

2 PETER

REMEMBERING THE PROMISES

2 Peter 2:1-3

False Teachers

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We are continuing in our study through 2 Peter today.

One of the themes that is evident in 1 and 2 Peter is that the introduction of Christianity and the Christian community into any mandmade society creates a clash of kingdoms.

Christians are commanded not to ever violently spread their kingdom, they are commanded to love their neighbors, especially those that disagree with them, even to the point of laying down our lives for them like Jesus did for us while we were His enemies. They are called to go above and beyond in love and service for their neighbors while kindly and patiently bringing truth and the Gospel message and remaining personally faithful.

But a new people with a different set of values and morals introduced to the broader community will inevitably be met with some resistance and opposition. There will be some friction. E

specially as Christians claim that Jesus is Lord of all - they claim there is a different ultimate authority than the one others are living under. So 1 Peter, which we walked through last fall and winter, was all about living in a world where the values of your neighbors are not the values of the Christian community.

And it included a lot of guidance like this - 1 Peter 2:11-12 - this is good to remember in these days of tension:

1 Peter 2:11-12 “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct

among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

He says keep your conduct out there honorable, in other places he says not to suffer at the hands of your neighbors because you're actually an evildoer - keep doing good. Don't deserve the reputation of being a jerk that they give you.

But know that even when you do good, even when you're kind, even when you're winsome, even when they see good deeds in you, they will speak against you as evildoers. And you gotta be content to leave it all to judgment day, for God to sort out, don't try to get your own vengeance. So that's the guidance for life out there when your values are now on a different planet than your neighbor's values.

But in 2 Peter another reality of church life comes into view: people who are part of the church community smuggle in ideologies from the broader community, and import values that don't line up with the values of Christ, and promote acceptance of some of the unbiblical philosophies and sinful ways of life of their non-Christian neighbors.

I'll let the text say this before I say it:

2 Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

There is pressure from without, and pressure from within.

Calvin said this is necessary to point out because some people will mistakenly think that because Jesus reigns over the church, the church will enjoy tranquility.¹

Sometimes we can think, “I don’t know about this church - there seem to be a lot of problems” and then go on a search for the tranquil one. And certainly there are reasons to go to a different one, as some can become corrupt to the core with false gospels, unbiblical teaching, legalism and licentiousness.

But Peter says there’s gonna be some really difficult stuff that happens in a good church. And until Jesus comes back, it will be similar to how it was in the Old Testament stories of Israel, where false prophets just kept rising up.

And this is what God told them:

Deuteronomy 13 ““If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him.”

There were, in OT days, false prophets who could conjur up some signs and wonders, who seemed authentic, but led people astray to follow other gods. And Moses said, “Don’t follow them! Walk after the Lord your God. It’s a test for you to

¹ It was necessary expressly to shew this, because many imagined that the Church would enjoy tranquillity under the rein of Christ; for as the prophets had promised that at his coming there would be real peace, the highest degree of heavenly wisdom, and the full restoration of all things, they thought that the Church would be no more exposed to any contests. Let us then remember that the Spirit of God hath once for all declared, that the Church shall never be free from this intestine evil; and let this likeness be always borne in mind, that the trial of our faith is to be similar to that of the fathers, and for the same reason — that in this way it may be made evident, whether we really love God, as we find it written in Deuteronomy 13:3. - Calvin’s commentary on 2 Peter. (This is where the following few paragraphs of the sermon are derived from.)

know the genuineness of your faith - will you keep walking after the Lord when an attractive and seemingly authentic alternative is proclaimed by a false prophet?

We say, "I would never do what Adam and Eve did in the garden." There's always a tree planted among us that we are not to eat from - the tree of attractive, popular, trending false ideologies brought by authentic-seeming people.

Peter says, "Just as there were false prophets then, there will be false teachers among you." We aren't in heaven yet, even in the best church, and people will come in among us, who seem authentic, who do damage.

This is a helpful realization for us to come to: There is no easy church life that's faithful to Jesus. In many ways church community is the closest thing we've got to the kind of community we will have in heaven, but it is still a long way off from that, we are a long way from doing on earth as it is in heaven.

And Peter says just like that happened in Old Testament days, it will happen in your day. The same kind of people will be among us. The false prophets in the OT were a regular problem in the Old Testament - people who claimed to speak for God, but didn't preach God's revealed words at all, they just took God's name in vain and used it to manipulate, lying about what God said.

