

“The damage that false teachers cause” (5)

We’re continuing our sermon series through 1+2 Peter but before we begin let me give you a quick summary of what Peter has reminded us of so far in his 2nd letter. In 2 Peter 1:1-4 he reminded us to always count our blessings. In 2 Peter 1:5-11 he reminded us to keep on growing as Christians. In 2 Peter 1:12-15 he reminded us that it’s really important for Christians to grow and that physical life is temporary but eternal life is forever. And finally in 2 Peter 1:16-21 he reminded us that we have two powerful testimonies to help strengthen our faith, the testimony of the apostles and the testimony of the Scriptures.

And as we enter 2 Peter 2 we will clearly see why I chose the theme for his 2nd epistle, as ‘watch out but keep on growing.’ And over the next four sermons Peter is going to be talking a lot about false teachers. Before we get into our text today let me share with you a story I heard not long ago.

Two nuns were travelling through Europe in their car. They get to Transylvania and are stopped at a traffic light. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a tiny little Dracula jumps onto the hood of the car and hisses through the windshield. "Quick, quick!" one nun says, "What shall we do?" the other says, "Turn the windshield wipers on. That will get rid of the abomination." So she switches them on, knocking Dracula about, but he clings on and continues hissing at the nuns. "What shall I do now?" she shouts. "Switch on the windshield washer. I filled it up with Holy Water at the Vatican." says the other nun. So she turns on the windshield washer. Dracula screams as the water burns his skin, but he clings on and continues hissing at the nuns. The nun says, "Show him your cross." "Now you're talking," says the other nun. She opens the window and shouts, "Hey you! Dracula get off my car or I will come out there and beat you up."

When it comes to religion there are many people with many strange ideas about what the Bible teaches. Some are simply misguided because they haven’t been taught clearly and then there are others who simply twist the Scriptures to mislead people. And so, just as there were false prophets in Old Testament times we should expect false teachers in our day.

2 Peter 2:1 “But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you.” Now when Peter uses the term false prophet not only here but throughout the rest of this chapter. He’s implying that they are more than someone who is teaching out of ignorance, someone who is sincerely mistaken, like Apollos in Acts 18. He’s talking about those who know full well what they are doing and are purposely trying to mislead others. And in our sermon today Peter is going to describe the damage that these false teachers can and do cause.

2 Peter 2:1 “But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.” Peter says if you want to know what a false teacher is like, look at the damage they cause. He says they have their own destructive heresies.

Now what does he mean by that? He means there are some people who will come into our assemblies with their own secret agendas. And make no mistake about it loved ones, they may have an appearance like any other Christian, they will be polite and sound godly and even come across as if they know the Scriptures. But they will have an agenda that you’re not aware of. And if you listen closely enough you will begin to hear their agenda the more time you spend with them.

And so how do we know if a person has an agenda? Well not only will you hear it but you will see it. Look at the damage which is being caused. Just try and disagree with their thinking and watch what happens. Churches start arguing over matters of opinions, churches start splitting because people have different goals. And so what Peter is saying here loved ones is this, be careful. There are people who will come into our assemblies and try to teach their own doctrine and cause division in the Lord’s church because of that doctrine.

An issue of National Geographic included a photograph of the fossil remains of two saber-tooth cats locked in combat. The article says: "One had bitten deep into the leg bone of the other, a thrust that trapped both in a common fate. The cause of the death of the two cats is as clear as the causes of the extinction of their species are obvious".

You see loved ones when Christians fight each other, everybody loses. Or as Paul says in Galatians 5:15 “If you continually bite and devour one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another”. And so one sign of a false teacher is someone who tries to bring in their own agendas and causes division within the church because they want to push their own doctrinal ideas.

2 Peter 2:1 “But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction.”

Peter says these false teachers will cause others to deny Jesus, the very person who bought them. Now we know that this was already a problem for the early church. John writes in 2 John 7 “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who don’t confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh.”

But let me ask you, were these false teachers which Peter had in mind true Christians at one point in their lives? I would like to suggest that they were, that’s why Peter uses that phrase bought them. We know from Acts 20:28 that all Christians were bought by the precious blood of Christ. We know from 1 Corinthians 6:20 that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit because we were bought with a price.

