

Title: The Truth About the False
Text: 2 Peter 2:1-3
Theme: The reality of false teachers
Series: 2 Peter
Prop Stmtnt: False teachers have been and will be a problem until Christ returns.

Before a flight takes off, the cabin crew reviews safety instructions with the passengers, many of whom, if not most, pay very little attention. However, if that flight encountered a scare, you would probably wish that you had been paying a little more attention, or if the flight that you were just on, encountered some trouble, then you would probably pay more attention. In the 2nd chapter of 2nd Peter, Peter is warning the believers that they are going to face a problem and in fact, already are. There is always a need to pay attention to this text.

The other night Cathi and I were with our grandson Judah at a playground. I noticed that no one drove by, dropped their kids off and drove off. Every kid had an adult on the playground in an effort to keep an eye on the kid because their safety helped to ensure that they had a good time. The church is like a playground. The elders of the church are like the fence around it, and are charged with keeping danger out. However, once in a while someone, who looks to be safe or pretends to be ok, gets in. Therefore, we all have to be on guard. This is always a challenge for the church and therefore, this text, which lays out a profile of a false teacher is always needed.

Read Text:

The ministry is made up of the message (gospel) and ministers (person). The minister is not the message, but because the message is so personal, that it is really natural to tie them together. Most of us have heard the message of the gospel through ministers. Some ministers are more competent and skilled than others and some are more faithful than others. The worst combination is not incompetent and unfaithful ministers, it is skilled communicators who are unfaithful in what they teach or how they lead, or in why they lead and “serve.” People who are gifted communicators generally have the ability to influence people which can be used for good things and it can be leveraged for a lot of evil. In this text and therefore, in this sermon Peter addresses those three areas: 1) content 2) manner and 3) motive. The key word is destructive or destruction which surfaces 3 times. And since the text begins with a coordinating conjunction, this text is linked to what we just looked at.

Every believer needs to pay attention to the Word. Every believer needs to study and be skilled in handling the Word because you are going to be influenced by people who seem very nice, who are polished and persuasive, but who are misleading people and, in some cases, intentionally so. False teachers have been and will be a problem until Christ returns. In this text Peter gives us a resume of false teachers. They do not all possess all of these qualities, but generally two or more go together. Each point (verse) describes an aspect of a false teacher and gives the consequence. 1) They are secretly destructive and they bring destruction on themselves. 2) They promote sensuality and they bring terrible damage to the reputation of the gospel. 3) They are motivated by greed and are destined for eternal condemnation. The stakes are high. Point 1 describes mannerisms to be wary of. Point 2 describes mannerisms and motives. Point 3 describes motives.

Let's say that you recently became a follower of Christ because someone in this church shared the gospel with you. Or, let's say that you recently started to attend this church or you recently joined. Much of what you are hearing or experiencing is new and it is good. You are being helped, encouraged and frankly, you are actually excited about church. I am so grateful for that, but do not drop your guard, ever. In fact, the reason why there is much in this church that is an encouragement and help to you, is because people do not drop their guard. First of all, mannerisms to be wary of:

1. **False Teachers are Secretly destructive.** (1b)

False teachers tend to have a level of secrecy about them. I want to suggest to you three ways this takes place.

A. False teachers use communication skill to gain influence and trust.

How do you think of the local church? Do you see us as a family of believers who because of our commitment to Christ are committed to helping one another look like Christ and grow in Christ? Do you see one another as brothers and sisters that can depend on you, who can trust you, who can expect you to pray for them, encourage them and counsel them? Do you sense your responsibility to relationships here and are willing to be inconvenienced because, frankly, you love one another? That is how the body is designed to function. Like your physical body, when an injury occurs (need arises), an infection is found, the immune system rallies to help, so in this local expression of the body of Christ, we live with a focus on others, rallying to help one another. But not everybody sees the church like that. Some see the church as a group of gullible people whom they can exploit and manipulate for their own purposes. Some use flattery. Some use service. Some use their talents as a means to get themselves into positions of influence. They are initially echo people. In other words, they find out what you want to hear and they say those things or they look the part and are able to get themselves into positions of influence. Peter is warning us about false teachers. They are teachers. That is, they possess a level of knowledge and skill in communication to gain trust and influence.

