

Contend For The Faith
Feb. 5, 2020 Lesson #5 Beware Of False Teachers

The theme of Peter's second letter is that of faithful truth in the face of falsehood; how to detect error, how to live in the midst of deceit, how to distinguish between right and wrong, when wrong is subtly alluring and deceptive.

Peter had become increasingly concerned about false teachers who were infiltrating the churches in Asia Minor. Though these false teachers had already caused trouble, Peter expected that their heretical doctrines and immoral life-styles would result in more damage in the future. Thus Peter wrote to warn the beloved believers in Christ about the doctrinal dangers they were facing. The churches of Asia Minor were not just struggling with the persecution and suffering addressed in Peter's first letter; they also had strife and dissension within their ranks. In an effort to stem the tide of heresy and false teaching among the Christians, Peter emphasized the importance of learning and clinging to the proper knowledge of God. Peter's primary solution to false teaching is knowledge of true doctrine.

In writing to these Christians in the midst of trouble, he is trying to help them to be true in the face of falsehood.

II Pet. 1:1b... to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ:

Think of that! We are tempted to think of these mighty apostles as men of such sterling character and of such abundant faith that they are far above us in their grasp of knowledge and truth, but the apostles themselves never thought of themselves that way. They regarded themselves as nothing but ordinary believers with the same equality of opportunity in faith as any other believer enjoyed.

II Pet. 2:1a BUT there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you,

Before Peter describes the false teachers in II Peter 2, he describes the true Christian life in II Peter 1.

In II Pet. 1, Peter lays out the foundation for our faith which is the inspired Word of God. Peter emphasizes the KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. Know or knowledge is used >13x.

➤ It means: a living participation in the truth

V. 1-2 This faith is in the person of Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Savior.

- Jesus Christ has 3 "spiritual commodities" that can be secured from no one else.

❖ Righteousness, Grace and Peace

V. 3 This faith involves God's Power which will produce "life and godliness."

In II Pet. 1:1-4 He summarizes the all-sufficient work of our sovereign God in making provision for our salvation and our sanctification. [Col. 2:10 "You are complete in Him."]

"Even the weakest believer holds in his hands all that the mightiest saint ever possessed."

That is the theme of Peter's opening chapter. Listen to these words:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness... [II Peter 1:3a]

Prayer: Omnipotent God, your divine power has given me everything required for life and godliness. You've given me life. Your Word gives me teaching and knowledge. Your son Jesus gave me the example of how to live. Open my mind and spirit so that I grow in goodness and godliness. Amen

Consider: The false teachers claimed they had a "special doctrine" that would add something to the believer's life. However, Peter knew believers are given ALL they need to grow.

- From His Divine Nature, God has provided ALL that is necessary for life and godliness [faith, grace, peace, knowledge, His precious promises].

1. Nature determines appetite.

- The pig wants slop and the dog will even eat its own vomit. [II Pet. 2:22]
- Sheep desire green pastures.

2. Nature determines behavior.

- An eagle flies because it has an eagle's nature. A dolphin swims; it is its nature.

3. Nature determines environment.

- Squirrels climb trees. Moles burrow underground. Trout swim in the water.

4. Nature determines association.

- Lions travel in prides, sheep in flocks and fish in schools.

Truth: If I have the life and nature of Jesus Christ in me, I should have an appetite for that which is pure and holy. It should affect our behavior, our environment and our associations.

The only normal, fruit-bearing life is a godly life.

- These provisions make it possible to "become partakers of the divine nature" and enable us to escape from the corruption that is in the world through lust.
- Godly living is the result of cultivating the new nature within us.

There is the danger of life without growth [II Peter 1:3-8]; and there is the danger of knowledge without practice.

In v. 5-7, Peter urges us to pursue the path of discipleship. We are to make use of these divine provisions by diligently and energetically pursuing holiness [faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.]

- The things for which God has made provision, we are to make our pursuit.

