

Making Merchandise of You

2 Peter 2:1-3

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction:

A. In 2 Peter, chapter 2, we read of Peter's warning to his fellow Jewish believers against false prophets and false teachers. And he declares that many will fall for and follow what he calls their "damnable heresies." And in verse 3, he goes on to write that these false teachers shall "make merchandise of you" – that is, of the many who shall embrace their false teaching. And so with this text in view, I've titled this morning's message, "Making Merchandise of You."

B. The word "merchandise" can be both a noun and a verb.

1. As a noun, merchandise speaks of that which is bought and sold in business – the commodities or the goods that are traded or marketed. So "merchandise" refers to the goods that are merchandised.
2. As a verb, to merchandise means to buy and sell as in business. It speaks of a transaction, of deal making, or the completing of a trade. The Greek word for this is the root of our English term "emporium" which refers to a place for trading. And so when Peter writes here how they "make merchandise of you," he is referring to how they engage in trade or traffic of you and consequently impact on your very eternal welfare. And they do so in a way that can be described as making or completing a deal, as in buying or selling – they make merchandise of you. And we'll come back to this in a moment.

II. 2 Peter 2:1-3: But first, let's just read of this in its context in 2 Peter 2, beginning in verse 1, where we read... *"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. ³And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."*

- III. Characteristics of these False Teachers / False Merchants: Now from these verses, let's survey what Peter exposes concerning these false teachers or false merchants, if you will.
- A. They are found among believers: The first thing we notice, going back to verse 1 is that they are to be found among true believers. As verse 1 begins, "***But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you,...***" Now what this means is that they will come in the name of Christ. They will call themselves Christians and shall even be found among true believers, such as these to whom Peter is writing. This warning is to folks who consider themselves of the Christian faith. So it isn't a warning to be on guard against those who you would readily discern as being opposed to your doctrine. Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus – none of these claim nor even desire to be found worshipping "among" Christians. No, we're talking about teachers or preachers who come in the name of Christ. As Christ referred to them in His Sermon on the Mount, they are "wolves in sheep's clothing." So first know that the false teachers he is warning us against are those who claim to be of the Christian faith – they come in the name of Christ.
- B. They are successful: And the next thing I want you to notice is that you would be mistaken to assess that someone is a teacher or preacher of the true gospel of God's grace by observing how well they are received by the majority of others who claim to be of the Christian faith. Here we see that these false teachers are indeed popular and successful in gaining followers as men typically measure success!
1. How many times have you who believe the Gospel of God's grace asked yourselves (as I have) in moments of doubt, "How can so many be wrong?" Yet we know that is not how we should measure true and false for as Christ told us beginning in Matthew 7:13: "***Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.***"
 2. Likewise, we see here in 2 Peter 2:2, "***And many shall follow their pernicious ways:...***" So, one characteristic of these false teachers is that they gain a large following. They come in the name of Christ and they are the predominant voices of so-called Christianity as "many" follow them.
- C. By Doctrine: The next thing I want you to notice is they can be identified by their doctrine – by what they teach.

1. Peter calls them “false teachers.” A false teacher sets forth false doctrine. As verse 1 reads, they shall bring in “damnable heresies.” Heresy is false doctrine and this doctrine believed upon is to one’s eternal destruction – hence it is called a “damnable heresy.” So the doctrine they bring in is not just some minor or inconsequential non-vital difference of opinion, but this is speaking of those who would teach doctrine opposed to the true gospel of God’s grace in Christ.

2. Now it is of eternal importance that we are able to discern the true from the false for as we read in 2 John 1:9-11:

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

¹⁰If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: ¹¹For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

To be so deceived with the “many” (the masses) or even to view their insistence on some causal role that you perform in order to be saved (works salvation – I’m speaking of the widespread, popular notion that you, the sinner must make the real difference to be saved (not Christ alone) – to treat that as something not really serious enough to divide over, not counting them as lost promoters of heresy, to treat them as if they are spiritually okay – a fellow believer, a brother or sister in the faith – Well, according to God’s word, that is to share in their evil and in their end – it is to not have the Father and the Son.