If someone sounds smarter than you and has a convincing presentation, then you tend to trust them. If someone is able to effect you emotionally, then you will have a tendency to let your guard down. There is nothing wrong with being affected emotionally. But just because someone is a skilled communicator, and can impress you with information, or make you laugh, or cry or feel pity, does not mean that he is the real deal. In other words, what you see (and feel) is not always what you get. There is a hiddenness to them and talent and skill are not always what you think they are. Just because someone is skilled and polished does not mean they are the legitimate. Peter says that false teachers will be among you. These false teachers use secrecy either to cloak what they really believe or what they are really trying to accomplish.

B. False teachers hide behind vagueness and subtly to introduce and promote error.

Peter describes their secrecy in terms of not being completely forthright in what they are teaching. These teachers then would not come out and boldly disagree with Peter and Paul (apostolic doctrine), but would raise questions, have concerns, create controversies, presume to

know more or know better. Most of the time, false teachers do not announce their real beliefs. They attempt to sneak them in by using terms or phrases that are accepted, but they will define those terms a little differently. Good teachers communicate with clarity so that you know what they mean and you know what they do not mean.

These false teachers secretly bring in destructive heresies and, in some cases, will even deny the Master who bought them. That is the language of redemption. The Master refers to Christ and “who bought them” refers to the fact that Christ died on the cross as the payment for our sins. As a slave, who has no rights and is at the mercy of his owner, we were owned by our sin and were in bondage to Satan. Christ paid our debt. By offering his life on the cross in death, Christ bought us from the slave market of sin and redeemed us. We are his bondslaves. Peter is talking about the fact, that when you pin the false teachers down, they do not really believe the gospel. These are people who professed to believe in the gospel, they were part of the church and members of this congregation. They were identified with those who were described as and professed to be those whom the Master had bought. But whether their role as a teacher was nothing more than a big ego trip, or they were not really qualified to be in that role, Peter says that when you pin them down and find out what they really believe, they don’t believe the gospel. They deny that Christ is the Savior, even though they professed at one time that this is what they believed. How is it then, that they were able to get into the position of being recognized by the church as a teacher? Well, obviously, they sounded ok to someone and put into a position where they were able to gain some influence, but in reality, they did not believe correctly and that was hidden for a while and was now coming out and causing some serious problems. In some cases, false teachers use secrecy to cover what they are trying accomplish.

C. False teachers leverage influence to create divisions and sects.

The word that is translated heresy can also refer to a division or a sect. The gospel isolates us from the world, but it unifies us around the truth. Good teachers use the gospel to promote gospel unity. The gospel is sticky enough to hold use together and is frankly stickier than anything else. Good teachers are focused on Christ and are not threatened by other good teachers. Therefore, good teachers do not try to create divisions, gain a following at the expense of others or discredit others they feel threatened by.

So, let’s say that a faithful local church is experiencing a wonderful season of gospel growth and fruit and we aren’t. How should we view that? We should rejoice with them. But, if I, instead of rejoicing, am jealous, intimidated, angry, and I feel insecure and threatened by that, and I start to subtly question their faithfulness, or motives, I am, in that sense being a false teacher. My mannerisms of secrecy and deviously running them down and wishing that they didn’t make me look bad by comparison is evil. This can happen inside a local church where one teacher or one leader intimidates another, or one minister intimidates another. False teachers often do things secretly in order to gain influence or try to keep influence. False teachers only have power because people give it to them. We are to remain on guard.

What happens to people like this? They do not last. The things they teach that bring destruction on those who follow them will bring destruction on themselves. The gospel is so valuable and therefore, the church is so important and personal to Christ, we realize that the stakes are high.

How do we stay on guard against false teachers without becoming suspicious and stand-offish? You need to start with your view of the church. Do you see the church as a family to which you belong or an event that you attend? Is the church a gathering, a fellowship, or a production? If the church is a family, then there is a greater emphasis upon relationships and fellowship. There is the problem of not having any privacy and the problem of creating walls where there is too much privacy. What do you know about them? 1 Timothy 3 is really helpful. It talks about family, finances, friends and reputation outside of the church. Do we really know the person? Are they clear on what they believe and clear when they teach?

2. **False Teachers promote Sensuality**. (2) (destroy the reputation of the gospel)

“Many will follow...” Sadly people like this have been able to have a lot of influence and they do it by telling people what feels good. They promote sensuality. “Many will follow **their** sensuality.” I think that verse 2 describes mannerisms and motives. Not every false teacher is going to look exactly the same way in every detail, but here are some good categories to be aware of. In some cases, they are promoting sensuality, because they are personally immoral and are looking for ways to exploit others for their own sexual desires. In other cases, they permit sensuality because they hesitate to tell people what they need to hear.

