

COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANS?

In 2 Peter 2, the apostle continues to describe how false teachers camouflage their destructive heresies. Peter explains how they flaunt the flesh not the Spirit, and will face God's sure judgment. And he warns that counterfeit teachers result in counterfeit followers, who are likewise deluded. They emphasize sensuality not spirituality, flesh not spirit, things taught by false spirits not the Holy Spirit.

1- False teachers flaunt the flesh not the Spirit. They sound so convincing because they say what, deep-down inside, people want to hear. The "flesh" refers to physical appetites of unregenerate people, which continues to cause many conflicts in the sanctification of regenerate believers. "Spirit" refers to the real eternal you which inhabits your earthly body, which is regenerated by the Holy Spirit to faith. The Holy Spirit also empowers you to walk in God's ways instead of the old ways of the flesh. It's the daily battle of spirit vs flesh, following either the "old man" of the flesh, or the "new man" of the Spirit.

Fleshly errors of false teachers stretch to extremes. "Legalism" lays down man-made laws you can't keep, because the flesh has no spiritual power. Such deceivers twist Scripture to preach the letter of the law, not the spirit of God's law, and not the Holy Spirit who enables believers to keep God's commands. An opposite extreme is "license" which becomes licentiousness, so that anything goes. It's the erroneous idea that believers so live by grace they don't even worry about sin. They teach that one can simply confess your sins and then go live like the devil again. They promote the old man, not the new.

2- False teachers twist the Scriptures. Likewise, the error of "liberalism" dilutes the Holy Spirit to mere good intentions of trying to follow the example of Jesus. This also includes "moralism," an all-too common misconception of Christianity which emphasizes your efforts toward mere spiritual behavior, even to living Christ-like lives, but without the real empowerment of the real indwelling Holy Spirit.

False teachings flaunt life in the flesh, rather than living out new spiritual life in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Scripture teaches the law of "liberty in Christ," being born again by the Holy Spirit to live according to the law of Christ by the Spirit. Romans 8, Galatians 5-6, James 1-2 and elsewhere explain being set free from the fleshly law of sin and death to walk in the Spirit. Deceivers mis-use the principle that "behavior derives from beliefs." If you believe you are still in the flesh or that the flesh doesn't matter, you will live according to the impurity and sensuality of the flesh instead of the power of the Spirit. But Scripture teaches believers are new creations in Christ, born by the Holy Spirit who empowers you to bear His holy fruit. The evidence will be the increasing character of Christ in your life, not the flaunting of the flesh.

3- False teachers are wolves in sheep's clothing. The apostle Paul says in Galatians 2 "*false brothers secretly slipped in to spy out our freedom in Christ Jesus so that they might bring us to slavery.*" Slavery to the law or slavery to the flesh are both opposed to the Holy Spirit. But through Scripture, you can see through the camouflage of the pseudo-spiritual gnosticism that Peter writes against. JI Packer says they taught "*salvation was for the soul only, making bodily behavior irrelevant both to God's interest and to the soul's health. The conclusion was that one may behave riotously and it will not matter.*" It is possible to over-emphasize grace or works. The Bible teaches salvation by grace through faith not works, and works necessarily follow faith, not as the ground of salvation but as the fruit, evidence of saving faith.

Paul wrote to a corrupted church claiming all the gifts of the Holy Spirit yet living in debauchery, and so blaspheming God's name. He warns "*if anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord*" (1Corinthians 14) as opposed to "*false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ*" (2Corinthians 11). Peter likewise emphasizes that the words and writings of true apostles carry the authority of Christ Himself.

4- False teachers bear false fruit. 1Timothy 4:14 notes "*the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*" and those days came in the first generation of Christians. Speaking of the devil, 1John 4 declares "*greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world*" so that believers are not to listen to the lies of the world, the flesh, and the devil. That's why Jesus empowered His apostles to write down His truth in the Bible.

Jesus warned in Matthew 7 "*beware of false prophets who come to you sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*" False teachers threaten the church, but their judgment is coming. Counterfeit teachers lead to counterfeit followers. But Christ is the Good Shepherd of His sheep. He warns you, and protects you. If only you will trust Him and His Words, and obey Him, in the Spirit. □