3. How then are we to judge the doctrine we hear to be the doctrine of Christ, to be true or false? Notice that verse 3 of our text tells us that it is “...with feigned words <that they> ***make merchandise of you.***” “Feigned” words refer to made up words, fake words, or false words. Some interpret this to mean with “well turned” words or phrases – words that are not only false, but words that are also appealing to us by nature – that make us feel good about ourselves. Their false doctrine gives room for the sinner to boast of having met their prescribed condition to get themselves saved. As such, their words are flattering to us by nature. They tell us we can have it our way – whatever suits your fancy, if you’ll just pony up and do your part. But such notions are contrary to God’s reality for they are feigned, fake or false words.

4. So how do you know which preacher to believe? How do you know what is true among the smorgasbord of so-called “Christian” religious thoughts and ideas? Well the context of 2 Peter helps us if we consider the last words of chapter 1 which lead up to this warning against false teachers in chapter 2.

Look with me at 2 Peter 1, beginning down in verse 19 where we read, ***“We have also a more sure word of prophecy;*** <Now, if we had read the previous verses you would see that he is telling his fellow Jewish brethren that they have a more sure word than even that audible voice of God the Father as He declared of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” It’s saying we have something even more sure to hang our hat upon, speaking of the very gospel of God’s grace set forth in this Holy Spirit inspired book – the Word of God.

And so he continues...> ***whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:***

²⁰Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. ²¹For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” <This is God’s word!> And so he continues with that thought as we move into chapter 2, verse 1 where it reads, ***“But there were false prophets also among the people,*** <meaning in the days of the Old Testament prophets> ***even as there shall be false teachers among you,...”*** <in this the church age in which we also now live>.

5. So who do you believe? What preacher / what doctrine are you to believe? Believe God and only believe those who speak according to God’s word! Test the scripture to see if their doctrine is the doctrine of Christ. Don’t fall for their “feigned” or false words but rather heed and follow the Holy Spirit inspired word of God. Remember what Paul wrote concerning false teachers in his letter to the Galatians in chapter 1 beginning in verse 6 where we read, ***“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: ⁷Which is not another;*** <There is only 1 gospel> ***but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”***

It is the doctrine of Christ, the Gospel of Christ – the gospel of grace, not of works – not salvation based upon some deal or transaction (some merchandising) that involves something remaining to be done by, in or through you the sinner to make the real difference.

6. And it really is this simple for there is 1 true gospel and it sets forth all of salvation to be by grace. That means it is based upon nothing of merit in the one who is saved for they are saved by grace.

That means that every requirement and condition for a sinner's salvation was satisfied by their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His finished, substitutionary, redeeming work on the cross – by His perfect satisfaction to the justice of God (His righteousness) by His obedience unto death whereby He fully paid the penalty due unto the demerit of the sins of each and every one for whom He died. And if you take all the many religious notions – all the various ways that men devise or mistakenly imagine that they might be saved – know this, (for this greatly simplifies what may seem so complex): All vital doctrine pertaining to how God saves sinners falls into 1 of 2 categories. It either promotes salvation by grace in Christ alone with no causal role being assigned to the hand of those He saves, or else it is the false religion of works – the enemy of grace.

So we can identify these false teachers by seeing how they oppose the doctrine of Christ – the truth that Christ alone met every condition necessary for the salvation of those for whom He lived and died. And this opposition is manifested by their teaching that salvation is conditioned (at least in some small way or to some small degree) on something done by, in, or through you the sinner. Some will make faith that condition, others perseverance or keeping the faith, others baptism, others living a good and moral life, or doing the best you can, and the list goes on and on. It matters not – if it is not the one Gospel of God's grace in Christ that sets forth how salvation's requirements having been fully met by His doing and dying alone, then as Paul described it, it is another gospel which is not another – there is only 1 way of salvation and that is by God's sovereign grace in the doing and dying of the Lord Jesus Christ!

