

Romans
Wolves in Sheep's Clothing (Part 2)
Romans 16:17-20
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I also want you to turn with me for our study of the Word of God this morning back to the book of Romans, to Romans 16. Now, let me just say to you mothers, there is no hidden message in preaching on false teachers on Mother's Day; it's a matter of expediency. I've told you I want to finish this great letter before we get to summer, and we just have a few verses that we have left to cover, probably two messages after today, and so we're going to come back to our study of the book of Romans. Look at it this way mothers, at least I'm not like picking on you, so you can just sit back and relax and enjoy the morning.

Romans, chapter 16. There's a name that you're probably not that familiar with; it's Eupithecia. Eupithecia is a large grouping of moths different, different species of moths. There are over a thousand species whose caterpillars feed on plants as most caterpillars do. But there are some unique ones based in Hawaii. Several of Hawaii's species of this moth produce caterpillars that are carnivorous. The caterpillar ranges from ¼ of an inch to ¾ of an inch long; its hind legs anchor the caterpillar to the edge or mid ribs of leaves or twigs or other surfaces while its front legs grasp and hold onto its prey. It has an amazing disguise. When it stays still, it looks just like a twig on a branch, and it simply stays in that position and waits for insects to come within striking distance. When an insect walks along the twig and brushes against the hair on the caterpillar, what happens next is a spectacle suited to the Coliseum. The insect triggers a lightning fast strike, and in a moment, it's hopelessly in the caterpillars grasp, and soon the insect has been devoured.

Now, why do I start with that? It's Mother's Day, right? You're never **going** to be able to get that image out of your mind. But here's the reason, I came across that inadvertently this week, and it reminded me of this text that we're studying because we are learning from Paul in Romans 16, that false teachers come with an equally good disguise. And when they get an unsuspecting person in their grasp, they are just as deadly!

We're studying the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Romans, specifically, Paul's interruption of his final greetings to give a serious warning about false teachers. We're looking at verses 17 to 20; let me read them for us again, Romans 16, beginning in verse 17.

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

The theme of this paragraph is that false teachers are a constant danger in the Christian church, so all who have believed in Jesus and in the Biblical gospel must be on guard and reject them. In these verses that we've just read together, Paul gives us several important insights about false teachers and we're considering those together.

Last time, we considered just the first of them and that is, "The Perpetual Danger of False Teachers." They are always around, they're lurking in every era, every age, in every time, in every place; they were present in the churches that Paul planted in the first century; they are present and potentially a danger in every church today, including our own. And so they're a perpetual danger, and therefore we have to be on the alert, we have to be on guard. Wherever there is truth, there will be error; wherever there are true teachers of God's Word, there will be false teachers; wherever there are true disciples of Jesus Christ, there will be tares, there will be false believers. And so we have to be on the alert, on guard, it is a perpetual danger.

Now today, we begin with "The Biblical Response to False Teachers," the Biblical response to false teachers. We see this in verse 17. Paul encourages us to respond to false teachers in three ways. The last two of these ways are explicitly commanded in verse 17; the first of them is implied, so let's consider them together.

The first Biblical response is this, “Measure all Teachers Against Scripture,” measure all teachers against Scripture. Notice in the middle of verse 17, this is implied for us because he says, “...I (want) you...to keep your eye on those who (are acting, Notice!) contrary to the teaching which you learned.” Now, that implies that whenever we hear a teacher, we are keeping in mind the teaching we have learned, which we learned last time is the Scripture itself. So if we're **going** to keep our eye on those who teach and act contrary to that teaching, it means that we have to be constantly measuring everything we hear and everything we read against the Scripture. This ought to be as common as breathing to you as a Christian. “What does the Scripture say?”

The prophet Isaiah was dealing with the false prophets of his era, and in Isaiah 8:20, we read this, “To the law and to the testimony! (In other words, go to the Scriptures, and then he adds), If they (That is the teachers they’re listening to.) do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. (That is, they don't have any light to offer you.)” Don't listen to them; so go to the law and to the testimony, go to the Scriptures, and if they don't speak according to what you find there, then reject them, they have no light to offer you.

