

Today's message is called **False Starts in Life**; and our Text will be **2nd Peter 2:1-10**

In **sports**, a false start is a situation where a competitor in a Race starts before the official signal has been given. It's been called the cruelest rule in Olympic sports.

Usain Bolt, the fastest man in the world, was disqualified from the 100m final in the 2011 World Championships in South Korea because of this Regulation.

The Rule states: a Runner is disqualified from a 'track event' after just **one** false start.
-No warnings, no do-overs. If you **START** 'wrongly'... – You are done!

The IAAF modified the Rule in 2012 by adjusting the definition of a false start, ruling that a sprinter's hands had to leave the ground or their feet need to leave the blocks for it to be considered a false start (previously, a mere flinch in the blocks could earn you one).

Still, a runner could see his Olympics end before the race even begins. It happened to French sprinter Wilhem Belocian in 2016 - during his 110-meter 'hurdles' preliminary heat. 4 years of Olympic training – gone – **because** he started-off '**wrongly**'.

Sometimes...there is 'no other option' but to **follow** the Rules for Entering the RACE. Our **God** is very specific in His Word that there **is** only ONE WAY to enter Eternal Life; & - a **false start** in this Race leads not only to disqualification -but to destruction.

a **false 'start** is also 'defined' as: an attempt to **begin** something that is **not successful**:
As In: "After a few false starts, I finally managed to find a **good** church to attend!"
Or, "After a few false starts, I met the person I knew I'd spend the rest of my life with."

The 'thing' about a Race is... "It isn't over until it's over." Even if **you** **START** the Christian Life "well" – accepting the TRUTH of the GOSPEL- you must still make Christ **your** LORD.

There is a clear lesson here for our spiritual life: it's not only how you **start**; it's how you **finish**. It's all too easy to **start** well and then lose your focus -and spiritually collapse.

But, by God's grace, even if you've had a few False Starts you are not **out** of this race.

For some of you, those who've been around 'church circles' for a while, you've heard a specific word for this phenomenon: **backsliding**. It's a dated word, but an accurate one.

Backsliding suggests that you were making progress -but then- you veered off track and started sliding backwards in your spiritual life. Remember: it's not 'just':

-how you **start** the 'spiritual journey'; it is also: how you **continue** and how you **finish**!

The Apostle Paul often compares the Christian Life to the Running of a Race. In **Gal 5:7-8** he says, “You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the One who calls you.”

Paul is ‘talking about’ FALSE TEACHERS, & this is also Peter’s TOPIC in **CH. 2** of 1st Peter. False Teachers will ‘cross your path’; & they can trip you up; box you in, -slow you down.

About a month ago, as I was considering teaching this ‘Everything’ Series from 2nd Peter, I was ‘fired-up by Chapters 1 & 3’ but I wondered about the relevance of CH. 2 for us.

&, after a couple of hours of study, I really was thinking about going in another direction.

So, I decided to go for a walk and think through where else GOD might want us to focus.

I stepped out my door and walked about 10 feet down the sidewalk before meeting up with 2 young men in white shirts and black pants with name tags that said ELDER.

They ‘identified’ themselves as “missionaries” & asked me if ‘I’ knew what that meant? I said...“Of course, I am a BAPTIST pastor!” I half expected them to ‘fall backwards’ like the guards who came to arrest JESUS in Gethsemane... “Who do you seek?” “I am HE.”

Clearly my ‘motivation was wrong’ because all I got from them was ‘quizzical looks’, but one of them said, “We’re not quite sure WHAT Baptist’s believe.” I heard Open Sesame!

“Well let me tell you What Baptist’s believe...we believe that JESUS is GOD.”

They responded, “We believe Jesus is a god too.” “That is a MAJOR difference LADS!”

“The LORD thy GOD is ONE!” & yet, HE has revealed himself to BE: Father, Son & Holy Spirit. One in Essence, yet THREE Persons – the Holy TRINITY.

-You boys ‘need to know’ WHO it IS that you are seeking to SERVE!”

I then went on to talk about Grace vs. Works Righteousness and a few other differences in our Understanding of Salvation and Running the Race of the Christian Life.

Now...I share this with you because it was interesting to me that I had been prayerfully reading 2nd Peter Ch. 2 with its focus on False Teachers -and this ‘thought’ was niggling at me that ‘maybe’ we at Edmison don’t need to be looking at this right at this moment –and...-BAM-‘false teachers’ are ‘literally’ **at** my doorstep.

