

INTRODUCTION

The theme for II Peter is “Living in Fast Forward.” When you’re watching a tape or DVD, you can push the fast forward button on your remote and scan ahead to see what happens later. By reading this wonderful book, we can also look ahead to preview the final outcome of this world. When we look forward in faith, we can have confidence and hope to endure whatever trials we face today.

II Peter chapter one reassures us of the power and authenticity of the scriptures. Chapter two is all about the presence and danger of false teacher in the church, and Chapter three is about the prospect of the future, including the return of Jesus Christ.

We’ve all heard about counterfeit money, but do you think anyone would believe a “million dollar bill” was genuine? Last March, Alice Pike was checking out from a Wal-Mart in Covington, Georgia. The cashier rang up her purchases, which totaled \$1,671.55. That’s a pretty big purchase, but Alice didn’t worry. She handed the cashier a million dollar bill—expecting to get about \$988,000 change—that’s a lot of tens and twenties! The cashier called the manager and Mrs. Pike was arrested for forgery. She claimed to police that her estranged husband had given her four of the bogus million dollar bills, and she thought they were genuine. When the police office said, “The U.S. Treasury doesn’t print million dollar bills” Mrs. Pike’s response was, “You can’t keep up with the U.S. Treasury!” Maybe she needs another million-dollar bill to buy herself a clue!

Few people fall for a bogus million-dollar bill, but real counterfeit money is no joke. According to the U.S. Treasury department it is estimated there is \$130 million counterfeit currency in circulation. Most of it is printed in South America. That’s why the Treasury department has printed new editions of \$20 bills, the denomination that is most often copied. The new colors, and embedded security strips are an attempt to thwart counterfeiters.

In first century, the Apostle Peter recognized counterfeits were a real problem as well. There were counterfeit Christians in the church—and worse, some of them were teachers. Peter devotes an entire chapter to warn the church about the reality of counterfeit Christians.

To capture the context, look at II Peter 2:1 “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.” Then go to verse 10 to read his ongoing description of these counterfeit Christians:

“This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts, they too will perish. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they

are experts in greed—an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a beast without speech—who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.”

We shouldn’t be surprised there are false teachers or fake Christians around, because Jesus warned about the same danger in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit, you will recognize them.” (Matthew 7:15) What an amazing description! In the Bible, God’s people are often referred to as sheep. The Psalmist says, “We are his people; the sheep of his pasture.” (Psalm 100:3) These false teachers are dangerous because they hide their ferocious nature by appearing as innocent as a lamb. Just as there were wolves in sheep’s clothing 2,000 years ago, they are still around today. Jesus said, “By their fruit (their conduct) you will recognize them.” We’ll look briefly at four characteristics of counterfeit Christians and then conclude with a couple of personal lessons.

1. THEY BEHAVE LIKE ANIMALS

Peter wrote in vs. 12: “They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts, they too will perish.” It’s a jungle out there. I used to say the “world is going to the dogs” but I stopped saying that out of respect for dogs. The term “brute beasts” doesn’t refer to domesticated animals; it was a phrase that referred to wild, vicious animals.

The destructive nature of animals like lions, tigers, and poisonous snakes make it almost impossible to tame them to the point where they can be trusted. The term “lion tamer” is an oxymoron. They may seem tame, but their wild nature can be revealed in an instant. Lion tamers know they can’t turn their backs on the lions and tigers in the cage. Las Vegas magician Roy Horn of “Siegfried and Roy” learned this a couple of years ago, when his “tamed” tiger attacked him and nearly killed him. The tiger was simply exhibiting his true nature.

We live in a world where men act like wild animals—and sometimes worse than wild animals. Wild animals kill, but they generally kill for food. Only men are wicked enough to kidnap innocent people and then videotape themselves beheading or shooting them. But you don’t have to be a terrorist or a murderer to behave like an animal.

Peter says in verse 10 that counterfeit Christians “follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature.” Animal behavior is conduct driven by our old sinful, fleshly nature. Animals don’t have a conscience and they don’t base their moral decisions on a set of standards of right or wrong. Their behavior is conditioned and is based on their instinct.

