

Know The Danger of Deception

2Peter 2:1-22

Any student of the history of the ancient world will know that warfare was a constant part of life.

One of the major powers of the time was Greece which was comprised of a number of city states which cooperated together especially in times of conflict.

One of those city states was called Sparta.

A place which is primarily known for the fighting skill of its citizens.

One of the more famous battles involving the Spartans was the battle of Thermopylae which took place in 480BC.

In that year the Persian army under their king Xerxes I invaded Greece.

The Greeks knew they were outnumbered by a substantial amount as the Persian army numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

Their numbers were so great that it is said that a soldier in Greek army that the Persian archers could fire enough arrows to block out the sun.

It is said that a Spartan named Dienekes told him that he brought good news saying, “...if the Medes obscured the light of the sun, the battle against them would be in the shade and not in the sun.”

Unwilling to surrender the Greeks devised a plan to fight in a narrow pass between two cliffs a place called Thermopylae.

Because the pass was so narrow the Persians could not take advantage of their large numbers and the Greeks, under the leadership of the Spartan King Leonidas, were able to hold them back for three days.

Unfortunately for the Greek army a local citizen named Ephialtes betrayed his own people in hopes of being rewarded by Xerxes.

He showed the Persians that there was a way around the pass where they would be able to attack the Greeks from behind and erase the advantage that the narrow passage was giving them.

Realizing what was happening a good number of Greeks were able to retreat, but not the Spartans they stayed behind attempting to secure the escape of the rest of the army.

With their position betrayed they didn't last long against the vast number of Persians.

It is a classic story, which is why so many people have been drawn to it over the years.

It is an underdog story, one a valour and bravery in defending one's home, but it is also an unhappy ending.

It is a story that shows the threat of enemies is not the only danger to be faced and how your own people can also be your undoing.

That can be true in more than just warfare.

I have long believed that the threat to the church and its witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ from outside forces is enormous.

The Lord Himself told us to expect the world to hate us. I think we see more of that all the time in our own society which at the moment running full steam down the path of godlessness.

The Bible talks about the devil prowling around like a lion looking for someone to devour.

It also talks about demons and their assaults against the people of God.

From a numbers perspective the odds are against us, but the forces of evil are NOT our biggest threat.

Jesus said the forces of hell would not prevail against His kingdom, I believe that!

The biggest threat to the church does not come from outside, it comes from the inside.

[We are reminded of that in our text this morning **2Peter 2:1-22**. Peter is writing to believers so that we might have some safeguards for our faith. In these verses he reminds them of the danger of deception. Particularly the danger of being deceived by people within the church. These verses give us four important lessons about this kind of deception. Lessons that are desperately needed in our day. The first lesson is this...]

Point #1 – There will always be deceivers in the Church. (Verse 1)

While the LORD has been incredibly kind with the clarity of His revealed truth, there have always been those who have wished to twist it and try to lead people in a different direction.

At the end of chapter one Peter gives some important teaching on the truth of God's word.

He speaks of how the true gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached by those who were eyewitness to all that Jesus did to show Himself to be the Son of God.

He also tells us why we can trust that the Bible is God's word. He reminds us how the words of the OT prophets have been confirmed.

We talked last week about how that is most evident in the life of Jesus how He fulfilled over 300 messianic prophecies made centuries before His coming.

It is plain from what is written here that the LORD has made the truth of the true gospel obvious.

Having made that clear, Peter writes this in chapter two **verse 1**.

The history of Israel from the time they come up out of Egypt until they go into exile is filled with examples of this.

More than once during Moses' ministry people said, "Don't listen to him."

During the period of the judges the people were always drifting.

It is the same in the time of the kings. During those times God would raise up prophets to call the people back, but at the same time false prophets arose as well.

The LORD made it clear who spoke on His behalf because everything they said came true. There was also fire from heaven, water from rocks, sick people healed, food multiplied, and more.

Even all that did not keep people from trying to lead others away from God's true servants.

Peter says, that was the case amongst the people of Israel and that will be the case in the church.

People from within the church will "secretly bring in destructive heresies."

What he likely means by that is when deceivers are in the church they start out with subtle and seemingly unimportant lies.

One of the things I have personally witnessed is deceivers using biblical words and language but redefining them to mean something totally different.

It seems small in the beginning but before long it turns into a total denial of Jesus.

Peter is saying this is always going to be in the church.

[Jesus said as much when He told the parable of the wheat and the tares. In that parable He compared the kingdom of heaven to a field that was sown with 'good seed' and in the night an enemy come and sows weeds in the field. The servants asked the Master if they should pull out the weeds and the Master says to leave them until the harvest in case the wheat be harmed in the pulling out of the weeds.]

It would seem then that leaving of false believers in the church ultimately serves the good of genuine believers.

We might scratch our heads at that and ask, "How can that be?"

One of the things that comes to mind is that God uses challenges to the truth to encourage us to know the truth.

If someone says the doctrine of the Trinity doesn't matter, it should cause us to ask, "Why is it important?"

