

The False Leaders

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[0 : 0 0] passage, but we're going to walk through this together. So the first thing you need to realize is that Peter sees that there have always been false teachers, false leaders, false prophets. You can use any of that language. There have always been those among God's people, and there always will be. We're never going to get to a place where we don't have to be suspicious about the quality and the truthfulness of the people who are teaching. These are people who, verse 1, they bring in destructive heresies. It's almost funny. Why does he have to use the clarifier destructive? Aren't all heresies destructive? He's talking about what heresy really is.

Heresy is a false belief. It's denying the person of God or the presence or the power of God in the world. But what it does is it leads to a destructiveness, a devolving of the person and of the community. Now, we might think of heresy like in an abstract sense, a narrow sense, you know, that there's this one little belief that doesn't quite fit right, but that's not what he's saying, and we're going to get to more of that in a minute. You know, it's not as though these are just false teachers who they're like super well-meaning, they're really nice, but they just have this one like off thing about them. That's not what's going on here. They're not just doing their best and misguided. Now, last week we saw how the false teachers were those who were responding to the complicated world that Peter was living in. I mean, really, what was happening there was Jesus hadn't returned. All the apostles had said Jesus was going to return, and where was Jesus? He was nowhere.

And the Romans were bearing down on them. Life was getting more difficult. They were coming under more intense pressure. And so these false teachers were inventing ways to navigate the danger and the complication that they felt. It's totally natural. I understand why they would feel that way. But they were, the world was crumbling around them, and they were trying to figure out ways. And so they were inventing new ways of belief. But they were false leaders. And what Peter is saying is, they're not just folks who are doing their best trying to lead, and they're just mistaken. He says there's something sinister about them. Now, Peter isn't going to identify the specific beliefs for us, but it has to do with denying the Scriptures. It has to do with denying Jesus as the Messiah and the Savior. He's denying, they're denying God's active presence, His person, His power in the world. And what was the result?

Verse 2, what happens to these people? Well, verse 2, they follow their sensuality. By undercutting the truth, the false teachers entice people towards sensuality. What does sensuality mean? Well, it comes from the senses, right? It's an over-identification with our senses. Our senses lead us to all kinds of sinful behavior, right? Senses are good, but they do lead us to sinful behavior. This is where the seven deadly sins are really helpful. You know, sins like sexual lust, gluttony, just want more, like laziness and greed. Those parts of those deep sensual things about us that give us things that feel good that then drive us towards these sinful actions. So, let me summarize this. Here's what he's saying.

False leaders are responding to threatening situations by distorting God's Word and the belief about God so that they can pursue their sinful instincts and take other people with them.

[3 : 59] That's what's going on with the false leaders. Now, by saying that there have always been false leaders and there always will be, Peter's thinking back to the great challenges of the people of Israel.

We read earlier, Jeremy read earlier that passage from Jeremiah. Think about the time that Jeremiah was there. Jeremiah was prophesying to Israel in a time that was incredibly dangerous. The kingdom of Assyria that we talked about with Jonah, they had already marched over and destroyed the northern part of Israel. So, Israel was just half its size at that point. And now, the Babylonians had actually overtaken the Assyrians and they were threatening all of Israel. And in fact, during the time that Jeremiah was prophesying, he was going to watch the Babylonians come and tear down the walls of Jerusalem and march in.

They were going to burn the city and tear the temple down to the ground. They were going to rape and pillage the city and cart off all of the smartest and wealthiest and most skilled people and take them to Babylon. And Jeremiah was going to watch his entire society disintegrate. And yet, what Jeremiah was saying there was, our biggest problem is not those guys out there, Assyria and Babylon. Our biggest problem is these shepherds that should be taking care of you are not. The leaders here are not doing what they're supposed to do. In a dangerous world, what we need is not victory over the danger. What we need is to remember that God is with us in the midst of the danger. That's what we need first. And see, so Peter is taking that idea and he's saying that the great danger for his people in his day with the

Romans all around, the great danger for them was similar. They needed the truth. They needed the gospel. And we can take that for ourselves and say, at this point today, in 2024, what is the great danger for the church of Jesus Christ in America? It is not who will be elected president. It is not the moral decay of our culture.