I had a friend once who raised rabbits and he told me his rabbits only wanted to do two things: eat and breed. He had to constantly feed them and build new rabbit cages for the multiplying rabbits. A person who lives according to his animal instincts is primarily motivated by his desire for food and sex.

Now don't get the idea that genuine Christians are sinless. No, they sometimes revert to their sinful nature as well. But here's the difference—a real Christian struggles with sin and is sickened by sin in their life. A counterfeit Christian just tries to hide their sin. They think, “When I'm in church, I'll act like a Christian. I'll sing the songs, I'll say the prayers, but when I'm outta' here I'll go back to living in sin. No problem.”

2. THEY BLASPHEME HEAVENLY BEINGS

Peter wrote in verses 10 and 12: “Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; ... these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand.” Blasphemy is a sin that is committed by what you say. Blasphemy is saying something irreverent or unkind about someone or something that is holy. Blasphemy is committed when someone uses crude language in reference to God or the things of God. Every time you hear someone attach the word “damn” with God, they're committing blasphemy. Whenever someone uses the name “Jesus Christ” as a curse word, they are blaspheming a heavenly being.

Jesus taught that filthy speech is an indication of a filthy heart. In Matthew 12:34-36 Jesus said, “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.” Your speech reveals the content of your heart. Or as they used to say in the country, “what's down in the well will come up in the bucket.”

Now, not too many people cuss at church. But a counterfeit Christian is someone who has two vocabularies. They have a vocabulary for church, and a different vocabulary for the rest of the time. Do you think God can only hear what you say in church? Think again. The opposite of blasphemy is respect. We must respect God and His Holy angels.

3. THEY BLEMISH THE CHURCH

Peter wrote in vs. 13-14: “They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable;”

The sad thing is these counterfeit Christians are mingled with the true believers. The early church used to have communal meals, called agape feasts—or love feasts. These were times of Christian fellowship and worship. Peter was appalled because these false teachers would show up and use these gatherings as occasions to sin and to seduce others to sin. Their presence and conduct was an ugly blot on the beauty of that occasion.

Over the past thirty years I've performed hundreds of weddings. All brides take care to make themselves beautiful for their wedding. Can you imagine a bride walking down the aisle, and she looks lovely except for a huge pimple in the middle of her forehead? Yuk. That one blemish would detract from her beauty.

These counterfeit Christians are marring the beauty of the church, the bride of Christ. But one day, they'll be gone. In Ephesians 5:27 we learn that one day, the church will be presented as

beautiful bride—"a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." But until then, there are those in the church who blemish the beauty and unity of the church. Have you ever heard anybody say, "The church is full of hypocrites?" They aren't completely wrong—the church isn't full of hypocrites, but there are hypocrites in every church. Even among the twelve disciples of Jesus, one of them was a devil, according to Jesus.

I like what Zig Ziglar says whenever someone says they don't want to attend church because it's full of hypocrites. Zig says, "You're right, but come on anyway, because we've always got room for one more!"

4. THEY ARE BLINDED BY GREED

Peter wrote in vs. 14: "they are experts in greed—They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam."

Counterfeit Christians, especially false teachers, are those who use their spirituality for financial gain. Peter says they follow "the way of Balaam." You can read the story about Balaam and his talking donkey in Numbers 22. Balaam was a religious prophet who wanted to profit at the expense of God's people. God sent an angel with a sword to stop him. Balaam couldn't see the angel, but his donkey could—and the donkey warned Balaam. Don Francisco wrote a great song to tell the story of Balaam.

