

## II PETER

- I. Be holy in all your behavior just as God is holy
  - A. II Peter 1:20-21, 2:1-3 . . . But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, [21] for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. [2:1] 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. [2] Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; [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.
  - B. As a foundation for today's teaching, I want to remind you of the standard of unity and the purpose of unity within the church, which Jesus clearly stated as part of His prayer as recorded in John 17:22-23 . . . "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; [23] I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."
  - C. Pray
- II. False teaching in the church
  - A. II Peter 1:20-21 . . . But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, [21] for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.
    1. This is a profound statement, for in saying this, Peter is making it clear that neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament are to be interpreted, or understood, according to each individual's idea of what any specific portion means.
      - a. Peter follows this profound statement with the reason for making it – which is, the scriptures have been written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak and write what God wanted them to speak and write. Or as Paul said to Timothy: "All Scripture is inspired by God . . ." (II Timothy 3:16a).



accursed! As WE have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!”

2. Church history tells us that after the disciples died out and the churches lost that direct link to the teachings of Christ, the leaders from the individual churches began gathering on occasion for “councils” where they would work together to protect the integrity of the message and work out difficult doctrinal and theological issues that were arising. For example, it was during these early councils that the church worked out its stand on Christ being both fully God and fully man, and the doctrine of the trinity.
3. So why should all this matter to us today? I believe there are several reasons that the “NO personal interpretation” principle is of utmost importance, especially today. Let me give you three.
  - a. First, Peter, is making it clear that we are to anchor our faith in the authenticated teachings of Jesus – as understood, recorded, and passed on by His disciples, the apostle Paul, and those they directly taught.
    - (1) Unfortunately, many in the church today put more weight on Paul’s teaching than on Christ’s teaching. And because they treat Paul’s epistles as superior to the Gospels, they interpret, or even ignore what Christ taught based on their understanding of what Paul taught. This is wrong, for if anyone’s teaching should be elevated above the rest, it should be the teachings of our perfectly sinless Savior, Jesus Christ.
    - (2) However, God gave us both gospels and the epistles. Therefore, we ought to hold their teachings to be of equal importance so that we treat the NT as a unified whole and anchor our faith to the unified truth it conveys.
  - b. Second, this principle for interpreting scripture, when humbly and properly adhered to by the church universal, protects a unified truth that is then taught and lived throughout all the churches so that whatever minor differences there are remain truly minor rather than becoming competitive.
  - c. And finally, this principle protects the church from having a smorgasbord of competing denominations, doctrines, practices, and even competing theologies – like we have in the church today.

4. Now I want to add that there have been and will be what appear to be exceptions to this principle. And the exceptions happen when God calls a particular individual to work for the reformation of the larger group, like He did with the OT prophets, Jesus Christ, Ignatius of Loyola, Martin Luther, John Wycliffe and other's like them.
- C. II Peter 2:1 . . . 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.
1. In spite of the disciples' efforts to protect the unity of the message, Peter says that just as false prophets arose among the Israelites, so false teachers will arise within the church and teach false gospels.
  2. So how can this happen? After all, Jesus said the gates of hell shall not overpower or prevail against the church (Matthew 16:18). It is my observation that there are at least three primary reasons why false teachers are able to bring their message into the life of the church.
    - a. First, the leadership loses its anchor so that things like knowledge, religious education, tradition, Christian service, social justice, political activism, keeping the organization viable, and numerical growth begin to take precedence over the unified truth. And when these other things rise in importance above defending and protecting the unified truth, it opens the door for false teachers to bring in false gospels. Some obvious examples of this in our day are the Liberal wing of the organized church, some Seeker Churches, and some Pastor owned churches.
    - b. Second, when such things as pride, power, fame, financial gain, sexual immorality, and other fleshly desires become hidden or not so hidden parts of church leader's lives, the integrity of the unified truth is compromised – if not in word, than surely in practice. Over time, this opens the door for charlatans and others who would use the church to satisfy their own needs to interpret and use the scriptures to ensure the continued satisfying of their needs – which is nothing more or less than false teachers teaching a false gospel.
    - c. And third, church leaders could not introduce false teaching, and no church would hire someone who teaches a false gospel

unless the voting members and financial contributors supported such a decision.