And WHO were 'these guys'... they're just 2 young men who were 'sincere' and probably 'right living' individuals –who were 'attempting' to Run the Race of their Religion.

But, and this is one of those Big Buts of the Bible, -these young men had gotten off to a FALSE START. They had 'both' been 'disqualified' - and they were oblivious to the fact.

Yet, were they harmless? NO! If I did not **have** KNOWLEDGE of **WHO** the GOD of All Creation HAS Revealed HIMSELF to **BE**...these young men could have 'done me theological harm' by sharing their 'false understanding' with me – affecting 'my' START.

Again & again, the N.T. makes it 'plain' that our very SALVATION depends **on**... Confessing the TRUTH about GOD & His Revelation IN His SON – Jesus Christ our LORD!

The Biblical Writers demand a "**knowledge** of GOD" among His 'People' that Connects the HEAD with the HEART. That KNOWLEDGE equals: Revelation and Relationship. We must START well, Run well, and Finish well. & we have Everything we need to do so!

And yet...we must be 'on guard' against 'false teachers'. READ [2 Peter 2:1, "There were also false prophets among the people, just as there **will** be false teachers among you."

There are no "ifs, ands, or buts" in Peter's words. It's a clear and definite statement. There were 'false prophets' among God's People - that's Israel in the Old Testament.

It is a matter of history. False Prophets were a constant problem in the Promised Land; and those who **falsely** claimed to 'be' Prophets of God were to be **stoned** –put to death.

Unfortunately, the people rarely had 'the will' to deal with them, so they multiplied, causing 'disaster' to the spiritual life of God's people. Not much has changed!

In the same way Peter says, "There **will be** false teachers among you." Notice the words "**among** you." Peter is writing **to** The N.T. Church and says, "false prophets among **you**."

He is talking about people **in** the local church, members **of** a local congregation. Listen... -there is no such thing as a **pure** church - the 'wheat' and the 'tares' **grow** together.

On many issues of Doctrine those of us 'gathered here' this morning hold various views. Regardless, of what I teach – many of you will not move from what you learned as kids

&, as Baptists, we do have a Distinctive that allows for this 'variance' -on non-essential matters; and Liberty of Conscience has its place, **but** it must also have its LIMITS.

Satan **is** the counterfeiter. . . . He has a false gospel ([Galatians 1:6-9](#)), it's preached by false ministers ([2 Corinthians 11:13](#)), it produces false Christians ([2 Corinthians 11:26](#)). . . -&, Satan plants his counterfeits wherever God plants true believers ([Matthew 13:38](#)).

This is an important conversation within the CBOQ today. Will we have the will to **deal** Who is **Authentic or Counterfeit**? How would you **recognize** counterfeit Christianity?

In **2 Peter CH. 1** we read about **genuine** believers. And in **2 Peter CH. 2** we read about **counterfeit** believers. If we put these chapters side by side -we will see the difference between authentic and counterfeit believers; the divide between True & False Teachers.

1. Different Source—Where does the message come **from**?

In **2nd Peter 1:16** -Peter says, "We did not follow 'cleverly invented stories' when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". & then, in **Ch. 2 v 3** he says... -"in their greed these false teachers exploit you -with stories they have **made up**".

So...the true teacher **sources** what he 'says' from the **Bible**. He teaches from the WORD. -But...the false teacher relies on his **own** creativity. He **makes up** his own message.

I've noticed Joel Osteen will 'quote' a single verse before launching on his Ted Talk. Now I do not discount 'the practical value' of what he has to say -but it is rarely The Gospel.

2. Different Message—What is the **substance** of the message?

For the true teacher, Jesus Christ is **central**.

Ch. 1 v 3 "We have **everything** we need for 'life and godliness' **in Him**".

-For the false teacher, JESUS is at the **margins**. **Ch. 2 v 1**, "They will secretly introduce 'destructive' heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them".

-Notice the word **secretly**. It's rare for 'anyone **in church**' to openly **deny** JESUS.

Movement away from the **centrality** of Christ is subtle. The false teacher will speak about: 'positive thinking' or 'other people' changing your life; **but**, if you listen carefully to what's being said...you'll see that 'Jesus Christ' is not **essential** to their message.

