

**HEAVEN'S GATES, THE NEW AGE AND OTHER FALSE
TEACHERS
II PETER 2:1-3, 9-18**

INTRODUCTION:

“Heaven’s gate is only the latest of the cults to catch a national headline. Their misguided leader grew up in a Presbyterian pastor’s home. His father once served the Presbyterian church in Spur, Texas.

Before him we had Jim Jones and David Kerish and what seems to be an endless line of false teachers. Every time such a group arises, we are reminded of the warnings that Jesus gave to His disciples about false prophets. Simon Peter felt compelled to warn that first generation of Christians about such misguided leaders. The surprising thing is that there are always in every generation “many” who follow them. Mr. Neil Anderson has identified a number of things that tend to characterize those most vulnerable to such false teachers. They are persons with low self-esteem, social recluses, broken homes and split families, latch key kids, a deep need for belonging, susceptible to peer pressure, impressionable, little parental care or involvement in their lives, alienated from the church, middle to upper class homes, high intelligence, victims of prior sexual abuse, very creative and curious, rebellious and looking for power, over or under achievers. Those who come out of these backgrounds may be vulnerable to those who represent cults and the occult.

How can I be sure that a teacher is from God, how can I be sure that what he teaches is true? If you will study this extended chapter from the pen of the Apostle Peter, and compare it with

similar passages in other parts of the New Testament you should be prepared to avoid the trap that false teachers set.

Based on these inspired words from the Apostle, I see two essential actions that you can take.

I. EVALUATE THEIR TEACHINGS.

This would seem to be the obvious place to begin. If they are “false teachers” it is because they bring “false teachings.” Let me suggest four questions that you can raise concerning their teaching.

1. How does their teaching measure up against the faith that was once delivered to the saints?

In the opening words of this passage Peter says, “Just as there will be false teachers among you, they will secretly introduce destructive heresies.” The word translated “heresies” could be translated “opinions.” The assumption behind this statement is that we as Christians have received a body of truth by which we can measure any teaching that we hear. This body of truth was called “the faith once delivered to the saints” by Jude in his letter. The early Christians understood that there was a standard, a body of basic doctrine, by which you could evaluate any teacher who came claiming to have been sent by God.

This means that you must be diligent in acquainting yourself with that standard of truth that is embodied in the holy scriptures. This body of truth will cover such things as the reality that God is trinity, that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, that salvation is by grace through faith, that the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross was an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, and other such vital truths. So when someone

comes presenting themselves as a teacher, listen to what they say. Does what they say agree with what the faith once delivered to the saints says? If it deviates from that faith once delivered to the saints then it is a destructive heresy.

2. Where do they place Jesus in their teaching?

The Apostle continues, “Even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves.” It is difficult to know exactly what Peter had in mind when he talked about “denying the Lord.” We know who the Lord is – in this case it is the Lord Jesus Christ who bought us by His death on the cross. We know what it means to deny Him – at least Peter knew what it meant to deny the Lord. So we probably need to assume that Peter means the obvious – that the teachers do not give to Jesus His rightful place in their teaching. In fact, it is very likely that the focus is on the teacher rather than on the Lord in their teaching. This was surely true of that misguided soul, David Koresh, and Jim Jones. They made themselves the center of the faith rather than the Lord Jesus as the center of the faith. Most corruptions of the Christian faith can be discovered rather quickly if you will simply ask, “Where is Jesus in this message?” If Jesus Christ is not presented as the center, as the Lord who bought us, as the one before whom we bow in commitment, then the teaching should be rejected.

3. How do their promises and the results of their teaching match up?

In the scathing words that Peter addresses toward these false teachers he indicates that the end result of their teaching is negative. They prove to be a horrible disappointment to all who seek to follow them. He first introduces this idea when he says, “They will secretly introduce destructive heresies.” The word destructive points to the end result of their teachings instead of

building up and making the life of those who follow them better, they destroy that which is meaningful and good in life. They are destructive.

Later in his extended description of them Peter says, “These men are springs without water and mist driven by a storm. Black as darkness is reserved for them for they mouth empty boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promised them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” Those words are graphic. Everyone knows what a spring without any water is. These false teachers hold up the hope of water, but when you receive their teaching, there is no water. Their mouths are full of empty, boastful words as they appeal to the lower nature of man, but they never bring about what they promise. They promise a life of fullness and freedom but what they give is a life of depravity and bondage.

