

2 Peter 2

As we have seen before, the book of 1 Peter warned Christians of threats outside the Church, namely persecution by the Romans. Conversely, the book of 2 Peter warns Christians of threats within the Church. That theme continues in this chapter:

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.”

False teachers were a major problem in the early Church, as can be seen in the Bible. Christ warned of them: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15)*. This verse teaches that false teachers extremely deceptive. They will initially look and act like good Christians before they deceive.

Paul warned of them:

“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

John warned of them:

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Who were these false teachers and what falsehoods were they teaching? These verse gives us one of the warning signs. They *“even denying the Lord who bought them...”* Denying some aspect of Christ is a classic false teaching. We see this in the first six Ecumenical Councils. In each case, a person or group rejected the fulness of Christ’s humanity or divinity, and each time the Councils rejected them as false teachers.

At the first Council at Nicaea, Arius rejected the full divinity of Christ, but the Council affirmed the full divinity of Christ. In the second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople, Apolinarius claimed that Christ had a human soul and body, but not a divine mind. The Council reaffirmed that Christ was had a divine and a human mind. At the third Ecumenical at Ephesus, Nestorius claimed that Christ had two natures, but the two natures were not united. The Council reaffirmed that Christ had two natures are united. At the fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon, the Monophysites claimed that Christ’s divine

nature had absorbed his human nature. The Council reaffirmed that Christ's human nature remained intact. At the fifth and sixth Ecumenical Councils, both in Constantinople, a group called the Monothelites claimed that Christ only had a divine will, not a human will. The Council reaffirmed that Christ had both a human and divine will.

In all these cases, a teacher or group rejected either the full divinity or the full humanity of Christ. These are part of what 2 Peter 2 refers to when it says, "... *even denying the Lord who bought them...*" In all these cases. The Church affirmed the fulness of Christ's humanity and divinity as essential for human salvation. This pattern of rejecting the full divinity or humanity of Christ has continued up to the present day. Mormonism teaches that Christ is not eternally divine but "...inherited powers of godhood and divinity from His Father" (<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/what-mormons-believe-about-jesus-christ>). Mormons also teach that Christ was the child of God the Father and a "heavenly Mother" (not Mary) (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/mother-in-heaven?lang=eng>). Similarly, the Jehovah's Witness diminish Christ's divinity. They say, "However, we take Jesus at his word when he said: "The Father is greater than I am" (John 14:28). So we do not worship Jesus, as we do not believe that he is Almighty God" (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/believe-in-jesus/>).

In addition to these deniers of the full humanity and divinity of Christ, there were other forms of false teachers in the early Church. Another category of were the Judaizers, who were also "*even denying the Lord who bought them...*" by claiming that Christians must continue to practice some Jewish traditions, especially circumcision. The Apostle Paul frequently encountered Judaizers and harshly condemned them. To the church of Galatia, where Judaizers were present, he wrote of them:

"You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!" (Galatians 5:7-12). The Greek word translated "cut themselves off" is "apokopondai" (ἀποκόπονται), which means "amputate" or "mutilate." In this context Paul is saying these Judaizers should circumcise themselves again. The issue of requiring Christians to continue Jewish practices like circumcision was settled by the Jerusalem Council in the book of Acts:

"Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no such commandment... For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹ that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well" (Acts 15:24, 28-29).

Judaizers were a form of false teachers in the early Church. By saying that the Church which Christ founded was somehow insufficient, and needed leftovers from Judaism. As such, the Judaizers were “*even denying the Lord who bought them.*”

The Judaizing form of false teaching is alive and well in modern America. They call themselves “Messianic Christians” who reject the Church that Christ founded and have returned to most of the Jewish practices. From their website:

“Should Jews really attempt to assimilate into churches and forego their Jewish identity when they choose to put their faith in the Jewish Messiah? Messianic Judaism answers, “No!” As Yeshua Himself embraced His Jewishness, Messianic Jews seek to embrace theirs, by meeting in congregational communities with other Jewish believers and by maintaining a Biblically Jewish expression of their faith. Every congregation is different, but this expression often means worshiping in Hebrew, following Mosaic Law, dancing as King David did before the Lord, and keeping Biblical holidays such as Pesach, Sukkot, or Shavuot” (<https://mjaa.org/messianic-movement/>).