3. Different Position—In what **position** will the message **leave** you? Again in **Ch. 1**...

V:4 says, the true Christian "**escapes** the corruption in the world caused by **evil** desires" Peter describes the counterfeit Christian in **Ch. 2:19**, "They promise **freedom**, while they themselves are **slaves** of depravity, for a man is a slave to **whatever** has mastered him".

The true believer is **escaping** corruption, while the counterfeit believer is mastered **by** it.

4. Different Character—What ‘kind of people’ does ‘the message’ produce?

Ch. 1 v 5 - The **true** believer pursues: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brother kindness, and love. According to **Ch 2 v 10**, the **counterfeit** Christian is marked by arrogance and slander. These are people who ‘follow’ the corrupt desire of the sinful nature, and who despise ‘authority’. This Authority **is** God’s Word by the way.

I have to think of those CBOQ churches that have formed The Gathering of Baptists, a group dedicated to LGBTQ rights and the propagation of False Teaching on the issue. -These leaders are displaying the ‘general characteristics’ of counterfeit believers.

5. Different Appeal—When should you listen to the Message of any teacher?

The true teacher appeals to Scripture. **Ch. 1 v 19**, “We have the word of the prophets made more certain and you will do well to pay attention to it”. - **God** has spoken, and the true teacher ‘appeals to’ His Word -**as** ‘historically understood’ by the Church.

The false teacher makes a rather different appeal: **Ch. 2 v 18**,
“By appealing **to** the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error”.

So the true teacher asks, “What has God said in his Word?” The false teacher asks, “What do these ‘people’ want to hear? What will ‘appeal’ to their flesh?”

And worse yet, they will manipulate the Interpretation of Scripture to ‘back-it-up’!

6. Different Fruit—What **result** does ‘the message’ have in people’s **lives**?

1.8 The true believer **is** effective & productive **in** his or her **knowledge** of Jesus Christ.
2:17 The counterfeit is “like a spring without water”. This is an extraordinary picture! They promise much but produce little. Fruit of the Spirit only comes from the Spirit!

7. Different End—**Where** does ‘the message’ ultimately **lead** you?

Here we find the most disturbing contrast of all. **1:11**, The true believer will receive “a rich welcome into the **eternal** kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

Ch. 2 v 1, the false believer will experience “swift **destruction**”. **V. 3** “their condemnation has long been hanging over them and their destruction has not been sleeping”.

In **Matthew 7:21**, JESUS tells us that there will be ‘many’ who have been involved in ministry in his name, to whom He will say, “Depart from me; I never **knew** you”.

Who are these people? Surely, **Peter** is describing them **in** this **2nd** Chapter of his letter. -**So, don't Be Naïve!** We must not be ignorant: - Peter has cautioned us "There will be false teachers among you". NOW...how do we best **apply** this warning?

First, Peter's plain statement reminds us that The TRUTH needs to be protected. Among the many wonderful people who come through the doors of The Church each year, some would do more **harm** than **good**. Some...proclaim to be Prophets of God.

They may seem the nicest of people, but they may not believe in **the authority** of the Bible over the conduct of their personal lives, or in **the exclusivity** of salvation **in** Christ.

We are to welcome such people, -because they need Christ as much as we do; -but, we must not allow them to have influence **on** the core doctrines of the TRUTH.

Second, skeptics will always be able to point to: hypocrisy and inconsistency in the church. They've always done it, and they always will. One of the oldest excuses for **not** following Christ -goes like this: "I've seen people **in** the church who **are** hypocrites." So, they will not follow Christ because some people who **claim** to do so **are** hypocrites?

Listen, the existence of **the counterfeit** is never a good reason for rejecting **the genuine**. Peter essentially tells us, "Of course, there **are** counterfeit Christians. This is a 'fallen' world. Of course, there **are** teachers who do The Church more harm than good.

What else would you expect **in** a world where Satan exists? "Grow up! Don't be naïve! Don't miss what's **real** simply because you have seen the **counterfeit**" Here's what to do

Point to **2nd Peter Ch. 2 v 1** the next time you meet anyone 'hiding behind' that excuse!

The Book of **2nd Peter** began by teaching on the 'divine **provision**' for a godly life. GOD has given us Everything we Need, -though not all **in** the church **will** grow in godliness **nor** follow the teaching of the Word. / It goes on to stress the divine **inspiration** of Scripture.