- (1) Consider: Jeremiah 5:30-31 . . . An appalling and horrible thing Has happened in the land: [31] The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?
- (2) And Paul said: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, [4] and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).
- (3) The point here is that the people who attend a particular church or Bible Study, or who make up the voting membership of a denomination are also responsible for defending and protecting the unity of the truth and the unity of Christian living. And when they fail, false teachers have an open door to come into the church.

D. II Peter 2:2-3 . . . Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; [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.

1. Before looking more closely at the identifying behaviors and practices of false teachers, I thought it wise to go back to the OT and look at four scripture portions which give a picture of God’s identifying marks for false prophets. My purpose is to help us see the sad continuity in human nature and be better prepared to guard against false teachings and false teachers.
2. Deuteronomy 13:1-4 . . . If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, [2] and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom 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 find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. [4] You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

- a. This first identifying mark of a false prophet has to do directly with his message – which downgrades God from our Supreme Being to someone or something lessor so as to raise the importance of something or someone other than God above God.
  - b. There are two primary reasons this is a challenge for us to spot.
    - (1) First, this kind of false teaching appeals to our pride, fleshly desires, and our longings to have more control over our lives and the circumstances that come into our lives. Making and keeping God supreme requires trusting God, even when trust and patience seems foolish to us and most everyone who has gathered around us to give us advice. (prosperity gospel, God has a wonderful plan for everyone)
    - (2) Second, this kind of false teaching has enough truth in it that the false part is often camouflaged, and therefore hard to see. This means we must listen carefully to what is being taught and weigh what we hear against the scriptures and the supreme position that God is to hold in our lives. Any teaching that lowers the value, position, or love that we are to have for God, is false teaching.
3. Jeremiah 23:14 . . . Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah.
  - a. This scripture give us three identifying marks of a false prophet. Two have to do with the prophets behavior and one has to do with the results of his teaching.
  - b. The first identifying mark of a false prophet is the practice of one or more forms of sexual immorality. The second identifying mark is the practice of hypocrisy, that is, knowingly presenting a public image of godliness which is not supported by their behavior in their private life. And the third identifying mark is teaching which makes sinners feel secure before God even though they are continuing to practice known sin.
4. Deuteronomy 18:22 . . . When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.
  - a. This identifying mark of a false prophet is common in some church circles today, but rare or never seen in others. Simply

- put, this kind of false prophet is identified by claiming something is true or something is going to happen and in both cases, he turns out to be wrong.
- b. In church circles today, there are teachers who freely say such things as: “God told me” or “God is directing me/us to do so and so” or “God has given me a vision.” However, should any of these claims fail to come true or happen as the teacher claims God has said, it identifies that teacher as a false teacher.
5. Lamentations 2:14 . . . Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish visions; and they have not exposed your iniquity so as to restore you from captivity, but they have seen for you false and misleading oracles.
- a. Here again, there are two identifying marks of the false prophet. First, he claims to see visions or get a word from God that affirms or encourages or exhorts the listeners to believe God is both happy with them and ready to do them good, when in fact the listeners are under the discipline and judgement of God for having lived in known sin for a prolonged period of time and continuing to live, unrepentant, in that sin.
  - b. The second identifying mark is the failure to expose and speak directly against the sins of the people so as to call them to repentance, to return to godliness. and to take seriously God’s expectation that they continue to make forward progress in spiritual growth.

### III. Conclusion

- A. The Lord willing, next Sunday we will examine Peter’s list of identifying marks of false teachers. And is my hope that having some understanding of the OT marks of false prophets and some understanding of Peter’s marks of false teachers, you, individually and as a group, will be better equipped to do your part in guarding the unified truth and subsequent unified life of the Christian faith in our day.