East 91st Street Christian Church | **Message Guide**

Refined	The Wheat and the Chaff
November 22, 2026	Rick Grover
Week 7	2 Peter 2

Are you familiar with how farmers in the ancient world separated wheat from chaff? After the grain was harvested, it was taken to a threshing floor where the kernels were loosened from the stalks. Then the farmer would take a winnowing fork, throw everything into the air, and allow the wind to do the separating. The heavier grain would fall back to the ground, while the lighter husks—the chaff—would blow away.

From a distance, wheat and chaff looked like they belonged together, but eventually the wind revealed what was really there. That is a pretty good picture of 2 Peter 2, because Peter warns the church that there are people who may look like spiritual leaders, sound like spiritual leaders, use Christian vocabulary, quote Scripture, and even gather large followings, and yet not everyone who speaks in the name of Jesus actually represents Jesus.

1. **If someone can look like a follower of Jesus, sound like a follower of Jesus, and still not truly represent Him, how can we tell the difference?**

Welcome to week 7 of our series called, *Refined*, where we've been working our way through 1 & 2 Peter, two letters written by…Peter, to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. Refined has been our theme, something we like to see happen in our lives, but we often don't want to go through the process to get there. We like to lose weight and be "refined," but we don't want to do the hard work that's required. We like to be "refined" in our knowledge and skills so we can be more marketable and successful, but that takes a lot of discipline and study. Jesus followers want to be "refined" and grow spiritually, but it's sure a lot easier just to watch a few Instagram reels of some preacher giving us a motivational speech and pep talk than actually doing the hard work of studying Scripture and moving towards greater, humble obedience.

If we skim the surface of pop-theology and cultural Christianity, we become much more susceptible to false teaching rather than essential truth. And that's what 2 Peter 2 warns us about. Peter warns us about people who distort essential truth, use the things of God for personal gain, allow their character to contradict their message, and claim the name of Christ while quietly denying His authority over their lives.

2. **What do you understand to be essential truth?**

So, how can we tell the wheat from the chaff? And what does God do with those who use His name while rejecting His truth?

<u>False teachers often come from within</u>. **(2 Peter 2:1–3)**

Peter begins: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you…" (Peter 2:1a, ESV). Notice those last two words: "among you." Peter's primary concern is not atheists standing outside the church saying Christianity is false. His concern is people inside the Christian community who use Christian language while subtly replacing Christian truth.

Jesus warned about this when He said: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15, ESV). Notice Jesus doesn't say wolves show up wearing a T-shirt that says, “Hello, I'm a wolf.” They look like sheep. That's what makes false teaching dangerous. It often contains enough truth to sound Christian while quietly altering something essential. Peter says, “[These teachers] will…secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them….” (2 Peter 2:1b, ESV) That word “secretly” matters because false teaching rarely begins with someone announcing, “Today I'd like to deny Christianity.” It usually begins much more subtly. “Does the Bible really mean that? Surely God wouldn't judge anyone. Jesus is important, but there must be other ways to God. God really just wants you to be happy.” Little by little, biblical truth gets adjusted until we are using Christian words to communicate something Christianity never taught.

3. **When have you seen the subtle movement of false teachings in our world today?**

Paul warned Timothy: “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching….” (2 Timothy 4:3, ESV). Peter also says *many will follow them*, which means Popularity is not proof of faithfulness.

Crowds don't prove faithfulness. Book sales don't prove faithfulness. Social media followers don't prove faithfulness. A large church doesn't prove faithfulness—and neither does a small church! The question isn't, “Is this person successful?” The question is, “Is this person faithful to Jesus and His Word?”

Then Peter says: “And in their greed they will exploit you with false words” (2 Peter 2:3, ESV.) Peter moves from false teaching to false motives. Sometimes people use ministry not to serve people but to use people. That may involve money, power, attention, influence, loyalty, or control.

So, don't only listen to what a leader says; pay attention to what his ministry consistently seems to produce for himself. John the Baptist said of Jesus: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30, ESV). That's a pretty good test of spiritual leadership, which leads us to the second part of our text:

God knows how to judge falsehood. **(2 Peter 2:4–10)**

Peter gives us three sobering examples of divine judgment: fallen angels, the ancient world in Noah's day, and Sodom and Gomorrah. His point is that if God judged rebellious angels, the ancient world, and Sodom and Gomorrah, false teachers should not assume that because judgment has not happened yet, it will never happen.

4. **As followers of Jesus, how can remembering who is judge help us respond to false teachers?**

Peter says: “The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9, ESV). God knows how to rescue, and God knows how to judge. Christians become uncomfortable with the judgment of God because we prefer to emphasize His love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. But God's love doesn't cancel His holiness, and His grace doesn't eliminate His justice.