Balaam was a prophet about the time that Moses was coming through
And every now and again God'd speak to him and tell him what to say and do
He had a reputation in all those parts for bein' on the line of power
And when Moab's king heard Moses was comin' he called him in his needy hour

He said, "Balaam come and curse these Israelites
If you do I believe I could beat 'em in a fight!"
But when Balaam asked the Lord, the Lord said, "Balaam don't you go
Israel is blessed by Me, don't you go mess up My show"
But Balaam's head was turned by the money he could earn
So he saddled up his donkey anyway

Balaam and his servants hurried off for the King of Moab's castle
But they hadn't gone very far down the road when the whole trip became a hassle
Because the donkey ran off across a field, then she nearly broke Balaam's ankle
But when she lay right down and wouldn't get up Balaam got a little more than rankled

For the third time Balaam beat her with his cane
But that donkey just refused to move again
It was the thing that happened next though, that made Balaam's knees get weak
Well, that donkey still would not get up but she began to speak
She said, "Balaam you're to blame, the way you beat me is a shame
'Cause all I've done is tried to save your life!"

Then the Angel of the Lord appeared with a flamin' sword in his hand
Balaam fell down on his face, a very frightened man
The Angel said, "Balaam, you'd be dead if your donkey hadn't detected
That I was waitin' there to part your hair when you and my sword connected"

Balaam then repented for his sin
And he promised not to act like that again
And I hope he learned his lesson about God's reward for greed
But you know it's that talkin' donkey that's really strange indeed
Now that donkey's just a donkey but she's still the thing God used
And that's the point I want you all to see

The Lord's the one who makes the choice of the instrument He's usin'
We don't know the reasons and the plans behind His choosin'
So when the Lord starts usin' you don't you pay it any mind
He 'could have used the dog next door if He'd been so inclined

© Don Francisco

Balaam's mistake was his desire to make money through the gift God had given him. False prophets are always begging for money. It's hard for me to believe, but Robert Tilton is back on the air on the Black Entertainment Television. He was the huckster who used to have a "church" in Farmer's Branch in North Dallas. When investigative reporting revealed it was a scam, he folded. Now, he's living in Miami in a huge mansion with his new wife. His message hasn't changed. He tells viewers they must make a vow to God by sending him money—and if you do, God will make you rich. Don't give up—if you're not rich yet, it's because your vow of faith isn't large enough. Viewers are sending him several million dollars a year. He gets my vote as a modern example of a false prophet. But as you'll see in a minute, I don't really get a vote on the matter!

Compare Tilton to the great British Pastor, Charles Spurgeon. In the 1800s Spurgeon preached to 5,000 people a week in London. He was a captivating speaker. P.T. Barnum was the circus magnate who lived at the same time. Barnum sent a telegram to Spurgeon offering him a huge sum of money to come speak under the big top at his circus in America. They would charge admission and Spurgeon's payment would be 10 times his salary as a Baptist pastor. When Spurgeon received the offer, he sent a telegram back to P.T. Barnum containing one word and two numbers. Spurgeon's telegram read: "Acts 8:20." I would have liked to have seen Barnum's face when he found a Bible and read the words of that verse: "May your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God." (Acts 8:20)

Having considered these four characteristics of counterfeit Christians, what does it mean for those of us who are followers of Christ? In other words, what is the personal application? Learn two important things:

(1) It's not our job to root out false Christians, God will deal with them

When I hear someone like Robert Tilton, my first reaction is to kick him off the airwaves and publish that he is a false prophet. When I encounter someone who claims to be a Christian, my immediate desire is to kick him or her out of the church. But I would be a mistake to do that.

In Matthew 13 Jesus told the story of a farmer who planted a crop of wheat. While he was sleeping, his enemy slipped into the field and planted weeds among the wheat. As they began to grow it was obvious weeds were among the wheat. Jesus clearly explained that the wheat

represents true children of God and the weeds represent those who are counterfeit Christians—He called them children of the evil one. In the story the servants of the farmer wanted to go out into the field and pull out all the weeds. But the farmer told them to let them both grow together until the harvest. You can read this conversation in Matthew 13:28-30: The servants asked, "Do you want us to go and pull them (weeds) up?" "No," he answered, "Because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters; First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn." (Matthew 13:28-30)

In other words, Jesus is saying, "Your job is not to judge the hypocrites. I've never commissioned you to do that. So don't go into your church and start uprooting the hypocrites." Why? First of all, we're not exactly sure who the counterfeit Christians are—our judgement isn't perfect. Second, if we started rooting out all the hypocrites in the church, we're sure to injure some genuine Christians as well. And third, God is the perfect judge, and it's His job to separate the wheat from the weeds. The harvest time is at the end of the world, and that's when God will deal with counterfeit Christians. So, even though we suspect some people are false Christians according to the characteristics we studied in II Peter 2, that's all they are: Suspects. They are innocent until proven guilty by the Judge of heaven.