It will be important that you carefully evaluate the teachings that you hear. If I follow their teachings to their logical end, where will it lead? What has it done in their lives? What has happened to those who followed them most earnestly? Are there evidences that it leads to bondage rather than freedom?

Asking these questions will keep you from being victimized by false teachers. But there is another consideration.

II. EXAMINE THEIR LIFESTYLE.

Interestingly Peter puts more of the spotlight on their lifestyle than he does their teaching. This is consistent with what we find in other passages in the New Testament. Their lifestyle calls into question the trustworthiness of their teaching. Again there is some important questions to ask as you consider their lifestyle.

1. Are they deceitful in their methods?

Peter warns about these false teachers by saying, “They will secretly introduce destructive heresies.” The word translated “Secretly introduce” means that they come in deceitfully. They are almost like a spy in their methodology. They do not declare up front, “I am a false teacher.” Rather they usually come with credentials that would say, “I am a trustworthy and orthodox teacher of the things of God.” If you discover that they are actually practicing deceit, then you can know that they are of the darkness and not of the light. God never sends a servant to practice deceit. His servants are always marked by their integrity, their honesty.

2. Are they greedy for money?

This is one of the most serious charges that Peter brings against them. He says, “In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stores they have made up.” In the extended section toward the close of the chapter he expands on this. He says, “They are experts in greed – and a curse brewed. They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam, son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.” Comparing them to Balaam is helpful to the student of scripture. Balaam was a prophet for hire! He did what he did because of the money that came to him for doing it. Covetousness and greed marks these false teachers. It was true in the first century and it is true in the 20th century. It will be true in the 21st century as well.

3. What is their attitude toward authority.

In his expanded description of these false teachers Peter underlines their attitude toward authority. He says of them, “ Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings.” He goes ahead to described them as being like brute beast, doing things by instinct rather than by moral principal. They are often persons who were in rebellion against their parents in their days of youth. They are often in rebellion against all legitimate authority. They are even in rebellion against God’s rightful authority. Rather than submitting themselves to the rule of the Lord in their lives they choose their own path. So, raise questions about their attitude toward authority.

4. Are they morally upright?

Peter is severe of his denunciation of these false teachers at the point of their moral conduct. He says of them “Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.” “Shameful ways” could be translated sensual ways.

Later in the passage he becomes even more direct in his denunciation of them. “They will be paid back 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 – and a curse brewed. These words don’t need a lot of explanation. They are sexually immoral. They used their spiritual positions for their own sexual and sensual gratification.

It is amazing how often this is true of the cultic and these misguided false teachers. The David Kerishes and the Jim Jones of the world always have some kind of deviant sexual bent in their character. Their lifestyle is one of darkness rather than one of spiritual light.

5. Are they living lives of spiritual freedom?

If their teaching is worthy of your commitment to them you should be able to see in their personal lives that the teaching has made a difference in them. There should be evidences of spiritual fullness and freedom in their lives. Peter warns that these false teachers rather are slaves of their lower nature and make those who follow them likewise slaves of their lower nature. So, take a careful look at what the teaching is producing in their lives.

One of the most popular expressions of such false teachers in our day is in the new age movement. John McArthur has underscored something very basic about the new age religions in our day. He says that they are “pantheistic-believing in the divinity of creation as well as the creator. They are mystical – viewing truth as something one finds within one’s self. They are syncretistic-blending and merging religious ideas from a number of sources.” According to McArthur they usually add a large dose of occult superstition into most of their new age thought. Where ever they come from and what ever their source may be, we need to be aware that they are false teachers.

The thing that makes all of this so serious is that while they profess to be leading you to the true and living God, they are actually leading you away from God. While they promise you one thing, they give you something else. They promise you life, but they give you darkness. They promise you freedom, but they give you bondage. They promise you joy, but they give you

sorrow, they promise you heaven but they give you hell. Those who follow the false teachers will follow them into the darkness of an eternal hell without God.

A passage like this ought to put a sensitivity in our souls as we relate to the religious world around us. It ought to put an urgency in our work for the Savior. Those of us who are the stewards of the truth of God need to be diligent in sharing the truth of God with every person we can. The best preventive for false teaching is the teaching of the truth. The best preventive for your children and my children is to fill them with the truth of the Word of God. So, dear fellow follower of Jesus, let's give ourselves to the truth as is made known on the pages of holy scripture and commit ourselves to the sharing of this truth with the whole world.