If someone says the Bible has a bunch of contradictions, it can cause us to look at what it says more carefully.

If someone says there are more ways to God than Jesus, or all religions are the same, it can cause us to think about the uniqueness of Jesus and help us to see that He is The Way the Truth and the Life and no one comes to the Father except through Him.

[The genuine believer will heed Peter's warning here. He or she will not be content to be lazy in their faith and gloss over important issues as though they don't matter. We will not be afraid of questions or challenges to the gospel, but rather seek to sharpen one another in the truth. In these ways the LORD will keep those that belong to Him safe from the ongoing problem of false teachers in the church. In addition to being ever present Peter also shows us here that...]

Point #2 – Deceivers in the church will have many followers. (Verse 2)

Those who use teach error among God's people often end up with many followers; therefore, popularity offers us nothing in terms of evaluating the quality of a person's ministry.

Peter adds to the fact that there will constantly be false teachers in the church with verse 2.

I wish this verse said, "A few or a handful will follow".

Sadly, it says 'many will follow.'

The word 'sensuality' here points us to the particular kind of deception that Peter is concerned about.

The false teachers in this case are encouraging people in the church to follow whatever desires they may have.

The genuine believer in the gospel has a changed life, not a perfect life, a changed life.

One in which we are fighting against the sinful desires of the human condition and striving for what is right in the eyes of the LORD.

As we have said many times, doing those things as a believer does not save us.

We are made right with God by faith alone.

Faith in the forgiving power of the shed blood of Jesus.

If we truly believe, however, it is also true that we have been, are being, and will be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us to live a new life to the glory of God.

The false teachers that Peter is concerned with are saying that living a godly life doesn't matter.

They are saying you can be a Christian and enjoy things that God says are wrong.

That is an attractive message for someone who is still dead in their sins.

The fact is there are many who belong to the church in name only and when given the choice between indulging what they want and obeying Christ they choose themselves.

It is a popular message and many follow it.

Look at the result! It says, because of them (probably meaning the false teachers and their followers) the way of truth is blasphemed.

What is blasphemy? The simplest way to understand it is a negative misrepresentation. That is what happens when a whole bunch of people claim to be Christians and live like the devil.

People look at that and conclude that the gospel makes no difference and that the Holy Spirit accomplishes nothing.

To say that this is a huge problem in our own time and society is an understatement.

With TV and the internet the gospel can reach farther than it ever has and we should rejoice in that, but at the same time false teaching can also be promoted more than ever.

There is no shortage today of celebrity pastors and teachers who focus their teaching on you.

They will tell you things like you deserve your best life now, how God thinks you are amazing just the way you are, they will tell you to disregard the Old Testament, they will tell you that God's purpose for your life is that you have the job of your dreams, they will tell you to follow your heart, and alike.

They are happy to make church all about you.

And you know what they are pretty popular.

They have churches where 10-20 plus thousand flock to hear them every week.

I bet some of you watch preachers like that on TV or online.

Now not all popular teachers are false, but we need to know that a teacher's popularity doesn't tell us anything about whether they are true or false teachers.

[Don't be deceived by a teacher drawing thousands, selling a bunch of books, or gaining a bunch of views online. Don't be drawn in by someone you want to make your life all about you. That is a great lie and one that Peter is very concerned about because he knows where it leads. That is what he says next. Many might follow after these false teachers, but the third lesson in this text shows us that...]

Point #3 – Deceivers in the church face certain and eternal destruction. (Verse 3-9)

Disregarding the truth of Who God is and what He does and teaching others to do the same can only bring someone face to face with His wrath.

Let's look together at verse 3.

Peter speaks here as though the condemnation and destruction is right around the corner for these false teachers.

Why say that? Because we can often have a skewed perception of time which can lead us astray in our thinking.

No doubt these false teachers were saying, “Our lives are fantastic we are not under God’s judgement.”

And no doubt they had been saying that for what seemed like a long period of time, but the reality is God’s wrath can come at any time and those who persist in rebellion against Him will soon face it.

What is 10 or even 100 years in light of eternity?

He gives three examples in verses 3-9 to prove his point.

The fallen angels, the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah.

From what we know of angels they are incredible and powerful creatures. Does their position in heaven itself save them when they rebel against God? No, they are cast into hell.

People may pass themselves off as important and powerful, but it won’t save them.

How many people in Noah’s day paid attention to his preaching of what is right?

Nobody, only his own family was saved.

We are not told specifically in Genesis but it is safe to say Noah was mocked regularly for building a boat like he did.

It took many years to build it and the people just went on with life like nothing was going to happen to them and suddenly the flood came and wiped them all out.

How many years did Sodom of Gomorrah persist in going against God’s design for men and women indulging their perversions?

While Lot was far from perfect he did know that he was surrounded by evil.

Peter tells us he was “greatly distressed” by it.

Just before the destruction of the city he even points out their evil (although not in the greatest of ways) and tries to convince a few of the coming destruction.

Some laugh at him and others are angry that he would try and tell them how to live.

They have no fear or expectation of being destroyed and then in a moment fire came from heaven and turned the cities into ashes according to verse 6?