In fact later in this chapter in 2 Peter 2:20 Peter says this about them, “For if after they have escaped the filthy things of the world through the rich knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they again get entangled in them and succumb to them, their last state has become worse for them than their first.”

So I believe that these false teachers were once true Christians but over a period of time they started to deny the very person who bought them with His blood. And they deny Him by twisting God’s word to suit their own agendas and their own beliefs. You see loved ones the real damage they cause is seen in the many people who follow them.

They secretly come in with their own agendas and they go out of their way to convince others that what they are teaching is right. Or they go out of their way to convince others that what everyone else believes is wrong. But and this is important, they can’t back up what they believe using the Scriptures without either twisting them or taking the text out of context. And so this causes division and they now have their own following.

2 Peter 2:2 “Many will follow their immoral ways, and as a result, the way of the truth will be maligned”. Peter says, many will follow their immoral ways. In other words, instead of following the Lord as they should, they follow what they think is right. Instead of following the Lord who is the only way of salvation, they separate themselves from the only true source of salvation. That’s what Peter means when he says; the way of truth will be maligned.

Now it’s a shame that there are many false teachers in the world who claim to follow Jesus and claim to be Christians and so the world thinks that they are the norm for Christians. And so the world makes a judgment on Christianity based upon what these people say and think to themselves, ‘Well if that’s what Christianity is all about, I’m not interested’. Or people will look at the many different denominations in the world today, they will look at all the different branches of the churches of Christ and ask, ‘If you guys claim to have the truth why can’t you all agree on what that truth is?’

And so we can clearly see that even in the world today, there are many false teachers who have come and will continue to come. They will bring in their own agendas and doctrines which will cause even more division in the world of Christianity. And so Peter says, be careful Christian, don’t follow them or you may end up losing your soul because of their false doctrine.

Now the good news is that Peter doesn’t leave us in the dark about how false teachers go about doing their work. Look again at 1 Peter 2:1, he says they will work secretly. 2 Peter 2:1 “But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.”

Isn’t it interesting that most crimes are committed during the night? And that’s because there are less people around, they have the cover of darkness and they are more likely to get away with the crime. Well in much the same way, these false teachers can’t stand the light of truth, so they set out to work behind the scenes. Now what do I mean by that? I mean they divide and conquer.

They will work on creating good relationships with people within a congregation, invite them for dinner, give certain people a call regularly etc. And it’s then behind the scenes they will begin to share their own ideas about something. And when they have enough people to support their ideas, all of a sudden, out of nowhere it becomes a congregational matter.

And so something which can be easily explained using the Scriptures is rejected because these false teachers don't want to hear it. And so what Peter is saying loved ones, be careful of anyone who organises secret meetings with a select few. Be careful of anyone who claims one thing but can't back up what they believe with the Bible.

Now the sad news is that what these false teachers say often sounds very convincing **doesn't it?** Well that's because they are not appealing to the Scriptures, they are appealing to covetousness. **2 Peter 2:3 "In covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber."** Peter says be careful because these people will take advantage of you.

Now we don't have to wonder what Peter means here because he tells us in **2 Peter 2:14 "Having eyes full of adultery, and who can't cease from sin; enticing unsettled souls; having a heart trained in greed; children of cursing."** He also tells us in **2 Peter 2:18 "For, uttering great swelling words of emptiness, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by licentiousness, those who are indeed escaping from those who live in error."**

Have you ever heard of the gospel of health and wealth? Become a Christian and God will make you rich. It was during the **Healing Revivals** of the **1950s** that prosperity theology first came to prominence in the **United States**, although commentators have linked the origins of its theology to the **New Thought** movement. The prosperity teaching later figured prominently in the **Word of Faith** movement and **1980s** televangelism. In the **1990s** and **2000s**, it was adopted by influential leaders in the **Charismatic Movement** and promoted by Christian missionaries throughout the world, sometimes leading to the establishment of mega-churches.

So this has been around for a long time and these teachers who hold such a believe, offer exactly what Peter has just described to us. They offer things that the flesh often desires, things like wealth, health, power, and influence. **And how do they go about doing this?** They use misleading words.