Of course, the classic text on this is just a few pages back in the Book of Acts. You remember Acts 17; if you don't know this passage, you need to know this passage, Acts 17, verse 11:

Now these (That is the believers in Berea.) were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, (Why?) for they received the word with great eagerness, (By the way, that's the balance. They weren't critical; they weren't constantly cynical and skeptical.) They received the word with great eagerness, (But they did something really important; they examined.) ...the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Now you tell me, who is the teacher, the Bereans were measuring against the Scripture? Paul the Apostle! Now, if Luke, writing under the direction of Paul himself and ultimately under the direction of the Holy Spirit, praises the Bereans for measuring what Paul taught against the Scripture, how much more is that true for every single teacher you expose yourself to? It doesn't matter if it's me, another teacher in this church, it doesn't matter if it's somebody on the radio, somebody on the television, some book that's given to you by a well-meaning Christian

brother or sister, it doesn't matter! All teachers, measure them against the Scripture. To do so is to be spiritually noble. If we're **going** to respond to false teachers, it starts by measuring all teachers against the Scripture.

Now, here in our text, there's a second biblical response, and that is to, "Watch Out for Teachers Who Deviate from the Scripture," watch out for teachers who deviate from Scripture. Verse 17 says, "...keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you have learned." 'Keep your eye on,' as we saw last time, translates a single Greek word. It means 'to pay careful attention to, to look out for,' the Greek word is '*skopeo*,' from which we get our word 'scope' as in microscope and telescope. It means truly keep focused on, watch out for, so that you can avoid.

Now, let me just say that this doesn't always happen in a moment. There are false teachers; you turn the television, and three minutes later, you're going, "Yup, false teacher." It's so transparently clear. But it isn't always clear in that way. Sometimes identifying a false teacher is a process. For a time, you might just be bothered by what appears to be troubling nuance, bad direction, just a little red flag that says, "I don't know, I'm a little concerned about what I'm hearing." Don't ignore that red flag, don't pull it down. But over time, you can recognize a false teacher by his fruit. The fruit of a false teacher will eventually reveal his or her true nature.

By the way, the fact that it can sometimes take time to recognize a dangerous person in the life of the church is why we don't allow people who come to Countryside to teach immediately, and I know that can be a little frustrating because that's not how all churches operate. A lot of churches, you show up there, you say, "I have the gift of teaching," and two weeks later, you're in front of class. That's not healthy. If you have the gift of teaching, and you're tempted to be frustrated because you can't immediately teach here, just remember that part of what attracts you to this church is our carefulness with the Scripture and appreciate that for the desire that it is. Your time will come if you are here and prove faithful.

But, how can we watch out for false teachers as we're being admonished here? How can we recognize them? Well, Scripture identifies three kinds of fruit that reveal a false teacher. Here's

how you can look out for them; here's how you can identify them. First of all, look at their character and conduct, their character and conduct.

Kent Hughes writes, “A wolf can wear sheep's clothing, but it cannot grow a sheep's coat.” This is what our Lord says in the Sermon on the Mount. Turn to Matthew, chapter 7; Matthew, chapter 7, verse 15. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns about this very reality. Verse 15:

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (And then He says this.) You will know them (You'll be able to recognize them.) by their fruits. (He uses the analogy of fruit trees.) Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

In other words, what He is saying is this, “Look at a tree and look at its fruit, and by looking at its fruit, you can understand the nature of that tree.” The same thing is true for a person, and then He says in verse 19, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” In other words, false teachers whose fruit evidences their evil nature, they’re **going to** be thrown into hell, they’re not real believers. Verse 20, “So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

Now, this raises the question, “What fruit?” Well, here, by fruit, Jesus clearly means the false teacher’s life, his conduct, his character, because notice the contrast in this context between true and false disciples. Verse 21, “(The true disciple) does the will of My Father.” Verse 23, the false disciple works lawlessness. Verse 24, “(The true disciple is one) who hears these words of Mine and (does) them,” he obeys. Verse 26, “(The false disciple is the one) who hears these words of Mine and does not (do) them,” doesn't obey. So, you can identify a false teacher by looking at his/her life and seeing if there is a pattern of obedience to Jesus Christ.