7. But many fall prey to the false teaching that opposes the doctrine of Christ because it just doesn't seem right to our fallen, sinful natures. So many, upon hearing of the doctrine of the gospel – the doctrine of salvation by God's sovereign grace in Christ alone – they often will say something like this: "I just can't go there. I can't buy into this notion that God would, of His own sovereign will, choose some and not others to be saved – that my salvation isn't based at all upon some response by me such as my decision to accept Jesus or my act of faith. That just doesn't seem fair to me" they will often say. But listeners beware. As Proverbs 16:25 puts it, "***There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.***"
8. Judge according to God's truth! And only follow preachers and teachers as (and to the extent) they follow and teach consistent with the word of God. It is His doctrine of salvation – the gospel of grace which sets forth Christ and His imputed righteousness (the merit of what He accomplished being accounted to the sinner) as the sinner's only and sure hope – it is that doctrine that these false teachers will oppose and deny by diverting your attention elsewhere.

D. Their Motivation: Next I want you to see in our text how these false teachers are also described by what motivates them. It says there in the beginning of verse 3, “***And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you:...***” They are motivated by covetousness. This is a prevailing vice among false teachers just as it is a prevailing vice among all of us sinners in the spiritually dead state in which we begin our lives on earth.

1. We see this in that the only end in view is themselves and that is reflected in their doctrine that sets forth that their very salvation is not solely owing to God, but rather it is assumed to be due unto what they, themselves, do or do not do, and that in direct opposition to God’s true gospel of grace. They believe and promote that salvation is ultimately in their control and thereby, with this focus on self, they attempt to rob God of His glory – in opposition to the truth of salvation conditioned solely on the doing and dying of the Lord of glory. Now in their spiritual blindness, they may not see that they are coveting God’s glory for themselves, but they will see, just as some of you have seen or prayerfully will see if and when God grants you spiritual life and the faculties to see and value His glory in the glorious Person and work of Christ.
2. Now this covetousness may be evidenced by their desire to profit financially from the ministry. In many instances, ministers who profess to be of the Christian faith will move from church to church and often, such a move serves to improve their financial status. I was raised in a denomination where it was common for pastors to move from one church to another and they would often indicate that they were prayerfully considering such an opportunity by weighing whether or not they <quote>, “heard the call” – or that it was impressed upon them that God was guiding, leading, or calling them to make this or that move. And while I don’t necessarily doubt their sincerity, I’ll never forget something my dad once told me. He somewhat sarcastically said, “Isn’t it a strange thing that these preachers never seem to hear the call to take a position that pays less money than they are currently making.” And while I’m sure there may be exceptions to that, the fact that this is most often the case is rather telling.
3. The covetousness by which these false teachers are known may go beyond financial gain. For example, men also covet fame, popularity, and influence. And that is best gained by appealing to the natural, sinful inclinations of fallen humanity. They will tell us what we want to hear – how there is some good in you and if you’ll just do this or that (receive Christ, etc.) you can feel real secure and good about yourself in that you’ve done what it took to get yourself saved. But know that those are the feigned, false words whereby they make merchandise of their followers.

E. Their Ways: And then Peter also defines these false teachers by their ways or their M.O – their method of operation.

1. In verse 1, notice that it describes the method by which these false teachers present their damnable heresies as it reads how they “...***privily shall bring in damnable heresies...***” This word “privily” means privately, as in secretly or with cunning. It is telling us that their false teaching is disguised, not an open rebuttal of salvation by grace, but their false teaching is surrounded by truth and so is more likely to deceive. As an example, in our day, the “many” who are made merchandise of by these false teachers or preachers will insist (as do their teachers) that they too believe in Christ as their Savior, that they too believe in salvation by grace. But sadly, their doctrine is a perversion of grace for they insist that ultimately salvation is based upon some merit found in the one God saves, not that salvation is solely based upon the merit of Christ’s finished work – His righteousness alone.