It is not the church losing influence. The greatest danger that we have is the erosion of the proclaiming of the gospel. It is of the infiltration of those who would proclaim a false gospel, false leaders.

[6 : 44] Our danger is the same as their danger. There always have and always will be false leaders. So, secondly, false leaders can be identified. How can we figure out who these people are? How can we understand them? Well, Peter is going to go to great lengths to identify and describe these false teachers. Look at verse 3, that in their greed, they will exploit you with false words. Peter says that false leaders will exploit. In this context, here's, let me tell you what exploit means in this context.

It means to a deliberate deception, to take advantage of someone, getting them to do what they otherwise wouldn't do. Peter's later in this chapter. Peter's later in this chapter, you're going to see that he's going to use the words entice and entangle and entrap. That is the theme that false leaders exploit people. False leaders come in and the sheep are just feeding their own ego and their own pride and their own agenda. People are used to, people are there to be used. And how do they do it? They exploit through their false words. You know, nobody stands up and says, hey everybody, I'm a false teacher here.

You know, don't trust me. I'm the bad guy. No, these false teachers, they sound good. They're tempting. They're alluring in some way. You give yourself to them willingly and only later find out how destructive they really are. Their words are the key to identifying them. Now, I find that fascinating because Peter is taking their words really seriously. Look, we live in a time where we don't take what people say seriously, right? Somebody can get online and say, even people in significant places of power can get on stage and say something and we don't believe them at all. In fact, we excuse it. If somebody says something stupid, we're like, well, you know what? They probably didn't mean that. No, you know, it's fine. Don't worry about that. That's not important.

We excuse stuff away. And what Peter's saying, it's actually kind of countercultural for us. We talk about serious things in our time, but we don't talk seriously. We're not serious people.

We don't have serious leaders, most of them. Most of them are just up for a soundbite. Sorry, that may be too harsh. No, he's talking seriously. What he's saying is, watch the words of your leaders and they'll show you who they really are. Listen to what they're saying. Okay, look at verse 4. Who are these people?

[9 : 38] What are they like? Verse 4. If God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment. He's referring back to the angels that joined Satan in rebelling against God and were cast into hell. False teachers fundamentally refuse the authority of God. They refuse to be bound by God's authority and by God's word.

Verse 5. If he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. He's going back to Noah. In Noah's day, what was the problem in Noah's day? It was that the people were violent. They were incredibly violent. They tore down the image of God and other people. They killed one another. And so in the judgment of the flood, Peter is saying that the false leaders are known for their little regard for the dignity of other people. Verse 6. If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what was going to happen to the ungodly. And if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked, for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard. He's going back to Sodom and Gomorrah who were destroyed because they preached this unrestrained sexuality. And then they took advantage of other people in their sexuality.

Took advantage of them. See, very often, we can summarize, false leaders are known by their sexual transgressions. Now, not all people who sin sexually are false teachers, but often they are seen because they, not only do they sin sexually, but they defend it. They don't repent. How can we summarize this section? Well, here's how you can recognize false leaders. Number one is their unwillingness to recognize and submit to authority. Number two, the ways that they diminish the image of God in humans. They disregard humanity. They don't care for it. And three, their sexual sins follow them and their followers. But here's the deal. Peter is not just going to stop there. He's using his flamethrower here. Look at this, verse 9. Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under judgment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. There's those two themes again. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones. Whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these, these false leaders, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction. Suffering wrong is the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, hold on Peter, reveling in their deceptions while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed, accursed children, forsaking the right way they have gone astray. They followed the way of Balaam, the son of Baor, who loved gain from wrongdoing but was rebuked for his own transgressions. A speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. I would love to tell you about Balaam and his story.

I don't have time today. It's amazing. You should go look it up. It's in the book of Numbers. The idea that he, that Peter is getting at is he's, he's comparing these, these false teachers with Balaam's donkey who, who was given the power to speak because he saw something that Balaam couldn't see. Balaam was blind. The whole point of the story is Balaam is dumber than his donkey.