In 2 Timothy 3:5, Paul refers to false teachers as, "...holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power." In other words, they have an outward form, that when you just glance at it looks like godliness, but they lack the real power that produces personal holiness.

Here's the point, at a distance, false teachers, people who have embraced a false gospel or a false Christ, men like Pope Francis, or the prophets of Mormonism, they can look at a distance like holy, godly men. But, I can promise you this, if they teach a false gospel, then, if you could get close enough to truly examine their characters, you would find in their lives the same sins that always mark false teachers, sins like greed, sexual sin, and arrogance. As John Calvin said, "Nothing is more difficult to counterfeit than virtue." If you want to recognize a false teacher, first examined his character.

Secondly, examine his content, examine his content. Turn to Luke, chapter 6. Our Lord uses the same fruit analogy but to a different point here. Luke, chapter 6, verse 43, "For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit." In other words, you don't have a grape vine that produces thorns; you don't have a fig tree that produces something that's not edible. The nature of the tree dictates the fruit. And then he says verse 44, "For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush."

Now, we expect Him to make the same point that He did in Matthew 7, but he doesn't. Notice verse 45, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart." In other words, here's another piece of fruit you can inspect and that is what comes out of their mouth in their teaching. Look at their content because what comes out of their mouth, over time, consistently, reflects the content of their hearts, so look at their teaching, look at their content.

Now specifically, what fruit should you be looking for in their teaching to identify a false teacher? I wish I had time to really walk you through this passage, I don't so let me just call it to your attention. But, in 1 John 4; 1 John 4, the entire chapter, there are what Jonathan Edwards

called, “the distinguishing marks of the work of the Spirit of God.” And he walks through that passage showing these distinguishing marks. Let me just give them to you. As you examine the teacher’s content that you’re trying to discern, whether they are or not a false teacher, ask yourself these questions.

Number one, does that teaching exalt the Biblical Jesus and the Biblical gospel? In other words, does his teaching center on the **truths** Jesus taught in the Scripture, and when it comes to the gospel, are they talking about things like sin, depravity, future judgment? And when it comes to how that gospel becomes yours, are they talking about, not, “You know God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” but are talking about things like repentance and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, counting the cost before you commit to follow Christ, and are they saying for those who refuse this message, there is eternal destruction in hell forever for those who don’t repent and believe in Christ? So, in other words, does the teaching exalt the Biblical Jesus and the Biblical gospel?

Number two, does the teaching promote true holiness? Does the teaching focus on worldly things that even unbelievers crave and long for, or does it encourage true holiness?

Number three, does it exalt the Word of God, does it exalt the Word of God? Listen carefully to the teaching. Is the focus on the teacher and all of his wonderful ideas and what he has to offer and the Scriptures hard to find; maybe a Scripture reference thrown in here or there, not even explained? Or instead, does the teacher read the text, explain the text in the context of that text, and then apply the text? Does it exalt the Word of God?

Number four, does it promote love for God and for others? In other words, as you listen to the teaching, ask yourself this, does this teaching promote self-love, self-fulfillment, and self-satisfaction? Or instead, is this teacher calling me to selfless love for God and for others regardless of what it may cost me? This is how you test the content of a man’s teaching. So, to identify a false teacher, examine his character and his conduct, and secondly, examine his content.

But there's a third mark that identifies the fruit of a false teacher and that is his converts, his converts. Examine the character of those who follow that teacher; not only his character, but look at the character of those who connect with him, those who are devoted to that person's teaching. Why? Listen to our Lord's words in Luke 6:40, "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher." Jesus was saying, "If you're my disciple and you really follow me, you're **going** to begin to look more and more like me." But the same thing holds true for false teachers. Once a student is fully trained, they're **going** to look more and more like that false teacher. So, you may not be able to get to the false teacher, but just look at the lives of those who have been influenced and impacted by that false teacher.