What will that look like?

2 Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies

They "secretly bring in destructive heresies" (verse 1). Maybe a better translation would be that they "bring in from the outside destructive schools of thought."

This is not to say that any wisdom that isn't taken directly from the Bible is wrong or bad. We have a lot to learn from science and nature and mathematics and economics and medicine, and all truth is God's truth, so this is not a warning about gaining wisdom in any field that isn't the Bible. Everything the Bible says is true and for our good, but the Bible doesn't say everything that's true, and though it

speaks to everything and frames everything, it doesn't speak directly to everything.

It doesn't tell you how often to change your oil. But it teaches you to pay attention to your resources, manage them well, and to cultivate all of the resources in the world for God's glory and human flourishing. Which will affect how often you change your oil, but you still need to consult some other knowledge on how to actually change your oil. There's not a Mazda service manual hidden in Leviticus somewhere.

We'll talk more about this when we look at Psalm 19 this summer, but God has written two books, the bible, and the natural world, and we can and should learn from both.

So we don't have to worry about becoming too wise in medicine or science or history or any other true field of study.

But the warning here is that there are schools of thought that come from the outside of the Christian tradition that, if believed and practiced, will be wildly destructive.

So, for example, in the last twenty years there was a good and healthy recovery of the idea that Christians should care about justice in the world around them. That's true and good. Part of loving our neighbors is loving them with good laws, and making sure the poor have the same access to justice as the rich, helping the oppressed, advocating for laws that care for the most vulnerable among us.

But then many started importing into the church definitions of justice and approaches to justice that were not the biblical definition or approach, but actually really destructive and unjust. So, to tick everybody off, you saw it on the left and on the right in White Supremacy and Critical Race Theory. Both are divisive, both treat a group of people as permanently guilty and suspect, neither provides the kind of redemption and reconciliation that the Gospel offers. And yet, both have been imported into church as the solution, because both would call themselves just, and we are supposed to do justice.

And this is just one of many examples that we've seen just in the 13 years since we've planted the church. Verse 1 says they will bring in destructive heresies, plural, or destructive schools of thought plural - this happens a lot.

So there are marriage wrecking schools of thought that say everyone should do what seems right to them and vows are disposable.

There are schools of thought from the manosphere on twitter that lead to the abuse of wives.

There are school of thought that lead to gender confusion among our kids.

And as they are increasingly called good and right in the broader culture, they get imported daily, under the banner of doing what is good and right in the church.

*And the false teachers don't have to have positions as teachers, they just have to teach. It can be a Christian friend at a coffee shop who is playing the part of the false teacher and importing the philosophies of the world, treating them like they're true, and feeding the destruction that comes from them.

(These are some dark passages, and these next few sermons are gonna be pretty dark and heavy. If you're new with us, we just keep working through the books of the Bible so we will follow their flow and their mood, and this is hard stuff.)

Peter goes on to mention one set of these destructive heresies in verse one, he uses the word "even" here to introduce an example:

2 Peter 2:1-2 ...even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

So one big destructive school of thought that is imported is denying the Lord through sensuality, causing Christianity to be spoken poorly of.

So they deny the Master that bought them. This is not necessarily outright denial of the existence of Jesus with their words, but denying Him with their lives. Denying him not with their doctrine, necessarily, but with their sensuality.

Titus talks about those who are among the church but deny God, and Paul writes this there:

Titus 1:16 “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.”

1 Corinthians uses this “deny the one who bought them language”:

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

So we can deny the Lord who bought us with our works. And in 1 Corinthians 6, sexual sin, or, any sexual gratification outside of marriage, is an affront to the fact that we are not our own, we were bought by Christ.

And the book of Jude, which is worth reading while we read 2 Peter because Jude is so similar to 2 Peter that they probably worked together or borrowed from each other:

Jude 1:3-4 “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

So it seems that a major false teaching was to pervert God’s grace into sensuality.

To deny the Lord who bought us by being redeemed by Jesus from sinful ways of life, only to run right back into those ways of life. And to somehow couch that in some kind of twisted teaching that justifies it and calls for its acceptance.