[Being or following a false teacher is sort of like driving a car with loose lug nuts and a leaky gas tank with faulty electrical wires. It is a car that can drive down the road just fine, for a while, but it can crash or blow up at any moment.]

A mistake that we can easily make is making judgments about things based on the way they look now.

We tend to envy and covet what we see from the outside looking in.

That's how many people are drawn to false teachers.

Lots of people like them, they sound good, and it seems like everything is going right for them.

All that looks good, but if they are teaching things that God hates then they are only a step away from experiencing the eternal wrath of God.

[That is terrifying and Peter tells us about it so that we will be motivated to steer clear of teachers like that which raises a question. How can we avoid getting taken in by such people? If they are always going to be around and many people are going to follow them, is there any way for us to avoid the path of destruction that they want to lead us on? That is what Peter devotes the rest of this chapter to. He shows us in verses 10-22 that...]

Point #4 – Deceivers in the church can be recognized. (Verses 10-22)

If we are willing to look with sober judgement we will be able to see the qualities of a false teacher.

These verses give us some details about the qualities that are common to false teachers.

There are at least six qualities talked about here that we should be on the lookout for and if we see them they should raise alarm bells in our minds.

Here are the qualities: 1 – They indulge sin, 2 – They have no fear of blasphemy, 3 – They have no shame, 4 – They are never satisfied, 5 – They make empty promises, and 6 – They never learn.

Peter likely intends us to be concerned about each one of these, which means we don't wait to be concerned until we see all six, but we should be concerned about seeing any of them.

We see the first one in the first half of verse 10, listen. (Verse 10a)

This one is perhaps the most common in our society.

Children have been indoctrinated with this philosophy for at least the past 30 years and it has subtly crept into the church as well.

It is the philosophy that says, "If you feel it do it because that is who you are."

In the church it sounds like, "You feel this way because God made you this way."

They take the truth that you are created by God and ignore the fact that human beings have rebelled against God and therefore have a corrupt nature which causes us to desire all kinds of evil.

Notice it says they despise authority. That is the mantra of the west isn't it? The mantra of the self, that how I feel and what I think it most important.

When a teacher makes you the focus of their teaching run away.

Next they have no fear of blaspheme. (Verse 10b)

Glorious ones there likely means angelic beings.

Peter goes on to say that these people are willing to say things that they cannot know things that are reserved for God alone.

They speak as though they know better than God.

They don't base their belief on the word of the LORD, but on their own authority.

Thirdly they have no shame. (Verse 13)

Reveling in the daytime means they do not care who sees them indulge in sin.

How many churches have made divorce into a small thing?

How many churches are fine with people living together before marriage?

How many churches today fly a rainbow flag?

How many times to churches excuse the blatant sin of their pastors?

How many churches are trying to make unbelievers comfortable in their sin?

Fourth, they are never satisfied. (Verse 14)

One of the great mistakes churches make is that they give in on an issue and think that will be the end of it.

That is not how sin works. Giving in never satisfies someone who loves sin, they simply move up to the next level.

Remember twenty years ago when the government changed their definition of marriage? They said it was about tolerance.

Now anything less than absolute affirmation and celebration is their standard.

That has worked and is working its way into many churches.

When a church or leader retreats on one sin you can be sure more will follow.

Fifth, they make empty promises. (Verses 17-19)

Every false teacher will say, "Follow me, it will be great!"

Their promise is like a waterless spring, Peter says. You go there looking for a drink and there is nothing there for you.

It is heartbreaking to watch people who refuse to turn aside from the way of destruction.

They are walking along thinking they will find something good and they end up in misery and despair.

If that is you this morning I pray by God's mercy that your ears, eyes, and heart would be opened to the news that there is a better way.

You can be born again through faith in the life, death, a resurrection of Christ and find eternal joy instead.

Don't stay with false teaching and philosophy because the last thing Peter shows us about them is that *they never learn*. (Verses 20-22)

Now when Peter says their "last state is worse than their first" he is not saying it was a bad thing for them to hear the gospel and follow it.

He is not saying everything would have been alright with them if they carried on in ignorance, he is saying they have made an already bad situation worse.

They have been exposed to and even embraced the truth for a time and then were willing to turn their backs on the incomparable glory of Jesus to follow after garbage.

He says it's like a dog returning to vomit or a pig back to the mud.

That is what dogs and pigs do and the same thing is true for these false teachers and their followers they go back to what they really love.

They might move to a different city and get a different church, but they keep doing the same things.

As believers, we need to know about the danger of deception in the church.

That is why God has put passages like this in His word.

We need to know about it because it is going to be a part of the church until Jesus comes.

We need to know about it because many will follow and the LORD does not want us to be caught up in the crowd.

We need to know about it because they are leading the way to certain and eternal destruction.

And the good news is we can know about it and put up a safeguard in our lives against it because if we pay attention we will be able to recognize deception and stay away from it.

We need to know the danger of deception brothers and sisters so that we might walk in the light of the glorious truth of the life changing gospel of Jesus Christ.