When you examine their lives, those who follow false teachers, here's what you're **going** to find, 2 Timothy 2:16, you're **going to** find that that teachers influence has led to further ungodliness. 2 Peter 2:2, you're going to find that they are now following the sensuality of the false teachers. Revelation 2:20, we're **going** to look at this text tonight, Lord willing, "...I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and (Listen to this.) she teaches and leads My (slaves) astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." No question about this woman in the church at Thyatira whether not she was a false teacher, just look at the lives of those who followed her. You can tell a lot about the nature of the teacher by the lives of those who are committed to their teaching. Does their teaching and example produce godly fruit in the lives of their followers? Together, those constitute the fruit of a false teacher and will show you whether or not that teacher has deviated from the Scripture.

So, the biblical response then that we're called to, is to measure all teachers against the Scripture. Secondly, to watch out for those who deviate, and you watch out for them by identifying them by that fruit we just talked about.

A third Biblical response is to, "Avoid All Teachers Who Deviate from Scripture," avoid all teachers who deviate from Scripture. Verse 17 says, "...and turn away from them." The Greek word for 'turn away' means 'to keep away from, steer clear of, avoid.' In other words, Paul is saying, "Listen, when you find a false teacher, don't debate them, don't befriend them, don't

engage in dialogue with them, don't join with them to fight cultural issues, don't watch them on television, don't buy their books, don't attend their meetings; keep away, steer clear, avoid, treat them as completely outside the Christian faith.” In 2 Timothy, chapter 3, Paul talks about false teachers and in verse 5, after he’s talked about them, he says, “...Avoid such men as those.” That’s what he’s saying to Timothy, the pastor.

Turn to 2 John, John’s second letter. You're familiar with this section, let me just remind you, 2 John, verse 7, “...many deceivers have gone out into the world, (Who have a flawed view of Christ.). (They are) deceiver(s) and...antichrist.” Verse 8, “Watch yourselves.” Verse 9, “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, (the teaching from Christ and about Christ) does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching...has both the Father and...Son.” Verse 10, here's your response:

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, (the true biblical teaching), do not receive him into your house, and do not give them a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

This doesn't mean you can't say, “Hello,” but it does mean that you don't say anything that would in any way give the idea that you approve of what they stand for and what they're teaching; you don't in any way assist them in their enterprise, and you certainly don't have any efforts to have some sort of false fellowship with them. No, treat them as outside the Christian faith. So, we’ve seen the perpetual danger of false teachers, and we’ve just examined the biblical response to false teachers.

But back in our text, there is a third insight that Paul gives us here and that is, “The Spiritual Anatomy of False Teachers,” the spiritual anatomy of false teachers; we see this in verse 18. Paul wants us to understand what these people are like so he gives us a brief anatomy lesson.

First, he points out their spiritual condition and it’s characterized by one word, “dead,” they’re dead. Verse 18, “For such men are slaves, (Notice these two keywords.), not of our Lord Christ,” not of our Lord Christ. That is a clear pronouncement by the apostle of their true spiritual condition; they are not slaves of our Lord Jesus Christ. But as we’ve discovered in the

book of Romans, the essence of being a Christian is to be a slave of Jesus Christ. That starts in verse 1, where Paul says he is a slave of Christ. We discover that we are slaves of Christ in chapter 6, verse 22, as well as 1 Corinthians 7:22. Since false teachers are not slaves of our Lord Christ, that must mean they are not genuine Christians; they are still dead in their sins.

As he continues his spiritual anatomy, he next uncovers their real motive. Their real motive is their own appetites. Notice verse 18, “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ, but they are slaves of their own (literally.) bellies.” They’re slaves of their own bellies. Now, that expression has been variously understood. Some say it means they are slaves to gluttony and that’s used as a metaphor for a greedy lifestyle. Others say, no, it means they’re slaves to their flesh and the desires of the flesh. Still others say, no it's really talking about the fact they’re slaves to themselves; they’re egocentric; they are slaves to their own self-interests. I don't think we have to choose between those; I think it's probably a combination of all three. False teachers are slaves to a greedy, self-centered lifestyle, dominated by self-indulgence and the desires of the flesh.