V. 8-11 spell out the fruits of the pursuit of holiness in terms of: what we avoid: what we gain.

- As children of God, the pursuit of holiness assures us of avoiding what we should dread [uselessness and unfruitfulness, blindness and short-sightedness, forgetfulness of our former cleansing from sin and stumbling.
- The pursuit of holiness assures us of attaining what we greatly desire as saints - an abundant entrance into the kingdom of God. WOW!

V. 11-21 stress not only the importance of the Scriptures but their certainty.

- In contrast to the "cleverly devised tales" of false teachers, the Scriptures are a "more sure word of prophecy" which come from men WHO WITNESSED THE POWER AND GLORY OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST. [v. 16-19]

V.20-21 These Scriptures must be interpreted correctly through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and in a way consistent with the interpretation of godly saints throughout history. "I am much more comforted by knowing that my understanding of a biblical text agrees with the interpretation of a saint of old, who suffered and died for his faith, than by embracing the bizarre interpretation of a Rolls Royce-driving televangelist who lives in Beverly Hills and whose only suffering is measured by the number of viewers his latest scandal cost him."

Compare Jude 1:4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men,

- turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and
- denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

II Pet. 2:1-3 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.

- ² And many shall follow their pernicious ways; [licentious conduct]
- by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.
- ³ And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not.

Second Peter was written for the purpose of exposing, thwarting, and defeating the invasion of false teachers into the church. Peter intended to instruct Christians in how to defend themselves against these false teachers and their deceptive lies. This book is the most graphic and penetrating exposé of false teachers in Scripture, comparable only to Jude.

In a general characterization of false teachers, he informs that they teach destructive heresies. They deny Christ and twist the Scriptures. They bring true faith into disrepute. They mock the second coming of Christ. Peter was just as concerned to show the immoral character of these teachers as he was to expose their teaching.

Thus, he describes them in more detail than he describes their doctrines.

Wickedness is not the product of sound doctrine, but of "destructive heresies" (2:1).

Peter's Concerns: 1. False teachers were promoting immoral ungodly living by denying that Christ was really going to return to judge sin.

2. They sought to lure the churches into their carnal ways.

3. Focus on Scriptures given by God rather than listening to the "private interpretation" of false teachers who refuse to believe that God will judge wickedness.

Dr. Piper: Wolves in sheep's clothing are dangerous, but wolves in shepherd's clothing are downright deadly."

Beware Of False Teachers: They Leave A Trail of Spiritual Devastation In Their Wake

A. They Are A Perpetual Threat To God's People.

Satan, the father of lies, deceived Eve in the garden and has used false teachers to deceive the unsuspecting ever since.

Note: Peter, Jude and Paul warned these false teachers would be "among you."

Acts 20:29-30 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

- False teachers often do much damage before they are confronted.
- If they leave, they invariably take many people with them.

It is wrong to minimize doctrine to the point where in the name of love and unity, we tolerate false teachers who deny the fundamental doctrines of THE FAITH.

- Triune nature of God; full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ; His virgin birth, sinless life, substitutionary atonement on the cross, bodily resurrection, ascension and personal return.
- Essentials of the Gospel: Saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.
- Underlying all of these truths: Divine inspiration, authority and complete infallibility of the Bible.

J.C. Ryle: "There is one thing worse than controversy in the church: False doctrine tolerated, allowed and permitted without protest. Three things there are which men never ought to trifle with: a little poison, a little false doctrine and a little sin. To regularly hear unscriptural teaching is a serious thing. It is a continual dropping of slow poison into the mind."

Conclusion: Just because someone claims to be a pastor, evangelist or teacher does not mean he is sound in the faith. False teachers have always arisen **WITHIN** the church. Beware!

B. Beware of False Teachers: Their Methods Are Subtle & Deceptive

1. False teachers "arise" and "creep in unnoticed"; "Privily" [Jude 1:4; II Pet. 2:1b]

II Tim. 3:13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

- In some cases, they do not even recognize their own condition.
They deceive and they are themselves deceived.