They will say Christ did it all, BUT that it is YOUR response that makes what He did effectual to the saving of your soul. That’s faith in faith, not faith in Christ. So while they maintain that Christ is their Savior, their doctrine will often reflect that the real difference is not in His redeeming work for many believe He rendered that work (He died) for all without exception, even those who perish in hell. They insist that the real crowning event by which men and women are saved is in their response. In other words, what they call grace is in reality a cleverly disguised promotion of the exact opposite – of salvation by works. They ‘privily’ or with cunning deception bring in their damnable heresies.

2. And then in verse 2 he wrote, “***And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.***” “Pernicious” is often translated as lascivious, meaning an unlawful way. This word also carries the connotation of being a way that is seductive while promoting both principles (doctrine) as well as practices which are destructive. And again, we see that these seductive, destructive, unlawful ways are consistent with their false doctrine in that the result is that the way of truth, God’s gospel of grace, is then evil spoken of. One way we see that take place is when others tend to discount and discredit the few who insist upon the one way of salvation by God’s grace in Christ. All who refuse to adopt the popular perversion of grace that is so prevalent in our day – who deny their false doctrine that would teach Christ made salvation possible, but that the real determining factor in order for you to be saved is left up to you and your supposed free will decision – such will be discredited or discounted by the “many” as being extreme or fringe group to be avoided. And thereby, their doctrine, God’s doctrine, the way of truth is evil spoken of.

F. Their End: And then lastly, they are described by their end. What will be their end? At the end of verse 1 it tells us that they will “...*bring upon themselves swift destruction.*” I would encourage you to read the rest of this chapter as Peter emphasizes the certain judgment that awaits both these false teachers as well as the many that follow them. I think what is important here is not that we can identify them ahead of time by knowing their sure and destructive end, but rather it drives home the importance that we strive to discern vital truth and error according to God’s word. Those who buy their bill of goods are made merchandise of and if they persist therein, they shall share their tragic end in eternal damnation.

G. Recap: So to recap, we see that God the Holy Spirit, through the writing of the Apostle Peter, identifies these false teachers as follows:

1. They are found among believers. They call themselves “Christians.”
2. They are successful. They are the predominant voices of so-called “Christianity” as the “many” follow them.
3. They are identified by their false doctrine which stands in opposition to the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ alone – to the truth that Christ alone met every requirement and condition by His obedience unto death (His righteousness) for each and everyone for whom He lived and died – for all whom God is pleased to save. For that is the doctrine of Christ that God’s Word sets forth in contrast to the feigned words of these popular, yet false teachers.
4. They are motivated by covetousness with the only end in view being themselves. And that is reflected in their doctrine which elevates man’s work so as to place it in a position of rivalry and in opposition to the very effectual, redeeming work of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. Their ways are cunning and deceptive as they “privily” couch their false doctrine along side of truth, redefining God’s own terms of salvation by grace.
6. And their ways are pernicious, destructive, and seductive for they are consistent with what we all, as fallen sinners desire to hear by nature.
7. And lastly their destructive end is sure and certain as it is for all who persist in following them. And all of us have fallen prey and would continue to fall prey to their pernicious, seductive ways if not for the grace of God in delivering us from their false teachings by His saving grace, through the hearing and belief of God’s true gospel of grace.

IV. Making Merchandise of You: Now before we close I’d like to revisit how these false teachers or preachers make merchandise of those who follow them.

A. First, those who fall prey to them are the goods being merchandised in this sense:

1. They are sold to sin and Satan. As Romans teaches us, we are all at this very moment either servants of sin or servants of righteousness. We read of that in Romans 6:17-18 as Paul writes to believers: “***But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. <or to which you were delivered> ¹⁸Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.***” We all start off in league with these very false teachers, but God be thanked He opens the eyes of His people and makes them see their freedom from sin in Christ, their Substitute who fully put their sins away at the cross.
2. You see, whenever we bought into the notion that something we sinners could do would save us or keep us saved, we were actually in bondage to sin. We dared to imagine that our doing (our faith, etc.) was sufficient when in reality, as sinners we fall miserably short of rendering that which is necessary to satisfy the justice of a holy God – a perfect righteousness. That is we would have to perfectly obey all of God’s revealed will from the cradle to the grave. A holy God requires and will accept no less. But under God’s Gospel, we hear and embrace how Christ alone rendered that perfect obedience and just as God imputed or accounted the sins of His people to Christ that He might pay the penalty due to their sins (sins that He Himself had no part in committing), likewise, God graciously imputes or puts to the account of each and every one for whom Christ died the merit of His finished work of perfect obedience, including His death, (His very righteousness), whereby they stand in Christ before God’s bar of justice without sin, accepted in their beloved Savior, all based on His righteousness (a righteousness that they as sinners had no part in producing – the very righteousness of Christ)!