So...having stressed the importance of God's Word, Peter next relays 'a **warning**' against those who threaten the church's **purpose** by 'impeding' our progress toward **godliness**; -those who do so - particularly - by refusing to 'submit to' the **authority** of that Word.

In an attempt to give a 'bases' or a 'justification' for a misdirected life, false teaching **will** come into the Church. It will come in many different expressions & various approaches.

These false teachers will be intelligent, talented, and charming people. But...following their teachings will jeopardize your future. So, it is paramount that we recognize them.

Chapter 2 of 2nd Peter provides their description. I guess it is 'relevant for us' after all.

The tragic fact about many 'false teachers' is that they **are** successful people. Many will **listen** to them and **follow** them -and their sensual or shameful ways. It **is** an easier path.

Paul mentions 'the great apostasy' of the **end times** in 2 Thess 2:3 and in 2 Timothy 4:3. He warns - people will **follow**: sensuality or what feels good instead of the way of Truth.

The attitudes and lifestyles of those who follow: sensuality [these false teachers] gives a 'black eye' to the Christian community, -& it fuels many to question the existence of any '**absolute**' truth. How can a house 'divided' on What TRUTH **is** – continue to STAND?

We must be especially careful to avoid 'false teachers' **today**. In the early church these teachers had to walk from village to village to 'find a hearing' face to face...but now each radio, internet, & television message must be evaluated **by** us according to God's Word!

Beware of special meanings, or interpretations that 'ask for MONEY. Verse **3** separates false teacher by their desire to **exploit** other Christians for their own advantage & greed

Their attitude is **not** "what I can give back to God and His people', but what can '**I**' get." False teachers exploit people! They 'use' them by **selling** a form of God's promises.

"I have some Anointing Oil from the Mount of Olives available for a donation of \$25 or upgrade to this 'prayed over cloth' with my 'healing power' for a donation of 50 dollars. Send **me** your biggest seed **today!** You only reap what you sow. So...Get **planting!**"

This tendency so grieved JESUS that it caused Him to overturn tables in the Temple rather than allow His Father's 'house' to remain a den of thieves (Matthew 21:12, 13).

These Teachers manipulate people to attain their **own** ends –therefore- GOD says 'their' end will be 'condemnation' and 'destruction'. Their Blasphemy will not go 'unpunished'.

Retribution for anyone leading another astray may not be immediate, but it **is** certain. -The wheels of GOD's judgment may 'turn' slowly –but, they 'grind' thoroughly. Yet...

These False teachers scoffed at the idea of future judgment - at the need for Christ's Return. Divine 'judgment' never happens, they said. -To refute their claims, 'Peter' cites well-known O.T. examples of divine judgment – **and** of His deliverance of the righteous.

GOD will not be 'mocked' by His CREATURES whether Angelic Beings or we poor Mortals The three examples -the fall of rebellious angels, the Great Flood, Sodom & Gomorrah- 'taken together' -show God's punishment of pride, disobedience and immorality.

But...Noah, Lot, & their families were 'spared' the coming judgement -by GOD's GRACE.

All unmerited. STARTING 'well', RUNNING 'well', FINISHING 'well' – is **for** a PURPOSE;
-to 'glorify' our GOD, who has sacrificially SOUGHT us –and SAVED us!

IN CLOSING,

In This Letter -Peter is concerned that, after his death, the people of the church will 'lose their way' because of the false teachers and false teachings **among** them.

God though, knows **how** to rescue godly people in any generation or in any situation from 'the testing' that comes from living 'in the midst of' an unbelieving world,
-The Testing that comes from 'both' their conduct and their destructive **ideas**.

What enables Christians to persist in **righteousness** is the **hope** for **deliverance** from:
-the '**testing**' of this life and -the eternal 'destruction' of God's coming **judgement**.

Just before JESUS went to The Cross, He spoke the words of **John 16:33** to His disciples.
"I have told you these things, so that **in Me you** may have **peace**.
In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart! **I** have overcome the world."

Troubles do come in this life - whether we like it or not.

Be comforted in knowing that our elder brother and Saviour **has** 'overcome the world' and our heavenly Father has promised to **rescue** us from 'all' our troubles.

And through the Holy Spirit, that is –**by** His divine **power**- GOD has given us **everything** we need for 'living' a **godly** life. Everything we need to START **&** to FINISH the RACE.

May the reality of HIS promises go **deep** into each of your hearts this morning.
Amen.