2. They appeal to the lusts of the flesh.

They will scratch the itching ears of people who reject the truth of the Bible and turn to fables. [II Tim. 4:1-4]

3. Use feigned or false words [II Pet. 2:3]

Greek = plastos = plastic = words that can be twisted to mean anything you want

False teachers use our vocabulary but NOT our dictionary.

They talk about salvation, inspiration, etc. but they do not mean what we mean.

4. Use great swelling words [II Pet. 2:18] to fascinate and influence their victims.

They flatter sinners and tell them the kind of ego-building words they want to hear.

I Thess. 2:5 For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness:

Immature and untaught believers hear them or read their books and think these people are sound in the faith, but they are not.

Wiersbe: Religion can be a tremendous tool for exploiting weak people. False teachers use religion to get what they can. These false teachers are not ministers; they are merchandisers.

Consider: True minister of Jesus Christ is an open book. He preaches the truth in love and does not twist the Scriptures to support his own selfish ideas. He doesn't flatter the rich or minister to only make money.

II Cor. 2:17 For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God

For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. [NASB]

II Cor. 4:1-2 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

² But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

5. Their heresies are "secretly introduced." = Bring in from the outside

➤ Add worldly concepts to the Bible and give them the same authority as Scripture.

Ex.: Concept of "self-esteem" or "loving yourself." This idea did not come from the Bible.

Search in vain: you will not find any verse that encourages you to build your self-esteem or love yourself more than you already do.

Advocates of this approach use as a proof text, "love your neighbor as yourself."

You must love yourself before you can properly love your neighbor and before you can love God.

They point to Matt. 22:37-40. Look at the context:

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

➤ There are 2 great commandments, not 3. They are to love God and to love our neighbor.

Love for self is assumed as the minimal standard.

False teachers often use Scripture, but they twist it by bringing in teaching from outside to pervert the true meaning of God's Word.

➤ They cleverly work in a little error here and there until they have taken people into a complete denial of the Gospel.

Paul warned: Just as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, even so his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. [II Cor. 11:13-15]

➤ They use subtlety and deception to gain followers.

The false teachers were accusing Peter and the apostles of following "cleverly devised tales." [1:16], but Peter counters by saying that they are making up their own stories and doctrines.

In contrast to the inspired prophets and apostles, who wrote down God's revealed truth in His Word, these false teachers were tools of Satan to promote deception.

6. They carry out their ministry in Jesus' name, and they are just as surprised at being called unbelievers as we are when we realize they do not share a "like precious faith" with us:

Matt. 7:15-23 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. ¹⁶ Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? ¹⁷ Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. ²⁰ Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

²¹ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Who were in danger: just a few? No, many.

Were evil acts being performed? No, they were doing miracles, great signs and wonders, prophesying.

Were they done in a demon's name? No, in JESUS' NAME! In His Holy Name.

Yet, He said - depart from Me.

How "good" it all looks and sounds - in our eyes. Not in His.

Consider: These are high-profile Christian leaders apparently performing signs and wonders in the name of Christ. Tragically, they seem to think their ability to prophesy and to perform wonders proves they belong to Him. The signs and wonders are so impressive that doctrine no longer matters -exactly what we see today! Obviously, something more than mere trickery is involved. These miracle workers are backed by the power of Satan, whom they unwittingly serve in the name of the Lord.

Our Lord's words here indicate that we dare not attempt to distinguish false teachers from a true teacher merely on the basis of their ability to perform mighty works.

- A true prophet need not perform great works. Such was John the Baptist, a prophet without mighty works but with mighty words [John 10:41].
- If a prophet declares that something will happen, and it does not, then he is a false prophet [Deuteronomy 18:20-22].
- But the ability to perform great works does not prove one to be a prophet. His doctrine must also conform to the Word of God [Deuteronomy 13:1-5].
- Jesus teaches that the "fruit" which distinguishes false teachers from the true is not just their mighty deeds. We must also take careful note of the fruit of their own character and that of their followers.

Truth: Satan is a liar and his ministers are liars. They use the Bible to deceive.

They follow the same pattern Satan used with Eve.

Question God's Word "Yea, hath God said?" [Gen. 3:1-6]

Denied God's Word "You shall not surely die."