Philippians 3:19 describes false teachers this way, “...(their) god is their appetite,” they’re god is their desires,” what they want.

Turnover to 2 Peter; 2 Peter, chapter 2, and notice how Peter describes false teachers here. I'll begin in the middle of verse 13, 2 Peter 2, middle of verse 13:

...They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, (And you get the obvious sexual overtones of that expression; and he goes on with that, verse 14.) having eyes full of adultery.

In other words, everywhere they look, they see objects for their sexual prey; they're concerned with sexual favors from members of the opposite sex or in some cases the same-sex,

...that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained (That word ‘trained’ is a word is often used for preparing for the athletic games, they have exercised themselves in getting better) in greed, accursed children; forsaking the...way, they have gone astray.

These are people who are consumed with greed and sexual sin and completely self-consumed.

Turn over to Jude. Jude's whole letter is about false teachers, and in verse 4, notice how he describes them, “For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, (to the Christian community) those who were beforehand marked out for this condemnation.” Now, notice how he describes them, “ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness.” That’s not a word you probably use very often, but it's a word that means ‘excess;’ it means ‘wanton pursuit of your pleasures;’ it means ‘of abandoning yourself to your desires in a sinful way,’ all kinds of desires. They abandon themselves to their appetites. This is how you know false teachers. This is what motivates them; it's their own appetites.

Next, Paul explains their deceptive method, their deceptive method, “...smooth...flattering speech,” like carnivorous caterpillars, false teachers disguise themselves as they search for their prey. They don't disguise themselves physically, but in their words, notice verse 18, “and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive.” Smooth words, these are literally easy words, fine speech, and flattering speech here is actually a word which means ‘blessing, good words,’ but here it refers to ‘words that are well-chosen but untrue; false eloquence, flattery.’ If you want to know what this looks like, just turn on your television set and look at TBN, this is what it looks like. False teachers conceal their real deadly content in smooth words couched in a sort of rhetorical flourishes meant to sway people's emotions. Colossians 2:4 says, “...(They) delude...with persuasive arguments.” 2 Peter 2:1, “...(they) secretly introduce destructive heresies.” 2 Peter 2:3. “...they...exploit...with false words.” This is their deceptive method; they give you a little bit of truth, a little bit of the real mixed with plenty of error, and they serve it to you on silver platters.

Chuck Swindoll tells a story about a friend of his who was invited to an elegant evening at a doctor's home near Miami. The doctor's wife had recently completed a gourmet cooking course, and she decided to put her new cooking skills to the ultimate test. And so, she decided to make the hors d'oeuvres for the dinner out of Alpo dog food, true story. After adding some spices and herbs to, you know, change the flavor, she put the doctored dog food on gourmet crackers, put on a wedge of imported cheese, bacon (Bacon makes everything better.) an olive,

and a sliver of pimento, and then she served the appetizers on a silver tray, and then watched. And with a great sense of satisfaction, she watched her guests go back again and again for more. Apparently, they remained her friends even after she told them the truth and they all had a good laugh together. Now, I might've had a good laugh, but I don't I'd ever go back there for dinner again.

Ken Hughes comments on that story this way, he says:

Every day phony preachers are marketing their wares on shiny platters decorated in such a way that people do not know what they're really getting. Their dishes are topped with the language of orthodoxy, pious religious clichés and buzzwords, and are being eagerly consumed by the tragically grateful. They even pay for it by the millions!

Smooth, flattering words are their deceptive method.

Next, we learn their favorite targets as this anatomy continues. We learn their favorite targets; they're the unsuspecting, the unsuspecting. Verse 18, "...they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." The Greek word translated 'unsuspecting' here sometimes has a positive sense. For example, it's used in Hebrews 7:26 of our Lord where there in reference to sin, He's referred to as 'innocent,' same word. But when this word has to do, not with sin, but rather how a person views the real world, it's better translated, 'gullible, naïve.'