The third form of false teaching faced by the early Church was Gnosticism. It was a hybrid of Christianity and pre-Christian beliefs influenced by Platonism. The term “Gnosticism” comes from the Greek word “Gnosis” (γνῶσις) which means “knowledge.” To the Gnostics, “knowledge” was all-important, but it was not the knowledge of relationship. It was the knowledge of secret rituals and code words, much like the “knowledge” of secret societies like the Masons. To the Gnostics, having “knowledge” was to join their secret group, undergo secret rituals, receive their secret codewords, passwords, and never share them with anyone outside the group.

Another defining characteristic of Gnosticism was their belief that the physical universe was bad. Anything physical was abhorrent. They believed that it created by an evil god called “demiurge” to torment humans. They believed in a second, parallel universe which was entirely spiritual and therefore good. To them, salvation was attained by acquiring secret knowledge, escaping the physical universe, and being fully absorbed in the spiritual universe. These doctrines were contrary belief in one God and not two, that the Universe the one God created was declared “good” (Genesis 1). Also, the Gnostics rejected that Christ assumed a material, human body. They rejected the crucifixion of that physical body on a cross. They also rejected the essential Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ’s physical body, and of human bodies in the future.

The false teaching of Gnosticism is mentioned in the New Testament. Paul wrote,

“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge - by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith” (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

Christ even mentioned one of the Gnostic groups in the book of Revelation. To the church in Pergamos He said:

“But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (Revelation 2:6).

Who were the Nicolaitans that Christ “hates”? There is no other mention of them in the New Testament. The second century Church Father Irenaeus wrote an extended book called Against Heresies which gives details about each of the Gnostic groups. He informs us about the Nicolaitans:

“The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They live lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice idolatry, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. Therefore the Word has also spoken of them: “you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

“⁴ For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment...”

The fall of many of the angels is described elsewhere in Scripture. Christ spoke of it as an eyewitness:

“¹⁷ Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” ¹⁸ And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:17-18).

The fall of Satan is also described by the prophet Isaiah:

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit. Those who see you will stare at you and ponder over you: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?' (Isaiah 14:12-17)

Peter continues with the theme of God’s judgement on rebellious humanity, drawn from the Old Testament. He refers to the story of Noah in Genesis chapters 7-8.

“⁵ ... and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly...”

Next Peter cites the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah from Genesis 19:

“⁶ and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; ⁷ and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked ⁸ (for that righteous man, dwelling

among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)...”

The common theme in these Old Testament stories is warning the faithful: God punishes persistent rebellion severely. Peter is warning that what happened to the earth during the Flood, and what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, could happen again. But Peter is also proclaiming a message of hope for the faithful, even in times of general judgement:

“⁹ then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment...”

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As Irenaeus noted previously, the Nicolaitanes were known hedonists: *“They live lives of unrestrained indulgence.”* The reason is, they regarded the human body as already evil. Therefore, any abuse of human body, like fornication and adultery, cannot add any additional evil. When the body dies, all concern about the deeds committed in the body will be irrelevant. True Christianity requires us to restrain our passions, but Peter describes false teachers who voraciously feed their passions leading to disgrace and judgement:

“¹⁰ and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries... ¹² But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, ¹³ and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, ¹⁴ having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.”

The age of false teachers, condemned by Peter in the 1st century, is alive and well in the 21st:

Ted Haggard

Evangelical pastor [Ted Haggard](#) ranted against the evils of premarital sex, adultery, and gay marriage. That is, until he was caught in a [gay sex scandal](#) in 2006. A male escort named Mike Jones publicly claimed that Haggard had been a client for years. Not only that, Haggard had allegedly used crystal meth in front of his male lover.

Ted Haggard was forced to resign from his church. Following his downfall, he attempted a form of conversion therapy and embraced his heterosexual side. His wife stood by Haggard during the scandal.