B. But in the merchandising of souls, it is assumed and taught that this transaction wasn’t truly finished at the cross. Their doctrine teaches that the deal has yet to be finalized.

1. Look back with me at the end of verse 1 of our text. There it says of these false teachers that in bringing in their damnable heresies, they even deny “***...the Lord that bought them...***” This does not mean, that these false prophets, teachers or preachers were redeemed by the blood of Christ by which He purchases His church, but rather this is referring to the temporal mercies and deliverance which these men enjoyed. This is the language of Deuteronomy chapter 32. In the interest of time, I won’t turn there but if you will look into that on your own, you’ll see similar language found there as is used here in verse 1 as well as further down in 2 Peter 2. Knowing that Peter was writing to fellow Jewish believers that were scattered throughout Asia Minor, we can apply this language as was used by Moses to describe the Jews as a people, a privileged nation who were ‘bought’ in the sense of their having been delivered and temporarily blessed by God.

Moses in Deuteronomy 32 is scolding them for their ingratitude, just as Peter here is emphasizing how the false teachers are denying the Lord, the true and living God who had so blessed them. And God not only extends mercies to the nation Israel, but just as Moses pointed how to the Jews in Deuteronomy 32:6, it can be said of us all, “...***hath he not made thee, and established thee?***” He is the Creator who has blessed you with every breath you take. And Peter here is pointing out how by their doctrine, they are denying the Lord of this universe, the Creator, the one true and living God.

2. And while that temporal deliverance is the sense of that phrase, I couldn't help but be reminded as I studied this how any and all false doctrine that stands in denial of salvation by grace in Christ alone, actually does deny that the Lord Jesus Christ truly did buy a people. Acts 20:28b refers to “.. ***the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.***” There is no merchandising, no deal, no transaction remaining to be completed.
3. But the doctrine that exposes these false teachers will suggest to you that Christ's death in and of itself was insufficient or inadequate to save you. The suggestion is that you need to cut your end of the bargain by doing what the “many” all suggest – whether it is simply walking this aisle, or saying this prayer, or inviting Christ into your life, “letting Him” save you (Hear that: you, the mere sinful creature letting almighty God save you), cleaning up your act, getting serious about religion, being baptized, being confirmed, agreeing with this or that catechism, and the list goes on. But don't be fooled, if you buy into the notion that you, the sinner, must make the real, final difference in order to be saved, then you have been made merchandise of.

And if that's the case, don't continue to pretend or fool yourself by thinking that you need God's mercy. You don't need mercy. That's not mercy and grace. You simply need to fulfill your end of the bargain as prescribed by your preacher of choice and thereby, save yourself. It is true, you must believe but know this: All who are saved shall believe because they have already been saved by the blood of Christ. None who are truly saved believe in order to be saved.

V. Closing:

Well, I pray better for you. I pray that God will deliver someone you from the soul merchants who would sell you such a bill of goods. All who are saved must at some point in time be so delivered. Resolve and pray that by the grace of God, you will not be made merchandise of. The deal is done! When Christ cried out on the cross, “It is finished” he meant it. Look to that finished transaction – the finished work of Christ on the cross and His righteousness alone for this doctrine of His Person and finished work is the doctrine of Christ – not the feigned words of those who will make merchandise of you, but rather, as we read from 2 Peter 1, that doctrine of Christ, God's gospel of grace, is the sure word of prophecy which you would do well to take heed!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.

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