

# CONQUERING THROUGH CONFLICT

## A Study of 2 Peter

### STUDY FOUR

## An Exposé of Counterfeit Communicators

2 Peter 2:1–3

*The servants of Satan sound caring, intelligent, and worth your trust, but they are false. They are truth-twisters and mind-benders, and they will love you to the very pit of hell.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ONCE in a while, the Lion of Judah uncaged His righteous anger and let it roar. Jesus drove out the merchants and “money changers” who were cheating worshipers at the temple (Matthew 21:12). He lashed out at the hypocritical Pharisees who concealed their “greed and self-indulgence” (23:25) while crushing people under “unbearable religious demands” (23:4).

Those who incited Jesus the most were the *religious counterfeits*, spiritual leaders who took advantage of people who were sincerely seeking God. When Jesus responded in anger, the light of divinity flashed in His eyes—His holiness, His justice, and His passion to protect vulnerable souls.

A counterfeit is something that looks and sounds right but is “contrary to fact,” an imitation meant to mislead the unsuspecting. Religious counterfeits don’t look like phonies. Oh, no. They display impressive credentials and dress up their lies in spiritual garb to look like truth. They are skilled at the art of lying. They are expert con artists who lure people to trust them, and then steal their money and their faith.

Jesus foretold that “false prophets will appear and will deceive many people” (24:11). Peter never forgot Jesus’ warning, and he learned from the Master how to deal with these counterfeits. So, when he saw them creeping into the churches, the old apostle let out a roar of his own.



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### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps your loved one or friend has fallen prey to spiritual counterfeits. Your heart aches as you watch his or her innocent faith in Christ stolen away. Pray that the Lord will expose the lies and make His truth clear.

*Father, shine Your light into the hearts of those who have been lured into the darkness and deceived by counterfeits. Make clear to me Your truth so that I may help others find in Christ the hope of eternal life and the way of peace. In His name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Having testified to the reliability of the apostles and prophets in 2 Peter 1:16–21, Peter turned his gaze on the false, or “pseudo,” teachers in the opening of chapter 2. These deceivers were nothing like the apostles and prophets who “spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21). The roots of the false teachers go back to the false prophets in Israel, who blended in with the true prophets like tares among the wheat. In the same way, the false teachers in the churches disguised themselves as true apostles, claiming equal authority.

The false teachers, however, didn’t speak from God. The Holy Spirit didn’t inspire them. Their words didn’t shine like lamps. Rather, their clever lies blanketed people in darkness. How should the church respond? Peter’s first action as an apostle was to expose them by naming their treacherous offenses.



### Observation: Characteristics of Counterfeits

Let’s use our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. First, observe 2 Peter 2:1–3 carefully. Imagine yourself as a first-century Christian reading Peter’s letter to a group of believers who listen intently to every word. Write down your observations as you answer the following questions.



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In the opening line of [2 Peter 2:1](#), Peter compared the false teachers in the church with the false prophets in Israel. What feelings might Peter's comparison have evoked in the early Christians?

In the next line of [2:1](#), Peter stated what false teachers will do . . . and were doing. What do you observe in Peter's indictment?

Tragically, before the false teachers' destruction, what did Peter say will happen in [2:2](#)? If you were an early Christian, how would you have reacted to this statement—particularly, if you had already fallen prey to these con artists?



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What other harm did Peter say the false teachers will cause in 2 Peter 2:3?

Summarize your observations by writing a list of Peter's characteristics of counterfeits.

*Counterfeits don't look counterfeit. They look real. They sound great. But the fact is, they are destructive. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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### Interpretation: Heresy, Denial, Immorality, Greed

Now let's *interpret* our passage by probing a few key ideas. The Greek word for “heresy” is *haireisis*, which conveys the idea of “a choice or option.”<sup>1</sup> Heresies offer alternative doctrines contrary to established truth, “orthodoxy,” and pressure people to choose against everything they previously believed. Peter called these heresies “cleverly” taught and “destructive” (2 Peter 2:1). What did he mean by “cleverly”? How are they destructive?