Balaam has less spiritual insight than his donkey. And, and what Peter is saying is these false leaders are blind. They have less spiritual insight than you need. Watch out for these false leaders or they will destroy you. But again, they're really hard to identify. You know, we mistakenly think of heresies as these one-off single beliefs, but, but really the phrase that I like a lot better is to think of it as the spirit of the age. What is the spirit of our age? How does that begin to impact the way that particular leaders begin to teach? It infects us. The spirit of the age infects us like a virus. In Peter's day, think about it. In Peter's day, it was Rome. Rome was a clear and present danger. And that infected the way that the false leaders interpreted, you know, what's Jesus coming back? Well, I don't know, but Rome's really bad. So we got a problem. It infected the way that they thought. Where do we see that now? Well, I've got a couple of ideas for you. I've got three.

[15 : 38] There's dozens more that we could come up with, and I'm happy to talk to you about those. The first one is sexuality as identity. You know, in some quarters of the church, we've mistakenly taken on the language of sexual identity as the core of a person. But our sexual identity is not the core of who we are. It's not the most important thing about us. And here's the other side of the coin. Your sexual sin is not the most important thing about you. We are made to be people who are made for sexuality. That's how God has made us. And yet, it is not the core of us. If it becomes the core of who we are, then it's something that must be expressed. And if we restrain that expression, then somehow we are repressive or violent even. But the core of sexuality for us is that it is an aspect of our identity. It's something that is meant to be utilized in the right context and yet restrained in other contexts. And yet, this sexuality as identity puts it at too central of a place. We talked about this in our Genesis series last fall. You can go back and look at some of that. It distorts the image of God. It diminishes people to say that our sexuality is the key to our identity. That's one way.

And that infects the church, typically on maybe a more progressive side of where the church is. But this happens in all parts of the church. A second one is the idea of masculine dominance.

As a response to the feminist movement of the last, you know, 50 or so years, there's been a focus, a renewed focus on masculinity. Instead of projecting a vision for masculinity that is all about, that is about strong servant leadership, sacrificial leadership out of strength, it's a vision of dominance. It's a vision of dominance over women, asserting a man's place.

It's a vision of exercising power, exercising control, feeding our desires for sexuality and financial stability and power. And here's the thing, it's often peddled by men who mock weakness, who use women, who use women, and who have the lack of virtues that we see in Jesus. They lack gentleness. They lack kindness, peacefulness. It's the spirit of the age infecting our teaching.

Third thing is this, the win at all costs mentality. In a world like Peter's day, where the dominant cultural wins are against the church and the people of God, there is a desperation in some quarters of the church to win at all costs, to protect the church from danger, to preserve our way of life, to, you know, to own the libs, to even to the point of violence. See, it leads Christians to excuse away the kinds of leaders that look like the kinds of people that Peter is describing here. You know, we cannot say that anyone, any particular leader is a Christian leader if they exhibit these kinds of qualities, even if they talk about the things that we like and things that would be helpful.

[19 : 32] We cannot sacrifice our integrity. We cannot become hypocrites saying that one thing is true when it is politically expedient and yet minimizing the problems. We can't do that. You see, why are false leaders so seductive? Why do they get so good at building a brand off of our attention? Why do we allow them to exploit the vulnerable and enrich themselves feasting on the poor, honor themselves at the expense of the people that they claim to serve? Yet we still follow them. Why? Well, we follow the, you know, political leaders and media pundits, music and movie stars, social media personalities, influencers and podcasters, podcasters and preachers. We follow them. Why?

They're seductive because they give us what we really want. They, false leaders, mirror our souls. We'd say it this way, the leaders that we put forward in the church mirror our deepest desires and idolatries. And if they are false, it is because we have put them there.

See, it's, it's like, you know, old Colonel Nathan Jessup from A Few Good Men. You remember him? Some of you have a certain age. About the violence that is inherent in the army. You remember what he said? You want the truth? You can't handle the truth. You don't want the truth because deep down, you don't, in places you don't talk about in parties, you want me on that wall. You need me on that wall. You see, the reason we have the leaders that we have is because we desperately want them to do the things that they're doing that we don't want to actually acknowledge. We don't want to say, actually, I do not care how you get this done, just get it done. It's a failure of our souls.