There's a youtube video of a Russian guy pulling a sheep out of a narrow ditch that it had fallen in to. And the sheep immediately starts prancing away, all excited, immediately to jump right back into the same ditch.

And to deny the Lord that bought us in this regard is to be redeemed by Jesus, but then to hop right back into the ditch of sensuality. Or, as Jude puts it, to pervert God's grace into sensuality.

And sensuality involves sexual sin, but includes all the ways we cast off any restraint on our desires and seek to fulfill them.

To twist God's grace in this way is to say that Jesus rescued us, but then run back into the ditch he rescued us from.

And there are two big ways we twist Gospel teaching to allow this, two big ways we teach falsely, and we need to watch out for both.

There is a ditch on either side of the road when it comes to believing the gospel.

On one side of the road is the ditch of moralism or legalism, which says that the Gospel is helpful, but if we are going to be real Christians than we better work hard and be good to make ourselves acceptable before God. We maintain our rightness with God by our good works and effort alone. We work hard to obey, and we think knowing the standards and keeping the standards can power that obedience. We take the focus off of Christ and put it on us and our efforts to stay OK, to be OK, to be worthy.

But we can only pretend to keep the law of God fully on our own, we never actually live up to it. And if our life is a life of pretending and performance, this leads to all kinds of hidden sin but also persistent shame and guilt and fears of

being found out. Or we invent rules and laws that we can keep to make sure we look better than others who don't keep those rules.

So legalism is one ditch we can fall off in to.

But the ditch on the other side of the road is sometimes called licentiousness or antinomianism.

We rightly realize that law-keeping and rule-keeping can't save us, it's only the grace of God that does that.

We know that we're not more Christian on good days than on our bad days. So we say "I'm covered by grace, I'll just do whatever I want and sin it up." We don't want to be legalistic or religious or all about the rules, so we blatantly do what we know to be sin and call it "forgiven." And we call the acceptance of sin "grace."

We might think people who think that way believe the Gospel too much. But they actually believe it too little. They think the Gospel is only the solution for our guilt and our forgiveness, but fail to realize that the Gospel is also the power for our growth, and change, and practical holiness.

The "fix" for antinomianism or do-whatever-you-wantism is not more laws though, but the realization that the gospel frees us from sin: from our guilt for sin, but also from the reign of sin over our lives.

The Gospel imparts to us everything that Jesus has done so that we don't have to do anything to be right with God, it also imparts to us the Spirit of God so that we can't live unendingly in ways that contradict the Gospel without His Spirit prodding us and convicting us and leading us toward change.

And if we consistently live out-of-step with the gospel with no confession and no fighting of sin, then we have to ask if we've really believed and received the Spirit.

The Gospel is the life-changing message of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection to save those who would believe and welcome them into his story in which He will one day make all things new.

And belief in it, while it doesn't require any works to be made real, does create works - it does change us.

Which is why, even though the Gospel is what God has done and not what we have done, Paul can say in

Philippians 1:27 “let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

What does he mean by that?

“Manner of life” here is the Greek word “Politeuo”. It's where we get our word “politics”. It means “to be a good citizen, to conduct yourself according to the laws and customs of a state.”

It's the same word Paul uses in Philippians chapter 3 verse 20

Philippians 3:20-21 “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

Our citizenship - the state where we have our ultimate home, where we fit the best, where our values and virtues are defined, where we get our primary customs, is a heavenly one.

But we are constantly tempted to import the values of the earthly kingdom around us and to live by them, as opposed to living lives in step with the Gospel.

And according to 2 Peter 2:2 again:

2 Peter 2:2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

Many will assume that the grace of God means acceptance of sensuality. That believing that we are saved by grace through faith means acceptance of all lifestyles, of all forms of sexuality, of all views of the world. That grace means acceptance of sin. That the values of Christ are indistinguishable from the values of the Republican party or the Democratic party, they're one and the same.

Many will follow that kind of teaching, within the church.

And what will come with that, as some use the grace of Christ as an excuse to sin and cover it up as Christian leaders, is that many from outside will look at the church and

“The way of truth will be blasphemed” - or “spoken against.”

And aren't we seeing that in our day - church leaders have used the grace of Christ and the demand for forgiveness to cover up their sexual abuse in the name of Christ, and every day in the news, as a result, Christianity is spoken against.

