

When to be Intolerant

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[0 : 00] Well, please take a seat. And if you would, turn to that insert that you were given from 2 Peter. There's also an outline in the bulletin that you might find helpful as well.

I thought I'd start this morning by teaching you some French. And the phrase I want to teach you is a phrase called *mise en garde*. Yep, there's a slide of it.

At the top, there's the phrase. It's next to a little symbol, which might help us to know what the phrase might mean. Now, I know this is not normal, but I'm after a bit of crowd participation at this point.

So I want to see if anyone can call out what they think this phrase, *mise en garde*, might mean. And to help you, I have a Freddo. Just, you know. It's Freddo up for grabs.

Does anyone want to have a go? Does anyone speak French? Sorry? Be careful. Yep. That's pretty close.

[0 : 59] Warning. Warning. Yeah. Warning. Warning. That's my understanding. I don't know who that was. I'll have to keep it. No, I'm going to keep it. Come see me afterwards. Yeah, and from this phrase, which essentially means warning, and hence the little symbol next to it, it's from a French warning on a bottle of some sorts, we get the shorter version of *en garde*, which don't do the next...

Oh, Rob. Oh, no. I was going to say, does anyone know where we use the phrase *en garde* for another Freddo? No. I'm not sure I could divvy it up to 200 ways, but...

From making bunk beds. That particular one, eh? From making bunk beds. Bunk beds. Only one person on the bed on the top. Oh, now you're just showing off, Joy.

You can have the Freddo, though. Yeah, okay. And then on the next slide, we get the shortened phrase *en garde* from the term fencing, which means be ready or, you know, be on your guard because danger is close.

We'll go to the title slide, the next one now. And so as we come to the letter of 2 Peter again today, we come to chapter 2, which is essentially a *mis en garde*, a warning to Peter's readers about false teachers.

[2 : 10] And in light of this warning, he wants them and us to on guard, to be ready, to be on our guard. And we see where he's heading at the end, towards the end of the letter. Just flick for a moment to what I said a couple of weeks ago were the key verses for 2 Peter.

Chapter 3, verse 17 and 18. This is where he's heading. He says, Therefore, dear friends, verse 17, Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard, on guard, so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people, that is, false teachers, and fall from your own stability, but rather grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

To him be glory both now and for the day of eternity. Amen. See, this is where Peter is heading.

This is his warning. Watch out for false teachers. And he heads to the application of on guard.

So that's where we're heading this morning. But come back to me to chapter 2, verse 1, where he begins his warning by saying there will be false teachers. Chapter 2, verse 1. He writes, But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.

They will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, and will bring swift or sudden destruction on themselves. Many will follow their unrestrained ways, and the way of truth will be blasphemed because of them.

[3 : 38] They will exploit you in their greed with deceptive words. Their condemnation pronounced long ago is not idle, and the destruction does not sleep. At the end of chapter 1, as David rightly alluded to, Peter had been talking about paying attention to God's word given through the prophets.

But just as there were good prophets, there were also bad prophets back in those times. And so Peter says, just as there were bad prophets back then, well, they're going to be bad teachers now.

They're going to be false teachers among you as well, now and in the future. And as their name suggests, they will teach false things, heresies, which even denies Jesus who bought them.

For example, we know from chapter 3 that they were denying Jesus' return. That's one way in which they were denying Jesus. And we see false teachers today.

For example, a few years ago, a bishop of Durham in the UK went on a popular TV show and said that the resurrection of Jesus was simply a juggling trick with bones.

[4 : 41] It wasn't real. It was just a trick. A bishop was saying this. He's denying Jesus, you see. In fact, a former head of the Anglican Church here in Australia taught that the resurrection wasn't a bodily one.

It was just kind of spiritual. We kind of floated around or something like that. At churches in the US, there are ministers who say homosexuality is fine when the Bible says it's not.

In another church I know of, a minister regularly drinks too much at parties. And so while he doesn't teach with his mouth that getting drunk is wrong, he's teaching it by his actions, isn't he? And then, of course, there are churches around the place, a church near us when we're in Sydney that taught that God wants us to be rich in this life.

It's about this life rather than the one to come. The point is there are false teachers even today. The problem is, though, they appear to be Christians. In verse 1, Peter says that they are among you. That is, they're a part of the church living as though they are Christians. And they secretly, verse 1, introduce this false teaching bit by bit, getting alongside people and saying things like, I don't know about this Jesus returning thing.

