



TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

Pastor Al Detter II Peter 2:1-10 English Standard Version
5:30, 9:30 & 11:00am Grace Church Feb. 16-17, 2008

We're in a very relevant and provocative series in the book of II Peter. We've already dealt with 2 issues on Peter's mind.

The 1st issue was what needs to be done to reflect the divine nature in the lives of Christians. For us to reflect the nature of God, we need to add 7 qualities (II Pet. 1:5-6) to our faith (II Pet. 1:5)—goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. Are you making progress in any of these areas?

The 2nd issue on Peter's mind was the origin of the Scriptures. He says that the Bible is not a book produced by the will or cleverness of human authors. The Scriptures were written as the Holy Spirit guided godly men to speak on behalf of God. And Peter says that a key function of the Bible is to be our light in a dark world.

As we paint a canvas of faith, Peter moves to the 3rd issue on his mind—false teachers. The tone is intensely serious, direct, and cautionary. His teaching is boldly true and applicable. It's an issue the church needs to hear and pay attention to because the stakes are so high.

You might be wondering, "Is false teaching really a problem in our day?" My answer is a resounding "Yes!" Over the centuries, the church has had to deal with lots of false teaching. And we're at another dangerous point in the 21st century.

As America was born, an 18th Century movement was afoot in Europe and America called "The Enlightenment". That's when our minds woke up, so to speak, and people began to use their reason to look at the world and its problems. The roles of tradition and religion became suspect.

The Enlightenment gave rise to Modernism in the 19th and 20th centuries when reason became the primary basis of authority in all matters including religion. Ideas of God intervening in the affairs of humanity and holding us accountable to a moral standard fell at the feet of rationalism. Modernism became a crisis in the American church as many opted to explain away much of the supernatural in the Bible.

That spawned a movement in the American church at the beginning of the 20th century called Fundamentalism, which was essentially a war against liberalism in mainline denominations and universities. From the Fundamentalist movement came a less pugilistic movement called Evangelicalism. That's the theological camp in which we reside as a church here at Grace.

Over the past decade or so, another movement is being birthed from Evangelicalism. Some call it the Emergent Church. In my view, the Emergent Church is radically committed to reaching the post-modern world. But it's apt to do so at the expense of sound, historic theology. Some leaders of the Emergent Church movement are making convincing arguments that undermine what I would consider to be core and non-negotiable doctrines like the nature of the Bible, salvation, hell, creation, and the miraculous.

I don't want our church to be on the slippery slope of doctrinal error dressed up as "theology-come-of-age" in modern culture. I'm a strong proponent of, in the words of Jude 3, "contending for the faith that was once for all delivered to the church (saints)."

So let's look at our text in II Peter 2. I want to tell you the point of verses 1-10 at the beginning of our study. We can successfully escape the dangerous influence of false teachers. That's the teaching of Peter for the church. In strong language, Peter gives us spiritual insight and the doorway out of a trap. Are you ready for some in-depth teaching on a very important subject?

I. We need to understand the nature of false teachers (I Pet. 2:1-4).

Peter tells us what we need to know about false teachers in order to recognize them and be on the alert. He wants us to know 2 important realities.

1. The threat of false teachers is constant (vs. 1a).

Look at the 1st part of verse 1, "False prophets arose among the people"—that is, among Israel in the Old Testament—"just as there will be false teachers among you." The Apostle Paul agrees with Peter in Acts 20:30, "From among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them (cf. I Tim. 4:1ff.; 6:3-5; II Tim. 3:1ff.)." In fact, Jesus Himself warned of false teachers in the last days (Mt. 24:4f; 23f).

There are numerous instances in the Old Testament in which prophets proclaimed false messages as though they were from God. And within 15 years after the founding of the church in Acts 2, doctrinal drift had set foot in the church as well, all the way from the Galatian heresy to Gnosticism. Tampering with the teachings of the Bible has continued throughout the centuries to our present day. Among the people of God there'll always be people from the inside messing with the message of the Bible. It's inevitable.

