

False Prophets: Their Methods and Motives

2 Peter 2:1-3 (07/13/14)

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When you go to the gas station you expect to pump gas, not kool-aid, into your car. When you cash a check at your bank, you expect them to give you genuine currency, not counterfeit. When you go to a restaurant, you expect the food to be uncontaminated by foreign objects or worse. What do you expect when you go to church? You expect to hear the truth. 1 Timothy 3:15 says the church is the pillar and support of the truth. And yet so many people are not hearing the truth as they sit in churches this morning.

Turn to 2 Peter 2:1-3. In chapter one Peter presses for vigorous, aggressive growth in grace with that rock solid foundation in God's Word. God's Word is more important than Peter's experience on that mountain. Without the Word, we have no discernment in this world full of religious counterfeits. And that introduces us to false teachers. You can see the connection from 1:20-21; true prophets didn't just decide to write Scripture, God moved them. Jeremiah didn't even want to prophecy. He said he was too young and couldn't speak. God said, "No, I have called you." That's a true prophet in the Old Testament. False prophets spoke out of their own will and opinion; God didn't send them. Like one old timer who asked a young preacher, "Was you sent, or did you just went?"

And now Peter warns us with the most severe words about false teachers who will infiltrate the church. Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes this chapter as the most terrifying in the Bible, "Anyone who enjoys this chapter must be abnormal." This is why systematically preaching through books of the Bible is so good. You come to chapters like 2 Peter 2 and you can't avoid it. Here it is.

Let's zoom out for a moment. What is really going on in this world? The world we live in is a war zone. There is a constant gigantic conflict over truth all around us, with God and His Word against Satan and his deceptions. We forget this. Reality TV is not really real reality. The real reality is this great spiritual warfare, from Genesis 3 to Revelation 20. And your soul is the target. Satan uses lies, fabrications, falsehood, and deception to get you to hold fast to what you think is right or true, but what is really false and damning.

That's why Christ constantly warns us, "Pay attention, be on your guard, don't go to sleep spiritually." The deception will be so strong it would deceive even God's people, if possible. Just listen to Matthew 24:11, "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many." In Acts 20:29-30 Paul puts us on high alert, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

Let's see what Peter says about these slick operators. We can hang these three verses on three words. False teachers are sneaky (v.1), popular (v.2), and greedy (v.3).

SNEAKY - False teachers sneak into churches – v. 1

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

Peter equates them with the false prophets among the people Israel in the Old Testament. But now in the church, Peter calls them false teachers. The age of prophets getting messages from God is over. Now we take what they wrote and teach and preach it.

Poor Jeremiah was plagued with these false prophets. Jeremiah 14:13-14, *But, "Ah, Lord GOD!" I said, "Look, the prophets are telling them, "You will not see the sword nor will you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place." Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to*

you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds. There you have a good description of these characters. God didn't call them. They give messages people want to hear, and their messages are deceptions of their own mind.

Now, let's look at this verse in 2 Peter. First, false teachers are among you. That means these people are in churches. And this has been true for the last 20 centuries. You can't find a century where false teaching wasn't in the churches. From the Judaizers and Gnostics of the first centuries all the way through church history, you will find people who deny justification by faith alone and the deity of Christ. You have the cults of the 19th century, the Jehovah's Witnesses who denied hell, the deity of Christ, and the trinity. You've got Ellen G. White of the Seventh Day Adventists, Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy of the Christian Science, which, like grape nuts cereal, is neither Christian nor Science.

And then you've got all the liberalism that spewed out of Germany in the 1800s, denying the inspiration of the Bible and the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. You've got popular preachers like Henry Emerson Fosdick of Riverside Church in Manhattan. He was the author of *God of Grace and God of Glory* in our hymnal but rejected the major truths of the Christianity, and the people loved him for it. Add to these all the health and wealth and feel good preachers of our day, men like Joel Osteen who will not preach against sin because he says God didn't call him to beat people down about their sin but lift them up with nice words.

How do false teachers get in? They bring their heresies in secretly. They sneak in the basement of the church. One day our daughter called for me to come into the dining room right away. I said, "A little later." "No Dad, you need to come now!" There in our dining room sitting on our high chair was an opossum, just looking at us with those beady eyes. He had come in through a hole in the foundation, into the basement, up the stairs, and up onto the high chair. That's how false teachers get in. They sneak into churches without strong biblical foundations. They don't announce themselves as false teachers. And they often hide what they really believe. I'll never forget chatting with a young Methodist preacher who assured me he didn't believe people needed to be born again and that God would not send people to hell. "Do your people know this?" "No, I just don't tell them." These guys are like espionage moles! Imagine our enemy training a man to work his way up through the political system as a mole to become president for the purpose of bringing down our nation! These men are Satan's moles.

Their teaching is called "destructive heresies." The King James translates it "damnable heresies." These are those false teachers Jesus warned us of in Matthew 7. Their message is not a saving message. They are preachers of the wide gate and broad way that leads to destruction, which is the same word as damnation. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. They are usually so nice and comforting and encouraging and look so good. And it isn't so much what they say, but what they don't say. There is no narrow gate in their preaching. They may talk about the cross, but not as that place where God's wrath was poured out on His Son for our sins, bearing the punishment we deserved.

They talk about our needs and problems, but not about our depravity and that we are God's enemies and dead in our sins apart from God's grace. They assure us how highly God thinks of us, or that God really does have lots of wealth for us if we'd just claim it by a faith confession, "Blab it and grab it." They dismiss preachers who hold to the God-breathed inerrant Scriptures, who still believe Genesis 1 and 2 about creation, and who talk about sin and judgment and the need to repent or perish. They talk lots about God's love. "Love Wins," they say. "There is certainly no final judgment, eternal fire, eternal wrath. God saves everyone." The Unitarian Universalist church says, "We don't necessarily believe in God. We are in a free and responsible search for truth and reality."