*False teachers bring their teaching alongside orthodox teaching and call into question the truth you have been taught. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Another characteristic of false teachers was they *denied* “the Master who bought them” (2:1). The “Master” is Christ and everything Christ said and did. What specific truths about Christ did these false teachers deny? What did Peter mean when he said Christ “bought them” (the false teachers)?



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Next, the false teachers *promoted immorality*, which enticed many followers (2 Peter 2:2). How do you think they twisted the apostles' teaching to license immorality? Hint: look at Paul's words in [Romans 6:15–16](#).

*Want to have a big following? Get sloppy with grace. People love to hear that their sin is okay. Grace, however, doesn't mean that we can live as we please. It means we're free to obey Jesus Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

The final mark of false teachers is greed. They *exploited the weak* by taking unfair advantage of others to get money, power, or prestige for themselves. They manipulated people with “false words” (2 Peter 2:3 NASB). The Greek word for “false” is *plastos*, from which we get the English word, *plastic*. How can words be *plastic*? How can they be used to mislead others for gain?

*The true minister doesn't do what he does for money. A person with integrity has nothing to hide, doesn't flatter, doesn't cater to the wealthy, doesn't play around with lust, doesn't require unquestioned loyalty. All of these are characteristics of greed.  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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### Correlation: The Original Counterfeit

We *correlate*—or compare—Scriptures to enhance our understanding. Although Peter was pointing his finger at the counterfeits in the church, they were merely pawns in the game. Who is the mastermind counterfeiter, according to Paul in *2 Corinthians 11:1–3*? What did He do?

Satan targets our thoughts with his deceptions, knowing once we accept his reasoning, our will and emotions will follow. His truth-twisting undermines “pure and undivided devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). What did Jesus call him in *John 8:44*? What did Jesus mean?

How did the deceivers in the early church imitate their master, according to *2 Corinthians 11:13–15*?



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Summarize Satan's goal and method to achieve his goal. How is Satan just as active today?

*False teachers appear to embrace orthodoxy, but they present heresy. They appear to stand for the truth, but they deny biblical truth. They appear to love grace, but they model sensuality. They appear to have our good at heart, but they are greedy for their own good.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### Application: How to Spot the Counterfeit

We can't avoid counterfeits, but we can avoid being hoodwinked by them. Here are three tips that can help us: *stop*, *look*, and *listen*.

*Stop.* Refuse to blindly accept someone else's authority. Stop long enough to compare what is being taught with what the Scriptures teach.

*Look.* Take a careful look at the life of the main spokesperson. Is the fruit of the Spirit evident, or the deeds of the flesh (*Galatians 5:19–23*)? Look past the charisma to the person's character.

*Listen.* False teachers will toss around orthodox words, such as *inspiration*, *incarnation*, or *salvation*, but twist their meanings. Pay attention to the terms the person uses and how he or she defines them.





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Have you been a victim of someone who used his or her spiritual authority to take advantage of you? Have any of your family members or friends been victimized? If so, it was heartbreaking. What wounds did you or the others suffer?

In the aftermath, what is helping you heal and move forward?

How can Peter's exposé and the "stop, look, and listen" principles protect you in the future?



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The best Bible teachers may disagree on some minor points, but they will always agree on the essentials: the person of Christ, the triune God, the authority and inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, Christ's death on our behalf, His resurrection, and His imminent return.

Become familiar with the foundations of the faith so you can immediately spot heresies. Knowing the truth is your best protection against counterfeits.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, false teachers can do great harm to me and others I love. Protect Your young lambs against the wolves who prey on the innocent. Give me the insight to perceive the threat and the heart of a lion to defend the vulnerable. In Jesus' name, amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. William D. Mounce, "haireisis," [billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/haireisis](http://billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/haireisis).