The reality is—every church has to keep its guard up. The possibility is likely that by influence of book, TV, radio, seminar, pastor, seminary professor, or some teacher—error will creep into the church. There's never a time when we can let down our guard.

Here's the 2nd reality about false teachers:

2. The characteristics of false teachers are consistent (vss. 1b-3).

False teachers are hard to recognize. But they have consistent characteristics that eventually become evident. There are some telltale signs. Peter mentions 4 of them in verses 1-3.

Characteristic #1—Secretive (vs. 1b). Verse 1 says that false teachers start out secretly. They don't show their cards. They know where they're headed but they keep it a secret. They make friends. They find positions of leadership. And then they secretly introduce (pareisathousin--infiltrate) errant teaching. The words "secretly introduce" mean "to bring alongside the existing by stealth". They use what's already in place and add error alongside it. Slowly people begin to notice that something seems different. Some will be intrigued by their teaching and some will sense that something isn't right.

Peter calls the errant teachings they bring "destructive heresies", verse 1. The word "heresy (haireseis)" developed in meaning over the ancient years. The basic meaning of heresy is "to choose". A person would choose to align himself with a variant point of view about something. Later the word was used to speak of a sect, party, or school. The word then became used for a heretical sect or faction. Ultimately in the New Testament, it came to mean false teaching, that which is errant and divisive.

Once they get a foothold, false teachers can really become extreme. Peter says, "Some of these teachers will even deny (arnoumenoi—repudiate, disown, disassociate) the Master who bought (agorasanta) them", verse 1. What did we see in the 3rd and 4th centuries? Teachers in the church denying that Jesus Christ is God or that He came in the flesh. The early church had to deal with all kinds of heresy about Christ. We have cults today that do the same thing. They deny what the Bible teaches about deity of Jesus Christ, most notably Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons.

(Deny could also mean to renounce their faith. If that's the case, it poses theological problems about the issue of redemption in this verse, whether or not one can lose their salvation.)

In Protestantism, the problem hasn't been so much denying Jesus but undercutting the nature and authority of the Bible. This stuff sneaks into the church and all of the sudden, there are all kinds of questions surrounding the inspiration of the Bible and the make-up of the canon.

Some might wonder, "What's so bad about differing doctrinal viewpoints? What's the harm?" Peter says in verse 1 that fabricated interpretations of God's word are destructive (apoleias). Errant teaching is ruinous—all the way from destroying relationships to a person's soul. Doctrinal error is very dangerous. But it never comes into the church full flower. It creeps in by stealth. It starts out as a seed, and if unchecked, grows into a thorny weed.

Characteristic #2—Charismatic (vs. 2). I'm not talking about using the sign gifts in charismatic churches. I'm talking about winsome personalities. Verse 2 says that many will follow them. False teachers are magnetic. They're intriguing. They attract loyal followers. Their teaching has an inebriating appeal.

I've always been amazed at this. If I get up and say something crazy or something people don't agree with, I hear about it. There's a commotion. But false teachers say some of the most ludicrous things and people swallow it up. If magnetic teachers begin to get a following centered on unusual interpretations of the Bible, you need to take note.

Characteristic #3—Sensuality (vs. 2). At some point, false teachers begin to show a problem in their lifestyle. When it gets extreme, it usually turns sexual. The word "sensuality (aselgeia)" here means sexually immoral indulgence and licentiousness. It becomes condoned under false grace, not just by them but by their followers. And even though they're too dumb to see how bad it is, Peter says that the way of the truth will be blasphemed (blasphemeo—injure the reputation of), get a bad name, among unbelievers who can see through it.

Characteristic #4—Greed (vs. 3). False teachers eventually fleece their followers. They find ways to get their money. Peter says that they'll exploit them. The word "exploit (emporeuomai)" in Greek is a commerce term meaning "to make money from". We get the word "emporium" from this word. It came to mean making a profit by deception for personal gain.