See, the power of the false leaders in our churches, and we could say all of those who, who talk about being Christians, you know, they claim Jesus, they claim to be Christians, they show up at churches or whatever. All of those leaders, we're willing to follow them even to our own destruction because they promise to give us something that we are desperate to get. And it's different, you know, it's power, safety, certainty, certainty, hope, peace, clarity, importance, a sense that with them we can be justified. They justify our lives and our existence, but oh, buddy, man, they do not deliver. You remember the proverb, there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, its way is death.

False teachers are dangerous because they mirror our own idolatry. They gain power because of our sin. They succeed because we let them. Did you see what number verse 2 said? Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed. What that saying is, our bad leaders who give a bad name to Christians, that's our fault. That's our fault. God is blasphemed because we as God's people do not demand that our leaders look like Jesus.

[23 : 25] Whew! You didn't know you were coming to church today to get this. Yikes! So what do we do with that? This is the third thing. False leaders will be defeated. Peter is pretty sobering here in his assessment, and he gets viciously ironic in this last part to talk about the future. What's going to happen to these folks? Let me read for you the end of this passage. These are waterless springs.

What could be worse than a desert wasteland where you show up to an oasis, and there's a spring that has no water in it. You're hoping for life, but all there is is death. And mists driven by a storm, for them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.

Listen to this. They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption.

For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome. The last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them to have never known the way of righteousness than after knowing it turned back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them.

The dog returns to its vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire. See, the false leaders are those who play as Christians. They once proclaimed the faith.

[25 : 23] They talk a big game, but they're going to return to their true loves. Now, you know, dogs in the ancient world were not the kind of things that you, you know, let come up and sleep in your bed nice and cuddly, which no one should do, but that's a different sermon. They were useless scavengers.

That's what they were. They were scavengers that you wanted to keep out of your house. Pigs were unclean and hated. Peter could not have picked two more disgusting examples of how he sees false leaders. He is being absolutely vicious in the way that he's coming at these guys.

Whatever pretense of faith they showed is going to be revealed as false. Their true self will be revealed. Look at verse 12. Did you see what verse 12 was doing? Verse 12, but these like irrational animals, creatures of instinct born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they were ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction.

Three times he repeats destroyed in their destruction. What's the point? The point is this isn't leading to where they promise it's going to lead. The false leaders may succeed for a little while, but their way will end in destruction and death and they will not be able to recover from it.

Yikes, guys, this is, you know, the harshness of Peter's tone here is shocking. You know, we don't do, we don't, we don't preach passages like this a lot. You know, that's all kind of, that's kind of that fire and brimstone stuff that we don't like to do. We don't like to talk about. We like the nice grace passages, right? Let's talk about peace and niceness and loving God and all that kind of stuff.

[27 : 13] We really dislike judgment talk, especially in our culture, right? Because it sounds arrogant and it cuts against the grain of our, you know, you do you mentality. You know, you do what's right for you.

You know, do your truth. You know, we have that mentality, but here's the thing about this passage that you have to see. It's that not only is he just coming with a flamethrower at these guys, but there's actually more. It's not just that God is going to do away with them. Look at how God has dealt with the false teachers in the past that he talks about. Noah, the flood came and it cleansed the world and Noah was saved. Sodom and Gomorrah, they were destroyed, but Lot was rescued from Sodom and Gomorrah and he was saved. Even with donkey-faced Balaam, who we didn't talk a lot about, he ends up pronouncing blessing and favor on Israel. Here's the point. God is rescuing his people through judgment, not away from judgment. And see, the promise, you always know a false teacher because a false teacher says, I can rescue you away from judgment and pain and difficulty and death. I can save you from things you don't want. And what God is saying here is, no, no, no, no, no. The route for God's people is always through judgment to salvation. Through the waters of the Red Sea you'll go.