[5 : 49] I mean, nothing has changed, has it? Maybe the apostles got it wrong. Or, you know, God is a God of love. And if he loves you, then he'll be understanding and let you live the way you want, even though he knows what's best.

And because they appeal to people in this way, then, verse 2, many will follow their unrestrained ways. I remember a church near where I used to live, the youth group leader started sleeping with his girlfriend and instead of repenting, instead of saying sorry and being forgiven, there is forgiveness available.

Instead of saying sorry, repenting, and then, you know, getting married, he argued that, well, we love each other and God knows that, so that's okay. And then the worst thing was, he then started to teach that to his youth group, who were kids, dating, or whatever term you use these days. And so what do you think started to happen? See, by doing this, others follow their unrestrained ways. And in so doing, and actually gave that youth group, and therefore Christianity a bad name, well, that's that dodgy youth group.

You don't want to go there. Those people say they believe one thing and they practice another. You know, as Peter says, verse 2, they bring the way of truth. The gospel will be blasphemed because of them.

[7 : 06] They bring Christ's name into disrepute. And so even though Jesus has bought them, even though he has in some way died for them, they instead deny Jesus by what they teach and by how they live.

And because they deny Jesus the only means of forgiveness, then there is no forgiveness left for them. Instead, verse 1, yep, they bring swift or sudden destruction on themselves on the last day. Or verse 3, their condemnation is not idle or asleep. It's there ready to come down on them like a ton of bricks on the last day when Jesus returns. And in case they or anyone else doubts this judgment, Peter then gives us three examples of how God will not let ungodliness slide.

Which brings us to point 2 and verse 4. He says, for, you know, their judgment is certain, for or because, if God didn't spare the angels who sinned but threw them down into Tartarus and delivered them to be kept into chains of darkness until judgment.

And if he didn't spare the ancient world but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness and seven others, when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly. And if he reduced the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes and condemned them to ruin, making them an example to those who are going to be ungodly.

[8 : 22] And if he rescued righteous lot, distressed by the unrestrained behavior of the immoral. For as he lived among them, that righteous man tormented himself day by day with the lawless deeds he saw and heard. Here's his conclusion, verse 9.

Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, especially those who, like these false teachers, follow the polluting desires of the flesh and despise authority.

Do you see what Peter's doing in these verses? He's saying their judgment is certain. Why? Well, look at these three examples of how God judges in the past. And if he judges in the past, then you can be assured he will judge in the future.

The first example here is of the angels. And we're not sure exactly if it's referring to the angels who fell with Satan or whether it's talking about the angels from Genesis chapter 6, where the sons of God or angels came down from heaven and married women.

Either way, Peter's point is that they have been thrown to Tartarus, which is the Greek word word in the Greek literature referring to the underworld, the place of the dead. And there they are kept in chains waiting to face judgment.

[9 : 34] The point is they didn't get away with their ungodliness. And then there's the example of the flood. And then there's the example of Sodom and Gomorrah. And Peter's conclusion, as I said, verse 9, if God has judged the ungodly in the past, he will certainly judge the ungodly in the future.

And especially, verse 10 says, especially those who, like these false teachers, follow their sinful desires and despise authority. But there is good news here, by the way.

Do note that God will also rescue the godly. He will always give us a way out when we get tempted. And he will fully and finally rescue us on that last day.

So there's an encouragement here to stand firm. But the big point here is that there will be judgment. God cannot tolerate anyone's sin forever, especially the sin of these false teachers.

And so their judgment is certain. A Christian man, I know, was looking for a place to rent. And he got talking to the real estate agent. I think it was a place to buy, actually. And the rental market was quite tight at the time.

[10 : 36] And so the real estate agent was showing him a few places. And there was this one place that he liked particularly. But he said to the real estate agent, he said, I guess there's no guarantee of getting this property. And the agent replied to him, no, no, sorry.

I guess there's no guarantees in life. The only certainties in life are death and taxes, he said, to use the old phrase. Now, at that point, the Christian man turned to him and said, actually, people seem to get out of paying their taxes these days.

I think the only certainties in life are death and judgment. Now, at that, the real estate agent's ears pricked up. And it's a good illustration of how to start a conversation about Jesus.

But he was right, isn't he? The only certainties in life are death and judgment, especially for these false teachers. Why? Why? Well, because of what they do and who they are.

