

1. All sins are equally sinful. But are some more serious than others? The most severe warnings of judgment in the New Testament seem to be given to those who distort the truth about God. (eg Matt 23:1-33; Gal 1:6-9; Rev 2:20-23).

*All sins are the product of a heart that is in rebellion against God and enough for eternal condemnation. But when the truth about God is distorted, the person distorting it has rejected the gospel message, but there is nothing else to call them back to and be saved. And if they are teaching their distortions to others they are actively hindering them from returning to God through the message of the cross. And so false teaching received the severest condemnation. Hence **James 1:3**.*

2. **Read 2 Peter 2:1-22.** What is it about false teachers that makes them so dangerous?

See v.1 – they secretly introduce their destructive heresies. If they said what they were doing they'd be much easier to spot and avoid!

3. What is the main reason that false teachers are condemned? ie What are they ultimately teaching?

v.1 they are denying the lordship of Jesus. At the heart of every false teaching is a denial of Jesus. And if he is not who he claims to be, then we are all lost in our sins.

4. False teachers don't appear as false and destructive (v.1b). So Peter describes what they are like to help his readers better identify them. List the characteristics of a false teacher that Peter gives.

v.1 secretive with their message, v.2 cause others to doubt the truth as it has been handed down, v.3 Greedy, exploitative, accounts with no historical reliability, v.10 self indulgent and resisting any accountability, bold, arrogant, speak with their own authority and no humility, v.12 spiritually ignorant, v.13. Shameless in their pursuit of pleasure, v.14 immoral, or spiritually immoral, loving beliefs foreign to the Bible, preying on those unsure of their beliefs, greedy, v.17-19 promising a 'freedom' outside of the gospel, so that the heart will remain enslaved to sinful, selfish desires. v.20-22 they'll speak like those who are (were) Christians, but appear little different to the unconverted.

5. vv4-12 contain some things that are not immediately clear to us, but it seems they were clear to Peter's readers. (Most likely there is reference here to the Genesis narrative of Gen 6-9, 19:1-29. It's impossible to be definite about what Peter is referring to in vv10b-11). But we don't always have to understand every reference to get the meaning of something in the Bible. What is the meaning of these verses?

God is a God who judges, don't be deceived about this. But he knows how to rescue people even from situations where they are surrounded by rebellion. So be humble, don't be misled by false teaching, God will deliver you.

6. We read of Balaam in Numbers 22-24. He was a pagan prophet who, it seems, God spoke to. The nation of Moab paid him to curse God's people, but he was unable to say anything but a blessing, though it seems he intended to curse them (Hence the donkey's warning Num 22:21-35). A little later, God's people committed sexual immorality with the people of Moab, thus threatening their unique identity as God's people. But in Num 31:16 we discover that behind this immorality was actually the advice of Balaam to the Moabites. It seems he found a way to curse God's people and get his payment after all! What does all this Old Testament background have to do with Peter's readers (and us)?

Not everyone who claims to speak for God is to be listened to. It is even possible to speak a word from God one day and the next lead you into ruin by denying God. Every message must be weighed up against what we know to be true.

7. Besides identifying the characteristics of false teachers (Q. 4), how else can we safeguard ourselves against false teachers? Hint, Peter has already told his readers in 1:12-15).

Knowing the truth that God has already revealed in the Bible – the apostolic witness to Jesus. And knowing this truth well – reading, re-reading, hearing it read and told, speaking to each other the same truth.

8. Do you encounter false teaching? Where / when? Do you treat it as seriously as Peter? How should we respond to false teaching? Spend time praying for some of these things.