2 Peter 2:3 "In covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words: whose sentence now from of old doesn't linger, and their destruction will not slumber." Peter says they will take advantage of you by using deceptive words. Or as we looked at a moment ago in **2 Peter 2:18** they will use **"Great swelling words of emptiness."**

Peter says these false teachers will be smooth talkers, who know exactly what they are doing. And they are and will continue to deceive those who follow them. **2 Timothy 3:13 "But evil people and charlatans will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves."**

Now you might wonder how on earth is that possible? How can people be so easily deceived? Well in the words of **Madonna**, **'We are living in a material world'** and so they are appealing to the flesh. They preach it on our television screens, **'Follow me and God will make you rich, follow me and God will keep you in good health'**. They teach it from their pulpits, **'Follow me and God will make you powerful, follow me and God will you an important person.'**

And they know it's a lie but they have convinced themselves its true and continue to convince many others that what they preach and teach is true too. And if a person wants something so bad they will believe anything in order to make that happen.

And so loved ones, Peter says, if a person cannot give you book, chapter, and verse, but appeals to something that sounds good, be careful. That's why Peter has been reminding us to keep growing in the knowledge of Christ. The more we know Christ, live Christ and keep our heads in the Bible, the less chance we will have of becoming deceived when these false teachers come along.

Now notice that Peter tells us what will eventually happen to these false teachers. **2 Peter 2:1 "But false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction."**

Peter says that they will bring on themselves swift destruction. In other words not only will their doctrines destroy others, but their doctrines will end up destroying them too. **How many times have we seen false teachers go into some churches and take away a bunch of people with them and then over a period of time their world just simply falls apart?**

You've probably heard of a man named **Jim Bakker**. He was an American televangelist, a former **Assemblies of God minister**.

His world fell apart when news of a sex scandal got out and he ended up resigning from his ministry. Over a period of time other things he was involved with came to light including accounting fraud for which he ended up in prison for.

Now we may think, well the destruction of these false teachers isn't that swift but Peter goes on to reassure us that it hasn't gone unnoticed. **2 Peter 2:3** "And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. Their condemnation pronounced long ago is not sitting idly by; their destruction is not asleep." In other words Peter is saying, when there are false teachers around, don't worry about them. God is not idle, and God isn't asleep when it comes to their judgment and destruction.

Peter goes on and says let me give you a few examples of how God doesn't let the guilty off with their sin. **2 Peter 2:4-9** "For if God didn't spare angels when they sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and didn't spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked (for that righteous man dwelling among them, was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds): the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment."

Peter asks **have you forgotten the angels who tried to overthrow God in heaven?** God hasn't. Peter asks **have you forgotten all those who wouldn't listen to Noah and turn to God?** God hasn't. Peter asks **have you forgotten what happened to those who sinned at Sodom and Gomorrah?** God hasn't. Peter says our God not only knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation but He hasn't forgotten those who have sinned either.

Loved ones, be careful because false teachers are everywhere, you cannot tell by their appearance but you can tell by their fruit. Jesus Himself told us in **Matthew 7:15-20** "Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will recognize them by their fruit."

So what fruit does Jesus have in mind here? **Galatians 5:22+23** "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." You see it is entirely possible to have a good tree and a bad tree that look nearly identical in trunk, limbs, and leaves, yet they differ in the quality of fruit they produce. But if you listen closely to these false teachers, their hypocrisy will eventually be shown to all those who observe them carefully.

So why doesn't God deal with these false teachers and all the ungodly people of this world today? **2 Peter 3:9** "The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance".

Peter says, God is not controlled by time like we are, and He doesn't want anyone to perish but everyone to come to Him in repentance. In other words, as long as today is called today, we have a chance to reach some soul with the true gospel of Jesus. Sinners everywhere have still got time to come to God because God is patiently waiting for them to come. He's waiting but He won't wait forever and when judgment day comes, it will be too late. Peter tells us in **2 Peter 3:10** "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night". And so if you're not a Christian this morning let me encourage to think about where you are going to spend eternity.

Let me encourage you to read your Bible and follow Jesus and His teachings closely. Jesus says in **John 14:6** "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me". False teachers cause so much damage to the good that Jesus has done and continues to do. False teachers are not the way to get to heaven, but Jesus Christ is the only way. False teachers fabricate the truth but Jesus Christ is the truth. False teachers offer false hope for this life but Jesus offers abundant life and hope for the life after.