Point three, verse 10. The rest of verse 10, just told, sorry, the end of verse 10 just told us that they do two things. They follow the desires of their flesh.

[11 : 32] That is, they are immoral. And they despise authority. That is, they are arrogant. And in the following verses, Peter elaborates on these two things. Firstly, the arrogance. In the rest of verse 10, he says, bold, arrogant people.

They do not tremble when they blaspheme the glorious ones. However, angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a slanderous charge against them before the Lord. But these people, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct born to be caught and destroyed, speak blasphemies about things they don't understand.

And in their destruction, they too will be destroyed, suffering harm as a payment for their unrighteousness. Here, these false teachers are arrogant.

And Peter elaborates on them. For in their arrogance, they show no respect for those who have more power than them. Instead, they blaspheme or pass judgment on the glorious ones, which refers to angels here.

But even angels don't bring charges against other angels. They don't even do that. Yet these false teachers think that they're the ultimate authority, that they can judge all people. They despise every authority but their own, such is their arrogance.

[12 : 42] Yet such arrogance is irrational. It's irrational to think that you have more power than God or angels. And since they're so irrational, Peter likens them to animals in verse 12.

He says, they're like irrational beasts who are born to be caught. They are like animals on their way to the spiritual abattoirs, as it were.

And then in the rest of verse 13, Peter moves from their arrogance to focus on their immorality. He says, the rest of verse 13. They consider it a pleasure to carouse the daytime.

They are spots and blemishes, delighting in their deceptions as they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery and are always looking for sin. They seduce unstable people and have hearts trained in greed, children under a curse.

They have gone astray by abandoning the straight path and have followed the path of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but received a rebuke for his transgression.

[13:41] A donkey that could not talk spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's irrationality. It's interesting here that these false teachers are described as irrational animals.

But here, even an irrational animal rebukes the false teacher, Balaam, doesn't it? It's as though that even the animals have got it together more than these false teachers do.

And although these false teachers delight in their deceptions and are trained in greed, we heard earlier in verse 13 that their only payment in the end will be to suffer harm for their unrighteousness.

And of course, the worst part about all this is that they are leading others astray. We've seen that in verse 2 and verse 14, but Peter focuses on it now in verse 17. He says, these people are springs without water.

Peter says here that these false teachers are like springs without water.

[15:03] That is, they promise water or life, but they're dry and empty. And so are their boastful words. They are empty as well. They promise freedom, but they can't give freedom.

They themselves are not even free because they've been mastered by their own sinful desires. And so they seduce young Christians who are not only just escaping, who are sorry, who are just escaping from the corruption of the world.

Some years ago now, my wife and I had a friend who said she believed in Jesus and we were over the moon. She started coming to church, even though no one in her family was a Christian.

And it was great. But before we knew it, she was carried away with her desires for wealth and clothes and shoes. I don't know what it is about women and shoes, but for her, shoes were important.

And she went shopping for shoes instead of going to church on Sundays. And looking back now, I wish we nursed her more carefully. I wish we understood how susceptible to seduction young Christians are.

[16:05] Of course, the reality is that she was probably never a Christian, a genuine Christian in the first place. Not yet, anyway. Instead, she was more like the seed scattered on the thorny ground, if you remember Jesus' parable, where the thorns came up and choked life.

And the same seems to be true for these false teachers. For, in verse 20 to 22, we read this. It says, Peter doesn't pull his punches, does he?

And here, Peter warns that if these false teachers were genuine Christians and fell away, then they would be worse off now than they would have been before they became Christians.

Of course, I think verse 22 says that they were never really Christians in the first place. It has happened to them according to those proverbs. They have always been a dog or a pig. See, going back to their old ways has proved that.

Going back to their old ways proves they were never really genuine Christians in the first place. But for us here who do have a knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, then I think verse 20 and 21 is still a warning for us.

[17:40] And so in light of this warning, to use the sword term, Peter wants us to on guard, point four. Here we come back to chapter 3, verse 17.

In fact, come back to chapter 3, verse 16 to see where he picks it up here. Peter warns his readers in chapter 2 about false teachers so that we can be on guard.

Chapter 3, verse 16, he's speaking about Paul. He says, You see, there will be false teachers who twist the scriptures to their own destruction.

Peter says, Since I've given you this warning in chapter 2, since you know all this in advance, then on guard. Be ready. Be on your guard. Why? So that you won't fall from your own stability, so that you won't fall away as a Christian.