Here is how it happens. False teachers generally are the kind of people who crave the approval of others even if they appear to be very confident. Being a people pleaser and teaching the Bible is a really bad combination. God loves his glory so much that he will not compromise that for anything. The happiness of God is not dependent on whether or not you and I like or approve of what God says. At the same time, God loves us so much that he will always tell us what we need to hear, not always what we want to hear. False teachers tend to like themselves so much that they crave your approval, so they will find out what you like to hear and will tell you that. There are plenty of people who want “God’s approval” to live how they feel like living and there are plenty of people who do not want to know the truth. It is not enough to talk about heaven, you also have to talk about hell. It is not enough to talk about how wonderful sex can be in marriage, if you are going to faithfully teach God’s Word, you also have to warn about sex outside of marriage. In an effort to put forth a good vibe and positive feel, we like to talk about what we are for, but if we are going to be faithful, we have to talk about what God is against. False teachers start by only teaching the parts they like and ignoring the parts they don’t like or the parts they feel will upset certain people. They do not initially come out and blatantly deny God’s Word, but if they are really uneasy about getting pushback because God’s Word is very clear on issues such as homosexuality, then they will simply not address that. Over time, that influences a congregation. What is not condemned, is ignored. What is ignored is tolerated. What is tolerated is accepted. What is accepted is celebrated. What is celebrated is demanded. More on that this Wednesday night.

What happens when a leader in the church uses his influence for his own sensual desires? He gives the world an excuse to disregard the gospel. “The way of truth will be blasphemed.” The way of truth refers both to the message of the gospel and to the people of the gospel. The way of truth is in contrast with the way(s) of error. When a leader in the way of truth does not live by the truth, then the way of truth looks like the way of error and there is no reason for people to

believe it. Even the world knows that adultery is wrong. When gospel leaders fail morally, it is big news. How do we be on guard without treating each other with suspicion? 1) Maintain a serious view of sin, both for yourself and for others. Do not be afraid to challenge and encourage one another. There are a handful of guys in this church who through the years have admonished me in a good way, not because they saw anything, but because they don't want to see anything. They will come up to me, give me a hug, then look me in the eye and say, "I love you. Don't you fall. Be faithful to your wife, and your calling." Isn't that good? If I thought, or said, "how dare you say that me" that would be failing to have a serious view of the deceitfulness of sin. This kind of conversation with one another needs to be the norm and not the exception.

At the same time, if something looks suspicious or feels suspicious, it may be. This is one of the great benefits of godly elders. Godly elders are not a good ole' boys club. They care for the church by caring well for one another. Secrecy is a red flag. Sensuality is obviously a red flag. False teachers are often marked by greed.

3. **False Teachers are motivated by Greed** (3) - motivation (destroy others)

Greed is not just the lust for money, it is also the lust for respect, influence, and envy. Greed is at the heart of the person who wants to receive the worship that is only due to God. False teachers will manipulate others by telling them what they want to hear in order to get from them what they (the false teacher) want. They pretend to care about the people, but they don't. People are just a means to an end. How should we be guard for this? Two things: 1) Listen to what he says and how he says it. Does he ever talk about sin? Does he ever talk about his sin? Does he ever talk about the sins of others with tenderness? How does he treat people who disagree with him? Is he threatened with the success of those around him? Does he have to be the hero of all of his own stories? Does he use flattery?

I've shared with you before that one of my weaknesses is my failure to encourage others like I should. Part of that, no doubt, stems from my own pridefulness and independence that I always need to work on. Part of that also stems from the fact that I watched a false teacher in a church exploit people with false words because he was greedy. I would hear him talk sugar in front of people and then cut them down behind their back. Listen to what he says and how he says it. How does he talk about sin and how does he talk about people?

2) Is he generous? False teachers are not generous people. They are not trying to give away authority, influence, opportunities or resources. But, Jesus did. Jesus gave everything away, including his life! He died as the ultimate act of sacrificial generosity in order to pay for your sins. One of the evidences of leadership integrity in a church is generosity and a relentless desire to elevate and advance everyone around him.

A local church is hard work. It is hard, soul-work, but she is worth it. Jesus is worth a beautiful bride. And yet, we are not sufficient for this. We cannot do this on our own. We need the Lord's help. And the Lord is more than willing to help us fulfill what he has called us to be and do.