The text says that this exploitation is accomplished by "false words". The literal meaning of the word "false (plastois)" is "fabricated". They invent teaching or twist the meaning of Scripture to the point that it can actually please the mind. But it stands in sharp contrast to the clear meaning of the Scriptures. And while they please the unsuspecting, they take their money and live exorbitantly.

There's an ominous theme that runs through these verses—destruction and condemnation (vss. 1, 3, 9, 10). God is angry at false teaching and false teachers and at the judgment, some pretty harsh punishments will be meted out. It may look like God isn't noticing what's going on, verse 3. But there's a future day coming when swift judgment will finally come upon false teachers, verse 1.

(In verse 9, Peter says that God keeps the unrighteous, literally "under guard (terein)" until the Day of Judgment. And verse 10 says, especially those who crave (epithumia) the sexually sordid forbidden (miasmos) and who despise authority (kataphroneo) which means to look down on, scorn, or treat with contempt the leadership of the church. Despising authority could also mean the spirit world or the authority of Christ.)

Not all 4 of these characteristics of false teachers may be evident nor to the degree that Peter talks about them. There's a continuum that starts with secrecy and made-up stories all the way to a flat-out indulgent lifestyle. You don't wait until things get out of control. You deal with them at the 1st signs.

But lots of churches don't deal with false teaching and false teachers. And here's why. The teaching doesn't appear to be dangerous. Or the Bible isn't taught with clarity and power and people are ignorant of both truth and error. Or Christians haven't added the 7 qualities to their faith so doctrine seems irrelevant. Those churches are sitting ducks. The existence of false teachers is a reality and we can never forget that!

We've seen how important it is to understand the nature of false teachers. Now we move to the 2nd point.

II. We need to understand how we can escape the snare of false teachers (II Pet.

2:4-10a).

These verses get very intense. They demonstrate God's disdain for false teachers. From the following 3 judgment examples, we get an understanding about the severe punishment God has reserved for those who are so bold as to distort and twist the Word of God to the ruin-ation of the unsuspecting for personal gain.

One of the longest sentences in the New Testament is before us. It runs from verse 4 into verse 10. It's constructed with 4 "ifs" and a "then". So let's look at the 3 examples of God's severe judgment upon willful and brash sin:

Example #1—Sinning angels (vs. 4). In verse 4 Peter says, "If God did not spare the angels that sinned but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment..." What's Peter referring to?

There are 2 basic schools of interpretation. One is that Peter is referring to the angels that fell with Satan before the universe was created (Ez. 28). But I think it's much more likely that all 3 of the illustrations in this text come right out of Genesis, this one specifically from Genesis 6:1-4. In somewhat of a vague account there, we're told that some sons of God—most likely angels—sinned grievously by sexual relationships with human women thereby producing a hybrid race.

We get a little help from the book of Jude, which is very similar in content to the verses we're studying in II Peter today (II Pet. 2:1-18). Jude 6 talks about angels who left their proper dwelling, who are kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment. It's very likely that Jude and Peter are talking about the same thing.

Now back to verse 4 in II Peter 2. The Greek word translated "hell" is "tartarus". In the New Testament, tartarus means a deep pit or abyss in hell in which very wicked and rebellious angels are confined until the final judgment. (That name is derived from Greek mythology for a prison that confined the old Titan gods. It evolved into a dungeon for condemned souls.)

We know that the angels who fell with Lucifer are not confined. They function as demons that move freely about the spirit world. But the fallen angels in this text are confined. God locked them in chains until the great, last judgment—they were not spared.

Example #2—The flood (vs. 5). Peter draws from Genesis once again, this time chapters 6-8. In verse 5, he says that God didn't spare the ancient world but brought a flood, in Greek, a "cataclysm (kataklysmos)", upon the ungodly.