Now it sounds like Christians can fall away, doesn't it? In fact, this type of language is used all the way through 2 Peter and the rest of the Bible. Now, I was hoping to avoid this whole topic altogether, but I had some really good questions about it last week, and so I thought I should at

least address it briefly this week.

[19 : 10] Let me start off by saying the true Christian is guaranteed of heaven, 100%. Peter says in his first letter that we are shielded by God's power.

And so the Christian who truly believes in Jesus is guaranteed of heaven. We have that assurance. But the true Christian will also hear this warning and be on guard.

I mean, that's what it means to truly believe. If you truly believe in something, then you'll act on it, won't you? If you truly believe Jesus is Lord, then you'll show it by the way you live. And if you truly believe his word, then you'll heed his warnings, like this one which says, be on your guard so you don't fall away.

You see, these warnings from chapter 2 and 3 here are one of the ways God keeps us or shields us as Christians. We don't know who God's elect are, but he gives us these promises and these warnings to keep us to the end.

God doesn't encase us in a magical ball so that, you know, once we've got our ticket, that's it, we do nothing. He gives us promises to encourage us.

[20 : 17] He gives us warnings like this one to protect us and warn us. And he gives us his Holy Spirit to convict us that we might listen and obey. These warnings and promises in Scripture encourage us to cling to Christ to the end.

And so we are to obey this warning here if we truly believe to be on guard so that we won't be carried away by false teachers and fall.

Now, that's just a very quick description of how warnings and promises work in Scripture to keep us as Christians. If you've got more questions, then please talk to me afterwards. But for now, how are we to be on guard?

What are we to do? Well, let me suggest two ways in closing. The first is by growing in the truth. I once heard that those who worked in the Treasury Department used to study the real notes so that when they saw a counterfeit note, they could spot the differences.

And it's the same for us. We're to keep studying the truth in the Bible, keep growing in the truth, so that when the fake comes along, we'll be able to spot the lies. Remember, the false teachers introduce their heresy secretly bit by bit.

[21 : 27] And so we need to know the truth well so that we can be on our guard and spot the lie. So please keep coming to church. I know there are various good reasons to miss church, but please keep making every effort to come, to keep growing in the truth so that together we might not fall under the sway of false teaching.

And please keep going to Bible study. If you're not in a Bible study, then please speak to me. And Carol's just gone around and done up the list. We know which groups are which. Please speak to me and we'll find a group for you so that you can keep growing in the truth.

And for those of us who teach others, whether it's Bible study groups or Sunday school or CRE, then we need to keep working hard at growing in the truth so that we'll faithfully teach that truth. That it will be the true one, not the false truth. But the second way we're to be on guard is to take sin seriously, which is part of what it means to grow in godliness.

See, the false teachers, their way is to seduce. We saw it a couple of times in the text. It's to appeal to our own sinful natures and say, oh, that's okay. That doesn't matter. And so we need to remember that sin does matter so that we won't find ourselves on a slippery slope sliding away from Jesus.

[22 : 38] There was a youth group leader at my old church who was telling me one time about a TV series she loves watching. And she mentioned that a Christian friend of hers actually had a pirated copy of this next season's worth of episodes.

Now, she was dying to know what happened to Billy. He was left on a cliffhanger last season. She was keen to find out what happened. But when this friend offered this series to her, she said, you can borrow these, no big deal.

The youth group leader responded by saying, nah, that's okay. They're pirated, so I better not. Now, she wasn't saying this to rebuke her friend. She wasn't saying it to me to boast.

But it did tell me that here was a person who took sin seriously. And because she did, it helped her to resist being seduced, you see. It helped her to resist being swept away by her friend's wayward ways.

It helped her to stay off the slippery slope and instead stand firm as a Christian. See, we need to still take sin seriously. The world's big word today, one of them, is tolerance.

[23 : 40] We don't tolerate all sorts of things. And there's truth in that. But God doesn't tolerate sin. And neither should we. Because the more we do, the more likely we'll be seduced and slip from our secure position.

See, false teachers will come. And so let's, on guard, by growing in the truth and by taking sin seriously, remembering that God will rescue his godly people on the last day.

And so it will be worth it. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

And we pray, Father, that you would help us, since we know this in advance, to be on our guard. So that we are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from our own stability.

But rather help us grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.