One preacher finally admitted to his flock he no longer believed in hell. "Well, in that case," they answered, "If you are right we don't need you, and if you are wrong we don't want you. In either case, pack your bags, you're outtahere!"

Peter will say stronger things about these soul poisoners, but here he says they deny the Master who bought them. This has been one of those tough statements to figure out. If they are really saved by Christ, then we would have to believe that people can be saved and then lost. But that's impossible.

Jesus assured us, "No man shall pluck them out of my hand." Christ chose Judas, but Judas wasn't a believer. Judas was that branch in John 15 that looked like it was on the vine, but really wasn't attached. These false preachers identify with the church, claim to belong to God, and in that sense they look like they were bought by the Master, but they actually deny Him. They deny Him with their teaching and conduct. And God will bring swift destruction on them. God has zero toleration for false teachers with their damnable heresies!

False teachers attract multitudes with their message – vs. 2

Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

This is the saddest thing of all. Many follow false teachers. By far the masses of this world are under the spell of false teaching. From the false teaching of salvation by the sacramental system to the cults to the masses who flock after Benny Hinn and others, not to mention the poor lost souls blindly following all the false religions of this world, we are grieved. We take no delight in all of this. I have pictures from Time Magazine of Jim Jones and the Guyana disaster in 1978. There were only 900 people who drank the kool-aid, but this saddens our hearts. We pray for our loved ones, our neighbors, and friends at work who we know are being led astray.

Why are false teachers so popular? There is no cross in their message, no call to taking up the cross and following Christ. Their teaching allows for sin and doesn't urge holiness. People can go to church and never be convicted about sinful living. It's all about feeling good about myself. D. A. Carson in his book *The Gagging of God* wrote, "Millions of men and women fornicate without the slightest qualms of conscience."

"Many will follow their sensuality." Multitudes follow false teachers because they can be religious and still live the way they want. Churches promote themselves as non-judgmental. "They don't put me down for who I am." "I can be me and not feel like someone is judging me." Okay, but what does Jesus say? You cannot have Jesus as your Savior but not your Lord. Tozer wrote: "The Lord will not save those whom He cannot command."

False teachers may not directly encourage immoral living, but the effect of their watered down message, their emphasis on being happy, esteemed, and comforted leads to loose morals. To depart from the inspiration of the Scripture is the slippery slope to all kinds of false teaching and false living. False or watered down teaching breeds false living.

Because of them, "the way of truth has been maligned." There are many popular preachers and leaders who have given the world lots to laugh at. You may remember Ted Haggard who was a pastor and the head of the National Evangelical Association from 2003-2006. But then his secret life came out. He had intimately seen a masseur, engaged in homosexual acts, and used meth. The world laughs, maligns, and blasphemes.

You may remember Jack Hyles from First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, famous for having the biggest Sunday School in America. They joked that two church buses out to pick up kids for Sunday School, one from Hyles church and another from Jerry Falwell's church, collided somewhere in Texas! Hyles was a wild, screaming preacher. I heard him. He acted like a little Baptist pope and many followed his leadership. But he fell from his church throne. Here's the entry in Wikipedia: "Accusations of improper sexual behavior, financial and emotional abuse are highlights to Hyle's legacy." Imagine leaving that legacy behind.

Because of these false teachers, the way of truth is maligned! Imagine if every preacher in every church began a series of sermons on Romans, and preaching every word as inspired by God!

False teachers are lovers of money – v. 3

and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "It has often been said that immorality, love of money, and pride have been the ruin of many people. These false teachers were guilty of all three."

It's nothing new. The prophet Micah in 3:11 has these strong words for the religious hucksters of his day who were twisting everything straight. "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.'"

They exploit or make merchandise of you. They use God's people to line their own coffers. These big shot healers on TV have no real shepherdly care and concern for people. If these healers could really heal, why don't they go to the hospitals? Those big TV shows are all carefully orchestrated and controlled. And so many have their heyday and then plunge into multimillion dollar debt! Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral declared bankruptcy, owing 55 million dollars in debt. He had his heyday. The Catholic's purchased the facility, renaming it Christ Cathedral. The church in Brownsville, FL, that was so popular in the 90s went into 11 million dollars worth of debt. Last year Benny Hinn asked his followers to help him with a 2.5 million dollar debt. This parade of false teachers just keeps going on and on.

Did you see that word "false" in verse 3? In the verb form it's *plasso*, to mold, shape, or fabricate. For Berry Plastics, it's great. They can inject plastic into molds and make anything you want. For preachers it's a crime. It means false teachers shape their words to appeal to you. They mold their words and shape the words of Scripture to make it say whatever they want, and whatever they know you will like.

Matthew Vines is on the radar right now. This young Harvard graduate has molded and shaped the Bible to fit his desires. He wants to get married – to another man, but he wants to maintain his Christianity. So in his book *God and the Gay Christian* he writes, "Christians who affirm the full authority of Scripture can also affirm committed monogamous same-sex relationships." He argues that same-sex unions can fulfill the "one-flesh" promise of Genesis 2:24. That's molding the Bible to fit your desires.

SO WHAT?

We grieve for the poor masses without Bible knowledge. They are like a disarmed people in the face of bad guys with big guns. Satan works overtime to disarm this world of God's truth and has plenty of false teachers to mole their way into pulpits. No wonder Peter urged us to pay attention to the Word of God. When you go to church, you should insist that the guy up there tells you the truth and not some psycho-babble to try to make you have a nicer day. And, measure everything you hear by the one infallible measure of truth, your Bible.