Substituted His Own Lie "Ye shall be as gods."

Remember: Apostate teachers are not innocently ignorant of the Word. They know the truth but they deliberately reject it.

Illustration: A liberal pastor at a conference was asked to read a paper on Paul's views of justification. This paper superbly presented the truth of the gospel and justification by faith. A friend remarked: "I didn't know you believed that." He said: "I don't believe it. They didn't ask for MY views of justification. They asked for PAUL'S."

C. Beware Of False Teachers Because Their Motives Are Impure.

Peter shows these men are driven by two related evil motives: sensuality and greed.

At the root of these is their own self-centeredness and pride.

- ❖ They do not seek to give sacrificially to others; they seek to gain from others.

- ❖ They do not seek to edify others but to exploit them. [II Pet. 2:3]

False doctrine and impure living are intertwined. False doctrine leads to ungodly living, but the reverse is also true.

I Thess. 2:5 They exploit [make merchandise of] ignorant people and use their religions as "a cloak of covetousness."

Micah 3:11 Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, Her priests instruct for a price And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, "Is not the LORD in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us."

Quote: "Immorality, love of money and pride have been the ruin of many people."

D. Beware Of False Teachers Because Their Teaching And Lifestyles Result In Dishonor To The Way Of The Truth.

II Pet. 2:2 "because of them the way of the truth will be maligned." [shall be evil spoken of] The Christian faith is the way of the truth because Jesus Himself is "the way, the truth, and the life" [John 14:6]. When professing Christians do not live according to the truth of God's Word, unbelievers mock and disregard the truth.

The TV preachers who live lavishly while milking their audiences for more money and the well-known pastors who get exposed in sex scandals cause the world to scoff at the faith.

- ❖ Peter says we are to expect to be maligned for doing what is right. [I Pet. 2:12, 15, 20]

- ❖ When the sin of false teachers is exposed, the unrighteous may almost delight in lumping all professing Christians together. Thus we are wrongly associated with the folly of fraudulent saints.

Apostates and cultists use the Word of God to promote and defend their false doctrines.

They seduce young, immature Christians who have not yet been grounded in the Scriptures.

Question: What happens to their followers?

They bring disgrace to the name of Christ. Christian faith gets a "bad name."

Titus 1:16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. [counterfeit; not passing the test]

Rom. 2:24 "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you."

Few things hinder the cause of Christ like the bad reputations of professing Christians who are members of churches.

Every soldier of the cross needs to go through "basic training" so he knows how to use the weapons of spiritual warfare. [II Cor. 10:4-5]

E. Beware Of False Teachers Because Their Influence Is Alluring.

II Pet. 2:2 "And many shall follow their pernicious ways:"

Jude 1:4 "turning the grace of God into lasciviousness"

They were "successful!" It's amazing how many people think that if a man has a huge following, he must be sound in the faith. If he builds a megachurch, the Christian world looks to him as a leader, without questioning what he teaches.

- False teachers are driven by their own lusts and invariably cater to the flesh.
- They do not preach against sin nor mention divine judgment or hell.
- They avoid truths like denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Christ no matter what the cost.
- Rather, they soothe people with uplifting thoughts about how much God loves you and wants you to have your best life now.
- If they ever mention the death of Christ, they say that He did it because He believed in your great worth.
- Now you need to believe in yourself and ask God to help you fulfill your dreams.
- People follow that kind of false teaching by the droves, because it feeds their pride.

Paula White: Anyone who tells you to deny yourself, is from Satan.

Victoria Osteen: Just do good for yourself because God wants you happy.

John Bunyan: Let me die rather than deal corruptly with the blessed Word of God.

Nothing is more wicked than to speak for God to the salvation of souls when in reality he speaks for Satan to the damnation of souls. [Deut. 13:1-18; 18:20; Jer. 23; Ezek. 13; Matt. 7:15; Matt. 23:1-36; Matt. 24:4-5; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 3:1-2]

JC Ryle: It is neglect of the Bible which makes so many a prey to the first false teacher whom they hear.