The same Bible that says: “God is love.” (1 Jn. 4:8) also says: “Our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb. 12:29) Both are true. And nowhere do we see both truths more clearly than at the cross. At the cross, we see how seriously God takes sin and how deeply God loves sinners. The penalty had to be paid, and Jesus paid it.

In the next chapter, Peter will tell us that God is patient, "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pe. 3:9). But patience should never be confused with indifference. This should encourage Christians who have watched spiritual leaders abuse people, exploit trust, distort Scripture, and seemingly get away with it. But God knows and will judge rightly. We don't have to become judge, jury, and executioner. We can trust the righteous Judge, because He knows who we are on the inside.

Character reveals what teaching can conceal **(2 Peter 2:10–16)**

Peter describes the character of these false teachers. They are arrogant, sensual, greedy, reckless, and self-indulgent, and they indulge sinful desires while pretending to lead God's people.
Then Peter brings up Balaam from the Old Testament. Balaam possessed genuine spiritual awareness, but his heart was corrupted by money. Peter says he: "...loved gain from wrongdoing." (2 Peter 2:15, ESV) Balaam was a gifted prophet sought out by kings to hear the voice of the Lord (Numbers 22). Peter's point is that spiritual giftedness is not the same thing as spiritual maturity. A person can be charismatic and corrupt, talented and untrustworthy, biblically knowledgeable and spiritually unhealthy.

5. **What do you look for in a leader? When have you perhaps focused too much on a leader's giftedness that you ignored their ungodly character?**

So, how do we discern false spiritual leadership? Jesus gives us a practical answer: "You will recognize them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16):

- What kind of person is this leader becoming over time?
- Are humility and holiness increasingly evident?
- Can the person receive correction? Is there genuine accountability?
- How does that leader treat people who cannot advance his ministry?
- How does he handle money?
- Does his private character reinforce his public teaching?
- Do you see the fruit of the Spirit?

Eventually, Character reveals what charisma can conceal. D.L. Moody is often credited with saying: "Character is what you are in the dark." Anyone can polish a public image. Peter says we have to learn to look deeper. And that includes what he wrote in vv. 17-19....False teachers promise freedom while producing slavery (2 Peter 2:17–19).

Peter describes these teachers as..."Waterless springs and mists driven by a storm" (2 Peter 2:17). Imagine traveling through a dry desert and seeing what appears to be a spring in the distance. You're thirsty and desperate for water, but when you arrive, there's nothing there. Peter says that's false teaching. It makes enormous promises but can't deliver what the human soul actually needs.

Peter says these teachers use... "loud boasts of folly" to entice people. Every generation has people who discover that if you speak loudly enough, confidently enough, and dramatically enough, people may assume you know what you're talking about. But Volume is not authority, and confidence is not necessarily truth.

Peter says these teachers promise... freedom while they themselves are slaves. "For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved." (v. 19). Satan promises freedom from God's authority, but what he actually produces is slavery. Jesus said: "Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34, ESV). Jesus offers genuine freedom: "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36, ESV). The Gospel doesn't promise freedom *from* Jesus; it promises freedom *in* Jesus.

6. **When has been a time in your life that you thought you were promised freedom but found yourself a slave to sin? How have you experienced true freedom in Christ?**

What we learn is that…knowing about Jesus is not the same as belonging to Jesus. **(2 Peter 2:20-22)**

Peter closes the chapter with some disturbing imagery. He describes people who have escaped worldly corruption through knowledge of Christ but then become entangled in it again, and he quotes two proverbs: "The dog returns to its own vomit," and "The sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." But the imagery is intentionally unpleasant because Peter wants us to understand the seriousness of outward religious reform without inward transformation. A dog can leave its vomit temporarily, but it's still a dog. A pig can be washed externally, but washing doesn't change its nature.
Christianity isn't simply cleaning ourselves up. It is being made new. Paul says: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." (2 Cor. 5:17). We don't merely need religious activity; we need Jesus. And this is one reason false teaching is so dangerous: It can give people enough Christianity to make them feel religious without actually leading them to surrender to Christ.

So, how do we separate the wheat from the chaff?

- Test teaching against Scripture.
- Look at the direction of a leader's life.
- Follow the money, the power, and the glory.
- Pay attention to how the person responds when corrected.
- Keep your eyes on Jesus.

But this all comes with a warning: We can become so preoccupied with identifying false teachers that we forget to examine ourselves.

The final word is not just recognizing the wheat from the chaff in teachers, pastors, and church leaders; it's also looking at our own hearts.

- Have you merely become familiar with Christianity, or have you surrendered to Christ?
- Do you know a lot of biblical information, or do you actually know Jesus?
- Are you merely trying to clean up the outside, or has God transformed me from the inside?

Today's the day. Now's the time. Surrender to Jesus, because your relationship with Jesus truly matters.