Who are these unsuspecting, these naïve, gullible ones? Well again, Paul is reminding us all to be on our guard, but false teachers love to prey on these unsuspecting targets. First of all, young, immature believers! Ephesians 4, verses 14 and 15, talks about spiritual "children, (and they are) tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming." Paul says, "Listen, you need to grow up in Christ because spiritual children are easy prey for false teachers."

Secondly, they love to prey on unbelievers who are seeking freedom from an enslaving sin and futile lives. 2 Peter 2, verses 18 and 19, says:

(False teachers enticed) by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption.

Thirdly, they prey on the poor, the disadvantaged, and the desperate. In Mark, chapter 12, verse 40, Jesus said of the Pharisees, the false teachers of His day that they, "...devour(ed) widows' houses." False teachers prey on the desperate; they prey on the poor; they prey on the disadvantaged; that prey on the sick and the suffering; they prey on people who are looking for a miracle.

And number four, they prey on weak, sinful people. 2 Timothy 3:6 says, "... (False teachers) enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses." 2 Peter 2:14, "... (They entice) unstable souls." So, make no mistake, false teachers are predators; they are wolves, targeting the unsuspecting and the unsuspecting are immature believers, enslaved unbelievers, the poor and desperate, the weak and the unstable. So, Paul says, "You need to recognize false teachers, take a look at their spiritual anatomy," and he has laid that out for us in verse 18.

There's a fourth insight here about false teachers and that is in verse 19, "Our Principal Protection against False Teachers," our principal protection against false teachers. "For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you." Now at first, this verse appears to come out of nowhere; he's talking about false teachers. What does this have to do with anything? Notice, it is linked, the word 'For' begins verse 19, because verse 19 explains why Paul was comfortable urging these people he'd never met, to look out for false teachers. It was because the report about their obedience to the gospel in the Scripture had reached believers across that part of the world. Paul himself rejoiced having heard about their obedience, and he mentions this in verse 19 to remind them of how much the gospel would be harmed if they accepted false teaching. They were known for their obedience to Christ; imagine how devastating if they started following false teaching.

But I think he also does so to affirm his own confidence that because of their pattern of obedience, they were **going** to heed this warning against false teachers, and they were to be protected. You see, the more your life is characterized by obedience to the Scripture, the less susceptible you will be to error. That's why he goes on in verse 19 to say, "...but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil." Paul says, "I want you to be wise in identifying, believing, and following the truth, and I want you to be innocent in believing and following error. You know what Paul is saying here in verse 19? He's saying, "Like the Romans, your principal protection against false teachers is knowing the truth in Scripture, believing the truth in Scripture, and obeying the truth in Scripture. Concentrate on what Scripture teaches, live in the Scriptures. Remember Psalm 1, "Delight in the law the Lord and meditate in it day and night." Remember Psalm 119, "Come to the Word of God."

And by the way, let me just give you little warning. There are well-intentioned people, Christians, who spend their lives dwelling on those discernment ministry websites on the Internet. Don't do that. Don't get a steady diet of that. First of all, they often go beyond the clear teaching of Scripture in their assessment of others. But, I'm more concerned about this, it's a subtle sleight-of-hand; it's a ploy of Satan, because you end up spending all of your time studying error rather than the truth of Scripture. The best way to identify the counterfeit is to have a thorough knowledge of the genuine; the best way to identify the counterfeit is to have a thorough knowledge of the genuine. You've all heard the illustration that when they teach people who handle money to recognize counterfeits, they don't just give them all the counterfeits and say spend all your time looking at this counterfeit money. Rather, they don't give them any counterfeit money; they start by exposing them and giving them a constant, thorough knowledge of the genuine, and then they can recognize the counterfeit. And, that's how it is with us; spend your time and life energy in the truth of Scripture. Yes, you need to know error, but you're **going to** learn that error as you learn the truth and as Scripture exposes you to that error.

The final insight that we gain here about false teachers is, "Our Final Confidence against False Teachers," our final confidence against false teachers in verse 20.

