

Series: Grow in Grace	Reference: 2 Peter 2:1-10	Title: False Teachers	Date: 09.18.2022
Website Writeup:			
The original church fathers fought for the good of the Church & preserving the excellencies of Christ found in the Scriptures. In the first few centuries the Church saw heretics arise with errant ideas undermining the nature of Christ, and the Gospels core message. Which do we face now?			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Turn with me to p831 in your pew Bibles & follow along as I read 2 Peter 2:1-10. As you do that, let me say, 2 Peter 2 is all about false teachers in the church. Verses 1-3 concern the destructiveness of false teachers; verses 4-9 discuss examples of false teachers & their judgment to come; verses 10-17 touch on the depravity of false teachers & give examples of actions false teachers take in their depravity; and finally, verses 18-22 talk about the deceptions of false teachers through their methods & promises.¹

This passage begins...But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them - bringing swift destruction on themselves. ²Many will follow their depraved conduct & will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

⁴For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; ⁵if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; ⁶if he condemned the cities of Sodom & Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless ⁸(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw & heard) - ⁹if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials & to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. ¹⁰This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh & despise authority. Bold & arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings...

The original church fathers were fighters, struggling for the Church & preserving the excellencies of Christ found in the Bible. In the first few centuries of the church exactly what Peter said happened - heretics arose with errant ideas which undermined the nature of Christ, and the Gospels core message. **Did you know that if you're off course by just one degree, after one foot, you'll miss your target by 0.2 inches. For every 1 degree a plane veers off course, it misses its destination by 1 mile for every 60 miles of flight. Satan doesn't need to destroy the Church, he just needs it one degree off, causing a growing chasm between God & salvation. It may look like Truth, being dressed in**

¹ "Introduction to 2 Peter," *Blue Letter Bible*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/eo/2Pe/2Pe000.cfm>

Christian garb, using much of the same language, but it isn't Gospel Truth any longer - therefore it's destructive. In Greek Tragedy the word Hamartia described how a tragic hero undergoes great pain & suffering because they make one small mistake in judgment, or have one small tragic flaw. Hamartia, Paul uses it for describing sin in the NT - missing the mark by even one degree.

Peter states clearly, those who lead astray will come from among us. *Acts 20:29-30 says the same... "After my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things."* They secretly introduce destructive heresies & many follow, bringing the way of truth into disrepute. Right now as Bible believing Christians, you're in the minority. Your views of Christ as the only way of salvation, marriage between one man & one woman only, of no sex before marriage, or that homosexuality is a sin, among other things..have all been brought into disrepute. In holding traditionally Christian values under conviction of the Scriptures, you're labeled as hateful & phobic. Sadly, many professing Christians are capitulating, possibly to avoid persecution, or because they're deceived, who knows. We expect attack from the outside, but it often happens that often our own turn from doctrine & attack from within.

CS Lewis once said, "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life & death to you." The only positive of false teachers is to force us to abandon indifference, exploring exactly what God says in the Bible - if we stick with it. My wife was reminiscing on her journey with Christ. She said there are two things which have caused her to grow over the years; extreme desire & time. Trouble is, many don't have extreme desire & don't stay the long course to see Jesus transform them. And in giving up, turning to false ideas, damage is done. Church Creeds were written to solidify the Churches position against heresies which arose - in reading them you can see the issues they faced. What would the Church look like if God's Truth became a matter of life & death to us?