Do you remember what Peter said in chapter 1 about not using clever devised myths to teach about the 2nd coming of Christ? Peter said he didn't do that. And he didn't do it here either. There are many who say that the flood in Genesis didn't happen as the Bible presents it. In fact, many would argue that it's a myth from the ancient world. Peter gives absolutely no hint that the flood that destroyed humanity in the ancient world was anything other than a historical reality. It was a major point in his demonstrating the severity of God upon unbridled sin.

Example #3—Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 6). Peter takes us to Genesis 19 this time. Peter says in verse 6 that God's judgment was so severe that by turning the cities into ashes by fire and brimstone, God made them extinct. Isn't it interesting that, while archeologists know the general vicinity of Sodom and Gomorrah, they're unable to find their exact location?

Why does Peter say that God did this? As an example to the ungodly and false teachers, verse 6. They're supposed to look at God's judgment and fear God! But it rarely happens.

Now something interesting happens as we move to verse 9. Think through where we've just been starting in verse 4. If God didn't spare sinning angels, if God didn't spare the ancient world, if God didn't spare Sodom and Gomorrah, then— what would we expect to see following the word "then"? Then God won't spare false teachers.

But that's not the point Peter makes here. Instead of focusing on God's judgment, Peter moves to God's deliverance. He wants us to know something wonderful. Something awesome. Something powerful! And here it is—God can keep us from the menace of the evil temptations all around us including the temptation to believe false teachers.

Do you remember Example 2 in verse 5? God destroyed the world with a flood but He rescued Noah (plus his 3 sons and their wives). Do you remember Example 3 in verse 6? God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, but He rescued Lot (and his family) in verse 7. Do you see what Peter is saying? If God could rescue His children back then from an extreme flood and fire, He can rescue us today from extremely difficult circumstances as well.

The church of Christ is under the constant threat of false teachers. And in the ungodly world in which we live, Christians face constant temptation. Is anyone interested in knowing the requisite for God's deliverance?

It's found in verse 9. Here it is—the word "godly". The Lord knows how to rescue (ruomai) the godly from temptation (peirasmos—test, trial, enticement to sin). Do you remember 1 of the qualities Peter told us to add to our faith in chapter 1:7? Godliness. Friends, without godliness, there's no rescue.

Noah was a preacher of righteousness, verse 5. Not only did he preach it, he was righteous. Genesis 6:9 says that Noah was a righteous man, that he was blameless in his time, and that he walked with God. Noah was rescued.

We learn something about Lot by Peter in verse 8 that we're not told about Lot in the Genesis accounts. In the Old Testament, Lot isn't painted in the most righteous light. Yet God saw Lot's heart and what was going on inside. We learn it from the hand of Peter.

Verse 7 says that Lot was greatly distressed (katapaneo) by the immoral excesses (sensuality—aselgeia) of the wicked. It means that he was worn out and oppressed. Verse 8 says that day after day, the righteous soul of Lot was tormented by the unprincipled or wicked (athesmos—lawless) deeds he saw and heard all around him. The word "tormented (basanizo)" means "severe mental stress".

I wonder, how many Lots are there these days among God's people? How many of us are tormented in our souls by the daily excessive sin around us? I dare say that Lot would not be subscribing to the premium channels that so many Christians are willing to watch without moral objection.

Do you hear what Peter is saying? We're not exempt from temptation. But when the sin around us pains our hearts and we don't succumb to its temptation, God will protect us from the present sin as well as the future judgment that awaits the unrighteous.

But here's the problem. The conscience of the average American Christian has been seared. Many feel little, if any, pain about the deepening level of sin in the world. Much of the sin in this text is about sex gone wild. There's not a lot of torment in our souls about that. We allow sensual sex into our entertainment fare. Many Christian men are into porn and feel no distress. Very few of us are shocked and dismayed by the decadent level of ungodliness in our world.

I wouldn't want to be in Hugh Hefner's shoes. Do you realize what he's done in 50 years? He's made immorality mainstream and so palatable that you can subscribe to Playboy like you can TIME magazine. Hardly anyone cries foul anymore about blatant sexual indulgence.