False teachers, they're so deceptive, there's so destructive. How can we hope to survive? How can we hope to run the gauntlet of this life through all of the false teaching that Satan throws at us? What's our ultimate hope and confidence?

It's in two things Paul highlights here. First of all, God's defeat of Satan. This is our first confidence, God's defeat of Satan. Beginning in verse 20, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." That's interesting, isn't it? The God who is the source of peace will soon bring about peace, not by détente, but by utterly crushing His enemies, our enemy, Satan.

Here, by the way in verse 20, we're reminded of that the ultimate source behind all false teaching. It's Satan! Satan, John 8:44 tells us, "...is a liar and (he is) the father of (all) lies." Satan is the ultimate source of all error. But Satan delegates! We learn in 1 Timothy 4:1 that Satan delegates this work to his demons; his demons create and promote all false religion and all false teaching. In fact, it's interesting there; false teaching is called "the doctrine of demons," in 1 Timothy 4:1. And there, it's not antinomianism, it's not libertarianism, rather it's legalism; telling people they have to abstain from marriage and have to abstain from certain foods, and Paul says its "doctrines of demons," demons came up with this. So Satan is the ultimate source; demons are the ones who create and promote all false religion and its false teaching. But then the sort of third layer in this scheme is the human, false teachers, and they are merely pawns, they are merely servants of Satan, according to 2 Corinthians 11:15, servants of Satan.

But "God will soon crush Satan," the author of all error under our feet. That was first promised, you remember, in Genesis 3:15 when we're told the Messiah "...shall bruise (the serpent) on the head." It was initially fulfilled at the cross, according to Colossians 2:15. There, Jesus disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public display of them, "...having triumphed over them."

Here's something you may not have thought about though. This defeat of Satan, it is being constantly fulfilled in us as we believe the truth, 1 John, chapter 2, verse 14, speaks of young men who are strong and in whom the Word of God abides, and listen to this, "...because...the word of God abides in you...you have overcome the evil one." We are in the process of seeing

God crush Satan under our feet as we understand the Scriptures, believe it and obey it. 1 John 4:4, “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them.” You know who the ‘them’ is in context? False teachers! “You are from God, little children, and have overcome (false teachers); because greater is He who is in you than he was in the world.”

So, it's being fulfilled right now. It will ultimately be fulfilled in Revelation 20, verse 10, when it says, “...the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone...and...will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Listen, your great hope is the fact that God is defeating Satan under your feet. You're not defeating him, God's defeating him through His truth and through His promises.

There's a second confidence we have and that's Christ's grace to us. Look at the second half of verse 20, “...The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” This is how Paul finishes all of his letters; I could give you a list, but I don't need to do that. Likely he wrote these words with his own hand; it was like his signature authenticating the letter. But this is more than a traditional ending or a signature. Paul fills his closing with rich, spiritual significance and here it fits perfectly because the only hope we have, brothers and sisters, of our faith surviving the constant barrage of false teaching, is the continuing, sustaining grace of Jesus Christ our Lord! We sing it, “He will hold me fast,” that’s your hope!

Jude finishes his little letter about false teachers with these words, Jude 24 and 25, “...to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling.” In context, it’s **talking** about stumbling into damning error, stumbling into false teachings that’s **going** to destroy your soul:

...To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Your great confidence is the grace of Jesus Christ; that is your ultimate final confidence. He will hold you fast. Now, “May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.”

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the great encouragement of this passage; thank you for the warning, and, Lord, thank you that you use warnings like this to protect us. It's these very warnings that you keep us from stumbling into error. Lord, help us to be on the alert, help us to measure everything against Scripture, help us to love the truth of your Word, that it would be more precious to us than anything else in this life. And Father, I pray that you'd protect us. Thank you that we can rest in Christ and His sustaining grace.

Father, I also pray for those who may be here who are not in Christ; they've heard the gospel, they've sung the gospel, they've heard about the dangers of wrong gospels. Lord, I pray that today would be the day you would cause them to repent and to believe in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.