We live in a post-modern, post-Christian America. *Alisa Childers writes in her book, 'Another Gospel?', "...postmodernism rejects the idea that absolute truth can be known. With an emphasis on social activism, and reaching those who were marginalized, oppressed, and forgotten by the hierarchical structures of the modern church, emergent (Progressive) Christianity was the new kid on the block that everyone wanted to know more about."*

Emergent Village was one of the first organized groups of the progressive Christian movement. Emergent Village Leader Tony Jones published an article written by theologian LeRon Shults explaining why their movement had no statement of faith. It said..."Emergent aims to facilitate a conversation among persons committed to living out faithfully the call to participate in the reconciling mission of the biblical God...A "statement of faith" tends to stop conversation...Too often they create an environment in

which real conversation is avoided out of fear that critical reflection on one or more of the sacred propositions will lead to excommunication from the community.”²

Do you hear that? They've shifted the voice onto human opinion with open door to challenge the longstanding solid beliefs of the faith. Often focusing on the felt trauma of those who *feel* hurt by the Church & NOT on Scripture any longer. Even when those who claim trauma usually have simply experienced church discipline due to their sin & didn't like it. And, that's the point, the preservation of God's Truth is more important than individual opinion or feelings.

In his Prescription Against Heretics, Tertullian wrote, “For as they are heretics, they cannot be true Christians, because it is not from Christ that they get that which they pursue of their own mere choice, and from the pursuit incur and admit the name of heretics. Thus, not being Christians, they have acquired no right to the Christian Scriptures; and it may be very fairly said to them, “Who are you? When & whence did you come? As you are none of mine, what have you to do with that which is mine? Indeed Marcion by what right do you hew my wood? By who's permission, Valentinus, are you diverting the streams of my fountain?”” Agree...if you're going to give up on the Bible's authority & borrow from any faith tradition, then please, don't use the words Christian or Church on your sign! Make up a new thing - it's no longer the Gospel!

Ancient heresies are important to study because strains reappear in modern religious systems claiming to be compatible with Christianity. A good example might be seen in the comparison in a quote from Star Trek V in a dialogue between Captain Kirk & Dr. McCoy after the Enterprise had failed to find God in the center of the Universe, with a quote from a third century Gnostic heretic:

Dr. McCoy: “Is God really out there?”

Captain Kirk: “Maybe he's not out there, Bones. Maybe he's here in the human heart.”

Monoimus: “...seek for Him from (out of) thyself, and learn...My God (is) my mind, my understanding, my soul, my body...if you accurately investigate these (points), you will discover (God) Himself, unity & plurality, in thyself, according to that title, and that He finds the outlet (for Deity) to be from thyself.”³

Sounds nice, but it shifts divinity to us & erases God. Captain Kirks errant views may sell movies, but when explored we realize their destructive nature. Most heresies in the first 5 centuries centered around differing opinions on exactly who Christ was, what manner of being he was, and what the relationship was between Christ & God the Father - as they do today. A heresy is defined as, “An opinion or doctrine not in line with the accepted teaching of the church; the opposite of orthodoxy.” (Holman Bible Dictionary).

² Alisa Childers, Another Gospel? A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity, pp72-73.

³ The Refutation of All Heresies, Chapter 8, Hippolytus, Translated By The Rev. J. H. Macmahon, M.A

For instance, which statement best describes the person of Christ: *Christ was a divine spirit, not a physical man / Christ was a man that had a divine spirit dwelling within him / Christ was a great prophet, but not divine / Christ was divine, but on a lower level than the Father / Christ was fully God & fully Man; of one substance with the Father.* The last is what the Church believes from Scripture. And I'd venture to guess some of us struggle with the 4th! These are some of the arguments surrounding Christ.

This passage confirms there's no difference in the God of the NT with the Old - God is consistent, in charge, and will punish without impunity those who twist His Word & lead people astray. When false teachers whisper sweet words into the ears of immature Christians, the body of Christ suffers disunity & loses the distinctive faith in the unique person & work of Jesus Christ. Believers should apply themselves to learning biblical Truth, living out of the principles of the faith.