And, in dark moments, you wonder if Jesus is going to keep building his church. There's so much pressure from without and corruption within, and so many are walking away from the faith as a result.

John Calvin gives some hope here.

Writing in the 1500s, he said, “It is, indeed, no slight offense to the weak, when they see that false doctrines are received by the common consent of the world, that a large number of men are led astray, so that few continue in true obedience to Christ. So, at this day, there is nothing that more violently disturbs pious minds than such a defection. For hardly one in ten of those who have once made a profession of Christ, retains the purity of faith to the end. Almost all turn aside into corruptions, and being deluded by the teachers of licentiousness, they become profane. Lest this should make our faith to falter, Peter comes to our help, and in due time foretells that this very thing would be, that is, that false teachers would draw many to perdition.”

Peter is helping us by speaking to us of these realities - pressure without and pressure within, and many will be harmed by it, many will be misused by it, many will be led astray by it, many will say, "If this is what Jesus is like I don't want Him."

2 Peter goes on:

2 Peter 2:3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

In every age, there are people who see the faith as a way to make money off of people. Who know that if they can make you prosperity promises, you will give them cash. They are after your money, and if they can tell you what you want to hear, they can be assured they'll get your money.

That's what motivated false prophets in the OT, and what motivates many false teachers today. I'll say what pays. Which means I'll only say the hard things you'll all agree with, and I'll avoid the hard topics that could cost me something if I address them.

And Peter warns twice in this passage of their destruction. In verse 1 he said their destruction will be swift. Here he says their destruction is not asleep and their condemnation is not idle. There's a warning to these false teachers. Ironically we'll see in chapter 3 that some of their false teaching is that Jesus won't return, Jesus won't judge.

And here Peter says, "no, He will judge, he will judge them. They may think it won't happen because it's taking so long, but their condemnation is wide awake and is coming."

Galatians 6:7-8 "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

How is someone deceived?

We think, “If I keep on sinning, nothing will happen.”

We believe that we are the exception to the law of sowing and reaping. We say, that’s true, but not for me.

You can live under that deception for a long time because you don’t reap the harvest from sin right away. False teachers can false teach for awhile - they can lead astray with sensuality, they can draw a crowd, they can exploit those they lead out of greed, but if they think that they won’t one day face judgment for that and reap what they sow, they are deceived.

God is not mocked.

What does that have to do with anything? Who is mocking God? The false teacher is. The one who says, “I will not reap what I sow” is mocking God. You’re saying He isn’t real, He isn’t a judge, He isn’t holy.

God says, “I am not mocked.” He uses the same tone a parent would use who says to a child, “I will not be shown that attitude” or “I will not hear that word used again in my house.” It’s a warning tone: Don’t mock God, because he will not be mocked. He will see to it that your deception will not last for long, and you will reap what you’ve sown.

None of us will be the exception to this.

So, in response, we run the only place we can run, back to the Gospel of Jesus.

Which means turning from a life driven by sensuality, and treating church like a consumer product that gives us what we want to hear, where we can pay teachers to always say what we want.

It means turning from the sensuality of legalism and the ego boost it provides as we convince ourselves we’re better than others because of our works.

It means turning from the sensuality of licentiousness and believing all the culture tells us about sexuality, and marriage, and lust, and greed, and prosperity.

It means learning the scriptures so we can discern when ideas and values are those of Jesus or those of the surrounding world. And repenting frequently and running to Christ.

And however we are erring now, whether through legalism or through license, we run in confidence knowing that the cross is enough for us. Jesus offers real forgiveness and grace for those who really turn. And he will not accept our behavior, he will not accept all of our values and claims. But He will accept us if we're willing to drop all of those other things and run to him.

Let's pray and confess our sins in silence.

Prayer of Confession:

Father, we confess that so often we are the reason false teachers even exist. We like to hear that I can be good enough through my works and better than others. We like to believe that my giving will make me rich someday, and as these teachers give us the same hope that lottery tickets give us they reveal what our hearts are after. We want to believe the lies of our culture, that I can make my own identity, be whoever I want to be, pursue whatever my senses desire, and that it will go just fine for me, I won't reap what I sow.

But Jesus your cross speaks reality to us. There you died for sin, showing the holiness of God. You showed that there are real consequences for every false way. And you also showed the mercy and heart of God toward sinners who would tur