We cannot tolerate false teachers in the church, and if someone is teaching heresy, they should be relieved of their responsibilities. But anyone can seek God by coming to church—people who don't claim to be Christians, and those who are counterfeit Christians as well.

(2) Make sure there isn't a counterfeit Christian in your mirror!

We really can't speak with certainty about anyone else's relationship with God. But we can and *must* examine our own hearts to see if we see the symptoms of counterfeit Christianity there. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?" (II Corinthians 13:5)

Instead of looking around to try to detect counterfeit Christians around you, take a moment to look into the mirror and ask yourself if your faith is genuine. Is it real or fake? Can you imagine the scariest words you'll ever hear? They aren't "you've got cancer" or "we're under attack." The scariest words you could ever hear would be Jesus saying, "I never knew you."

In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus said, "Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven...Many will say to me on that day (Judgement Day), 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you.'" It's not about how religious you are. Do you know Jesus? Is your faith genuine?

CONCLUSION

On January 24, 1848, a carpenter named James Marshall was building a mill building for John Sutter on a little river in California. His eye caught a flash of something bright in the shallow

river. He waded into the water and discovered that the shiny rock was pure gold. When word finally spread back east that there was "gold in them thar hills" the California Gold Rush was launched. Almost 300,000 people (one of out 90 in the US) were infected with "gold fever" and rushed to California to cash in on the riches. It was hard, dirty work, and only a few of the miners struck gold. Most of the gold mines were owned by huge landowners like John Sutter.

The miners would stand in frigid water all day examining the rocks for the tell-tale flash of a gold nugget. Hundreds of miners carried bags full of shiny rocks into town convinced they were instant millionaires, only to discover they had bags of iron pyrite, which became known as "fool's gold." Iron pyrite is an abundant rock that has a yellow-gold color and is easily mistaken for gold. The thing that makes gold more valuable is that it is so rare. Thousands of prospectors learned the hard way that "all that glitters isn't gold." In the same way, we need to know there is a spiritual "fool's gold" as well.

Our faith is more precious than gold, but counterfeit Christians possess a false faith—it's like fool's gold. Their faith may appear to be real on the surface, but when it is put to the test it is found to be fake. When a counterfeit Christian faces the heat, they generally give up on God—because their faith is not genuine. But when a genuine Believer endures painful trials, their faith stands the test. Job, who faced more pain than most of us can ever imagine, made this observation: "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold." (Job 23:10)

Do you want to know if you are a real or counterfeit Christian? How do you act and react when your world seems to fall apart? It's easy to sing praises and say, "Praise the Lord" when your life is sailing along on an untroubled sea. But what is your response to God when you're going through a hurricane of tribulation? Peter wrote in his first letter: "Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come that so that your faith—of greater worth than gold—may be proved genuine." (I Peter 1:6-7)

So watch out for counterfeit Christians. You can I.D. them, but remember they're only suspects—innocent until proven guilty. The judge of heaven will make the final evaluation about who's real and who's fake.

OUTLINE

Jesus said, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit, you will recognize them." Matthew 7:15

1. THEY BEHAVE LIKE ANIMALS

"They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts, they too will perish." // Peter 2:12

2. THEY BLASPHEME HEAVENLY BEINGS

"Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; ... these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand." // Peter 2:10-12

3. THEY BLEMISH THE CHURCH

Peter wrote in vs. 13-14: "They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable;" // Peter 2:3-14

4. THEY ARE BLINDED BY GREED

"They are experts in greed...They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam." // Peter 2:14-15

PERSONAL APPLICATION

- (1) It's not our job to root out false Christians, God will deal with them
- (2) Make sure there isn't a counterfeit Christian in your mirror!



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes