

Sermon Brief
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October 2, 2022

Text: 2 Peter 2:1-3

Title: “False Teachers”

Subject: As opposed to the trustworthy apostles and Scripture, beware of false teachers.

Complement: False teachers promote deception, sensuality and greed.

Textual Idea: As opposed to the trustworthy apostles and Scripture, false teachers promote deception, sensuality and greed.

Sermon Idea: Not all truths are created equal!

Interrogative: What light am I following?

Key Points:

False teachers...

1. Pollute the truth. v.1
2. Practice and promote sensuality. v.2
3. Profit from the unsuspecting. v.3

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that not every “Christian” teacher is reliable. Avoid those who give license to sensuality and who financially exploit the unsuspecting.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) carefully evaluate any “new” teaching they hear, (2) sharpen your theological convictions, (3) remember believers carry Christ’s reputation.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need for maintaining solid teaching in an age of compromise.

“False Teachers

2 Peter 2:1-3

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It’s been so hard to watch the destruction caused by **(LCD) Hurricane Ian** in Florida and South Carolina. Dozens have died, and others have lost everything. Just terrible. And I couldn’t help but compare it to the destruction wrought in 2 Peter by false teachers leading people astray. Three times, Peter uses the word “destruction” to describe the impact of the false teachers. Truth matters...and, contrary to the prevailing culture, there is objective truth we are to conform to, we must conform to, if we’re to avoid hurricane-like devastation in our lives. Let’s pray.

Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter 2:1-3. Last week, we ended chapter 1 with Peter having to defend his credibility as a true teacher. He did this by declaring that there are **(LCD) two lights** that can lead us through the chaos and darkness of this world: the apostle’s eyewitness accounts of Jesus, and the divine Scriptures that came from trustworthy, Holy Spirit-inspired prophets. In chapter 2, Peter will now move from defense to offense by frankly exposing the false teachers who are NOT led by the Holy Spirit. Which leads me to continue the same question from last week, **(LCD) what light are you following?** We’re all following some kind of belief system, wisdom, guru – from the internet to our friends, to our own intuition – we’re all following some kind of light. What is it? The answer to that matters because though “all men are created equal,” not all truth is created equal. There is true light and false light. What are you following?

2 Peter 2:1, *“But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”* You know, I had a phone call from a dear friend this week who said that they aren’t enjoying this sermon series because it talks too much about judgment. I get it. None of us want to think or talk about judgment, neither do I. But if that’s where God’s light is pointing, then we need to go there. N.T. Wright said it well, **(LCD) “Wouldn’t it be kinder, gentler, more...well, more Christian, to assume that people who claim to be speaking the truth, to be teaching the Christian way, are doing so in fact? Surely we shouldn’t have such suspicious minds? Well, the same early Christians who tell us to be kind and gentle also tell us to be on our guard against being deceived. Jesus himself told us to be not only innocent as doves but also wise as serpents.”**

We need to be wise and discerning, not all truth is created equal. Some is true and some is false. How can we know the difference? Peter helps us by pointing out several of their characteristics which I’ll summarize in **(LCD) three categories:** False teachers pollute the pure waters of truth, practice and promote sensuality – if it feels right, go for it, and they profit from the unsuspecting. All those characteristics were true in Peter’s day and they’re true in ours too.

Let's begin with verse 1, the pollution of false teaching. *"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you."* Again, after talking about true, Old Testament prophets at the end of chapter 1, Peter reminds his readers that there were false prophets in Israel too. Not everyone who prophesied in Israel was truly speaking from God as God warned his people through Moses early on, (LCD) **"I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death."** As we see here, some prophets truly speak from God, and we must listen to them, but others don't. Peter says, *"there were false prophets AMONG the people."* We're not talking outsiders! These false prophets were fellow Israelites!

Old Testament prophets had at least (LCD) three characteristics in common:

1. **They did not speak with God's authority.**
2. **Their message was usually upbeat, in contrast to the authentic prophet's warning of divine judgement.**
3. **They were denounced as worthy of condemnation.**

An example of their upbeat preaching is found in Ezekiel, (LCD) **"My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations..."** **"Because they lead my people astray, saying, "Peace," when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash, therefore tell those who cover it with whitewash that it is going to fall."** False prophecy, as upbeat as it sounds, is nothing but a flimsy, whitewashed wall! When the hurricanes of life strike, it falls!

This was true in ancient Israel Peter says, and he adds that it's true in his time too, *"just as there will be false teachers among you."* Note, "among you." We're not talking pagans or atheists, we're talking people who look and smell like believers but aren't. Jesus warned Peter and His disciples of these types, (LCD) **"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them."** They look good, but they aren't. Just like in Peter's day, we have to be on our guard for these wolves. This is a little long, but I like what Chuck Swindoll wrote, (LCD) **"Warren Wiersbe puts it well: 'The false teachers use our vocabulary, but they do not use our dictionary.' They talk about 'sin,' 'salvation,' 'inspiration,' 'God,' 'Jesus Christ,' and 'resurrection' – but they don't mean what the Bible means by these terms. Sin may be failing to actualize our human potential. Salvation might mean self-actualization...to false teachers today Scripture is inspired in the same way great poetry or literature is 'inspired.' God is often seen as our personal higher power...Jesus Christ is viewed as a great moral teacher...resurrection is just a metaphor for keeping Jesus 'alive' through observing His teachings.... False teachers rethink and redefine terms as they encourage us to question long standing doctrines."**

I realize that "new" teaching sounds intriguing and interesting but be leery of anyone who questions long standing doctrines and "redefines" biblical concepts that the church has agreed upon throughout church history. And it isn't done with a mega-horn! Note what

Peter says next in verse 1, *“They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.”* “Secretly introduce” is a word that refers to bringing in something in addition to what’s already been known. It’s something “new!” We like new. I love a new car, a new house, and yeah, a new teaching sounds intriguing, but beware! The Holy Spirit hasn’t been asleep for two thousand years. There is wisdom in orthodoxy.

What they introduce is “destructive heresies” – destruction like a hurricane! The winds of false teaching can blow through a church and tear it apart. That’s certainly happening right now with the “new” teaching on same-sex marriage. People are re-interpreting the Bible and twisting what’s been agreed on for two thousand years! This is ripping churches and families apart with hurricane force! We talked about this in our Wednesday Night Live class this week, **(LCD) “Parents teaching their family traditional views of sex find themselves met with incomprehension by their children who have absorbed far different views from the culture around them...And this is true within the church as it is within wider society. The generation gap is reflected not simply in fashion and music but in attitudes and beliefs about some of the most basic aspects of human existence.”** These false teachings are destructive! At their heart they are a denial of the Lord Jesus. These false teachers claim to be blood-bought followers of Jesus, but they aren’t. Swift destruction is their destiny. The hurricane of God’s justice will come back upon them in due time.

Which brings me back to my question, **(LCD) what light are you following?** Not all truth is equally true. Where are you going for wisdom? The internet, friends, yourself, or God? Let me give you an example. **(LCD) What do you think of this quote from Helen Keller, “The heresy of one age becomes the orthodoxy of the next.”** Sounds true! What was heresy at one time becomes accepted norms in another – like same-sex marriage for instance. I agree with that! However, that’s not what she means by this statement; you have to read the context, **(LCD) “The heresy of one age becomes the orthodoxy of the next. Mere tolerance has given place to a sentiment of brotherhood between sincere men of all denominations.”** This book she wrote, “Optimism,” is all about how all roads lead to heaven. She’s saying that we need to drop our judgments of heresy between different religions and embrace each other. Like the false Old Testament prophets, “Peace! Love! We’re all good!” Sounds good but it’s just not true!

Now I’m not against Helen Keller, I’m sure she was a kind woman, but where did she get this thinking? Here’s what she said in her autobiography, “Light in the Darkness,” **(LCD) “The teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg have been my light... In that state of exhilaration, I had accepted (his) teachings...had drunk in his interpretation of the Bible, fearless, reverent, yet as unconfined as the sun, the clouds, the sea.”** Swedenborg founded something called the “New Church” and called it a Christian denomination. It denied the deity of Christ, the verbal inspiration of the Bible, and declared that God would save everyone – all heretical views. Keller allowed her feelings, “that state of exhilaration,” to guide her choice of light. What light are you following?

Verse 2, “*Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.*” The second characteristic of false teachers, along with polluting the truth, is **(LCD) they practice and promote sensuality** – if it feels right, it is right. We’ll see what he means by that later in the letter. The word translated, **(LCD) “depraved conduct,”** is a word that means **“A lack of self-constraint which involves one in conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable; self-abandonment.”** **“Indulgence in sensual pleasure unrestrained by convention or morality.”** Not only is their teaching false, but their lives are off too. Instead of the godly living that Peter urged us towards in chapter 1, these ones will create justification for things that would generally be regarded as wrong. And since they do it in the name of Jesus, it brings dishonor to Christ, to the way of truth, the gospel.

I ran across a prime example of this recently. Look at this article from last year, **(LCD) “In San Diego, Porn Star Preaches Message ‘For Sinners, By Sinners.’”** No joke. Listen, “*Angela and her husband, Stephen Dela Cruz, launched the church plant this summer, advertising it as “a church for sinners by sinners.” The church website further explains that the church’s leaders are “the biggest sinners, and this is the most non-judgmental church around!” While the church website doesn’t identify its pastors, the couple has been open on social media about Angela’s involvement in adult entertainment and her role in the church. For instance, “Where else will you find an adult actress who is also a pastor?!” a Sept. 6 post on the church’s Instagram reads in part... She maintains an online presence under a different name where she posts explicit content and promotes her involvement in adult entertainment industry events.*” What?! Talk about a hurricane! Porn destroys and exploits men and women all over the world! It has NO PLACE in God’s house! None! It’s pure sensuality! God help us!

Once again this is an example of twisting age-old truth. In this case, the truth about grace as Chuck Swindoll shares again, **(LCD) “To deceivers, ‘grace’ is freedom to do as they wish – when and where and with whom they wish. In contrast, for believers grace is freedom from the punishment of sin and the God-given power to freely love and serve Christ apart from legalistic dos and don’ts.”** Lord, may we NEVER abuse Your grace by justifying gross immorality.

One more characteristic, verse 3, “*In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*” Greed. Money, money, money! In addition to, **(LCD) polluting truth and practicing/promoting sensuality, false teachers profit from the unsuspecting.** They exploit people. The word here is a marketing one that refers to making something to be more than it is. It is duping people. They do it by “fabricating stories.” Peter was accused of creating cleverly invented stories, myths, about Jesus; yet it is really the false teachers who make up stories to swindle the vulnerable. Speaking of these kinds of charlatans, Paul describes them this way, **(LCD) “They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women.”** Greed has long been an issue in the church – in Peter’s time and in ours!

I read an op-ed in last Thursday's Christian Post by a Nigerian pastor who warned against these fake pastors as he called them, **(LCD) "In Nigeria, these groups of followers do not listen to anyone except their "Papa and Daddy" who are master manipulators... When a pastor tells his followers not to make any major decisions without consulting him first, what does that mean?... I have seen a woman who donated her only car to her pastor who has an entire collection... I have been in a church where our pastor regularly announced that anyone who leaves that church will be under a curse... Their interpretations of the Word always tilt towards earthly gains and the cross of Christ is completely sidelined in their messages."**

These greedy false teachers are here too. Anyone remember Robert Tilton? Back in the '90s, he had a syndicated show called Success-N-Life. I watched it in horror a few times. He raked in as much as \$80 million a year from donors. Take a look at this brief video and then talk to me about what you see going on here. **(VIDEO)**

- "Forget your church."
- Emotional manipulation
- A fake word of knowledge, "I'm speaking by the Spirit of God."
- "If you want the kind of miracles that are in the Bible, you're going to have to do what God says to do." A focus on getting through giving.

Guys, this is perverse and sick. Eventually, Tilton's deception was found out and he was discredited. But to the world, as Peter puts it in verse 2, men like Tilton "bring the way of truth into disrepute." And for that, Peter says that destruction will come back on their own heads! Though they're flying high now, God's not asleep. He sees all, and contrary to what they think, there will be a final judgment and it won't go well for them!

How can we be discerning? One more time, Chuck Swindoll. He said to spot false teachers: **(LCD) stop, look and listen!** Stop! Put the brakes on when you're exposed to something. Are they lining up to what the Bible teaches and the historic doctrines of the faith? If you're not sure, talk to mature believers you trust. Look! Observe closely. Do the lives of these teachers look like Jesus? Do you see humility? The fruit of the Spirit? Are they humble or proud? Finally, Listen carefully! I like this quote of his, "Don't fall into the trap of judging something to be true because it makes you feel good... lies are crafted to provide false security, freedom to sin, and emotional excitement." Unlike Luke Skywalker, DON'T trust your feelings, trust the Word of God.

One last time, **(LCD) what light are you following?** Not all truth is equally true. Forget the televangelists. Now there are false teachers all over the internet! You have to be vigilant and discerning! Be biblically sound and Holy Spirit sensitive in community! Let me close with **(LCD) this painting by Van Gogh called Still Life with Bible**. The Van Gogh Museum describes the painting this way, "*This hefty Bible had belonged to Van Gogh's father, a Protestant minister. Van Gogh painted it just after his father's death. He placed his own copy of Émile Zola's La joie de vivre next to it. That book was a kind of 'bible' for modern life. The books symbolize the different worldviews of Van Gogh and his father.*" One commentator said this about the painting, "*By placing a burned-out candle beside the Bible and by putting both in the background, van Gogh is telling us that the*

time for walking through this world by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, who shines down upon God's Word, is past...Even the flaming color of yellow is now reserved for the cover of another book. Humanity's new pursuit is governed by whatever brings us the joy of life." That's very well said. What light are you following?

Let's close by reaffirming the ancient historic apostolic teaching of the church, **(LCD)**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.**

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into death.**

The third day he rose again from the dead.

**He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.**

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy universal church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**