Through the waters of the Jordan River. Through death and resurrection we will go. These waters of baptism are not a pronouncement of Dakota's feeling good. It is a way of saying that the worst can happen in his life and yet through that will be life because of what God has done. Isn't that the message of the gospel? That's exactly what Jesus has done. Jesus, he went and he sat before the religious leaders and he let them come at him with all of the spirit of their own age. They had been so infected like a virus that they were so infected by their own fears of Rome and their hatred of Rome, wanting freedom from them, of wanting to uphold the Jewish way of life at all costs. They didn't care what it would cost them. They wanted to not question the religious traditions and they looked at Jesus in the face and said, this man deserves death. In a cowardice move of injustice, they declared death on the only righteous and innocent one. They were so blinded by their sin. They nailed Jesus to a cross. Justice was denied him.

And Jesus willingly stepped into destruction by the false leaders and let their destruction fall upon his shoulders so that he could provide salvation through destruction for us.

You see, if you give yourself to any idea other than this gospel, it will fail you. It will not just fail you. It will destroy you. You will walk alone into the destruction following those false leaders all the way to the pit. You see, living for unrestrained sexuality is going to crush your soul.

[31 : 25] Living for dominance and power in the culture will destroy everything you love. Living for freedom and being unencumbered by things that you don't like is ultimately going to leave you empty.

Winning at all costs, even hypocrisy, is going to mean that you will sacrifice everything that actually makes life worth living. And Jesus comes to us with his grace in the midst of trouble.

Do you remember what the most repeated command in the Bible is? Do not fear. Why would that be the most repeated command in the Bible?

Because this world is scary. There's bad stuff in this world. There are dangers at every turn. There are things we can't see.

There are things that will happen to our children. Things will feel like they're going well and then they'll turn bad. You'll be surprised by things. And yet, what God is saying is, Friends, we should hear Peter coming so strong at us and our response should be simple.

[32 : 55] We should pray that he would unmask the false leaders that we are tempted to follow. We should pray that God would give us repentance for all the ways that we have bought into, imbibed the spirit of the age.

We should pray for the strength to fall upon the grace that God has freely and overwhelmingly offered in his son Jesus. And you have the chance to do that as we come to the table of the Lord.

As we come to the table, what God is saying is, Look, I'm bringing you, but where am I bringing you at the table? Bread and juice. My body, my blood.

I'm bringing you into the cross. Into my destruction. My destruction is becoming yours so that you might live no matter what comes.

But that is only something that you can exercise by faith. To receive and rest upon that. So what we're going to do in just a minute is we're going to come to the table.

[34 : 05] But we're going to come in a bit of a different way that we don't do all the time. We're going to come. There will be servers here with bread and with juice. You'll be ushered down from the back. You'll come forward.

You'll receive the bread and juice while we sing together. But then you're going to go back. And we are going to circle around the room. And here's what I need you to do. Two things. First one is, I need you to, especially in those back areas, you're going to have to get a little tight so that we can fit everybody in.

So get close. The second thing is, if you are not someone who is a believer in Jesus, or if you've not been admitted to this table, and maybe normally you would sit in your seat and not come forward to partake, I want to ask you, I want to ask you to come forward.

You don't have to be served. You can cross your arms, and that'll be a sign to the server that you won't be serving, but won't be served. But here's what I want to ask you to do. Would you pray in that moment?

Would you let, even if you are a kid who hasn't come to the table yet, would you pray in that moment that you might hear from God? His words to you of do not fear, of my grace is for you, of invitation to Him.

[35 : 25] So let's do that as we pray together. Our God, we come to you now. We come to your table, and we pray, Lord, that you would feed us by the power of your Spirit. Would you give us life?

Would you reveal in our hearts all of those false leaders that we are so tempted to follow? Would you reveal to us those ways that we need to repent?

And would you give us trust in your holy word as we move forward in faith? Would you do that for the glory of Jesus? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Now, even if you are about those, I would say, amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 24] and it's given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also after the supper, he took the cup and he said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you and for many for the remission of sins. Drink of it, all of you. The new covenant, what that means is, is that there is a promise in his blood, a promise that he will not violate no matter how bad things get, a promise that he will never turn back on, a promise that you cannot violate by your actions, a promise that is because of him, rooted in his blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you show forth the Lord's death until he comes again. Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us. Please come to the feast.

you you