Age: 66

Birthplace: USA, Yorktown, Indiana, Mount Pleasant Township

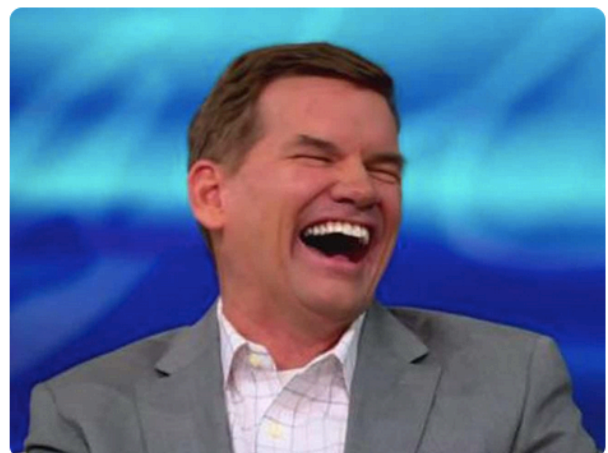


Photo: YouTube

Jim Bakker

[Jim Bakker](#) was perhaps the most popular televangelist in the 1980s, though his wife Tammy Faye gave him a run for his money. That all ended when Bakker was brought down by an enormous [scandal](#) that included sexual abuse and fraud.

In 1987, Bakker's secretary publicly accused the televangelist of raping and drugging her. After Bakker resigned from his ministry, he was charged with accounting fraud and sentenced to 45 years in prison.

[Bakker was replaced by Jerry Falwell](#), who called his predecessor, "the greatest scab and cancer on the face of Christianity in 2,000 years of church history."



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Jimmy Swaggart

[Jimmy Swaggart](#), a Pentecostal televangelist, got his start on television in 1975. In the 1980s, he teamed up with Reverend Jerry Falwell, Reverend James Robison, and Reverend Pat Robertson to use the Christian Right to shape the Republican party. Satan's agents are everywhere, according to Swaggart, and include feminists, Democrats, and rock musicians.

Swaggart's fall from grace happened in 1988 when it became public that he was cheating on his wife with a New Orleans prostitute. Not only that, [Swaggart](#) was an avid consumer of porn and experimented with BDSM, all while condemning such "immoral" acts.

Age: 87

Birthplace: Ferriday, Louisiana, United States of America



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1 of 14

Creflo Dollar

In 2015, Creflo Dollar asked his congregation to donate \$300 each – to his fundraiser. For what, you ask? A [\\$65 million private Gulfstream jet](#), so that he could travel safely and comfortably to spread the word of the Gospel.

Getty Images

A new documentary follows an affair that felled evangelist Jerry Falwell Jr.'s career

October 30, 2022 · 7:53 AM ET

Heard on [Weekend Edition Sunday](#)



AYESHA RASCOE



7-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST



NPR's Ayesha Rascoe talks with Billy Corben, director of "God Forbid: The Sex Scandal That Brought Down a Dynasty." The movie is about an affair that felled evangelist Jerry Falwell Jr.'s career.

Ravi Zacharias Hid Hundreds of Pictures of Women, Abuse During Massages, and a Rape Allegation

His ministry, preparing to downsize in the wake of a new investigation, expresses regret for "misplaced trust" in a leader who used his esteem to conceal his sexual misconduct.

DANIEL SILLIMAN AND KATE SHELLNUTT | FEBRUARY 11, 2021 04:29 PM

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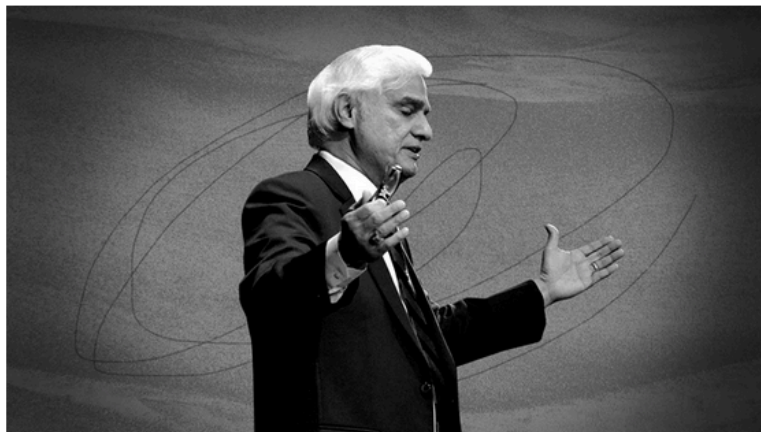


Image: Illustration by Mallory Rentsch / Source Image: Courtesy of RZIM

Cardinal Bernard Law: Disgraced US cardinal dies in Rome

🕒 20 December 2017



PHOTO: An Orthodox bishop blesses Russian missiles for airstrikes in Syria

Jeremy Bender Oct 16, 2015, 2:16 PM



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“¹⁵ They have forsaken the right way and gone astray...¹⁸ For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹ While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. ²⁰ For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹ For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.”