The early church defined heresies as "those doctrines or teachings that change the nature of the faith so fundamentally that it no longer can be trusted to be saving faith." The three biggest heresies mentioned in the New Testament are Judaizing; a form of legalism - placing Jewish requirements on new believers for salvation. Antinomianism (anti [against] nomos [law]) which says "once saved, anything goes." A licentiousness arising from the belief that due to Grace we need not follow the Mosaic Law (never mind that faith came to Abraham first, and the Law was given 430 years after). And Gnosticism which is based off elitism of which Harold Brown writes, "Ordinary people may make do with simple faith, but the Gnostic knows the secrets & belongs to a spiritual elite."⁴

One of the earliest heresies the church dealt with after the time of the apostles was Arianism, which came around the fourth century & denied the absolute divinity of Jesus as equal to God the Father. Marcion, in the second & third centuries, separated what he saw as the Old Testament 'vengeful' God from the New Testament 'merciful' God, rather than acknowledging the unity of one God. Docetism asserted that sacraments weren't effectual if led by pastors who had apostatized during persecution, making sacraments dependent on human worthiness rather than Gods mercy.⁵ And there were plenty more.

In verses 4-9, Peter gives three examples of God's judgment against sinners to prove that God always brings punishment to false teachers: (1) the angels who sinned, (2) the world of Noah, and (3) Sodom & Gomorrah for sexual perversion. Heresies are still alive in prosperity gospel preachers, or pastors saying that the Old Testament is irrelevant to Christians, the modern church still wrestles against false teachers.⁶

⁴ Harold Brown, "Heresy in the Early Church," *Ligonier Ministries*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/heresy-in-the-early-church/>

⁵ <http://www.sundayschoolcourses.com/heresy/heresy.pdf>

⁶ David Gibson, "Top 5 'Heresies' of 2016: 'One God,' Biblical Authority and more" <https://www.religionnews.com/2016/12/29/top-5-heresies-of-2016-one-god-biblical-authority-and-more/>

But it's not just theological heresies which negatively influence the church, sometimes they come in the form of sociopolitical ideologies. We're experiencing a worldview clash influencing the Church & its witness with very practical outcomes on the lives of some Christians who unknowingly adopt a worldview which deteriorates a Biblical Christian Worldview. It robs them of faith pulling them away from Christ. There've been other philosophical or ideological threats to Christianity's message, this is simply the newest. This new worldview is born out of two concepts: **Critical Theory & Intersectionality**.

Critical Theory first asserts people can be divided into two groups, those with power, those without. Secondly, it asserts, those with power *always* oppress the powerless, which isn't true. Thirdly, the categories of Oppressed & Oppressor are based on group identity, such as ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, income, etcetera.

In this line of thinking you can be an Oppressor in one category & Oppressed in another due to differing identities - which is called Intersectionality. For instance, two white men may be seen as Oppressors, but if one's homosexual, he's better off than the other, because he's viewed as oppressed. Therefore, Intersectionality seeks to measure levels of power & oppression - the more oppressed you are, the more value & moral authority you have according to Critical Theory.

The positive outcome of Critical Theory is that it's gotten many who wouldn't normally consider the plight of others to do so. However, although Critical Theory is a theory, it acts as a worldview. And in acting as such, there are three major conflicts between Christianity & Critical Theory.

Firstly, Critical Theory claims our value lies in our various identities, whereas Christianity claims our value comes from humanities being created in God's image.

Secondly, Critical Theory pits people against one another, whereas Christianity says God created us all equal - equally valuable, equally guilty of sin, equally able to find Grace & Mercy in Jesus, and equally called to forgive. The Bible defines sin as anything which violates God's design for humankind, including oppression of others. But Critical Theory only defines sin as the oppression of others. Therefore, violence, jealousy, theft, anger & the like from the Oppressed are only considered excusable reactions towards the Oppressor. This is because Critical Theory sees only oppression as sinful, the Oppressed are always innocent.

And thirdly, the solution of salvation is errant, since Critical Theory says salvation's only found through social liberation achieved through activism - penance through reparation & suffering of former oppressor since roles flip-flop. Whereas the Bible says all are guilty of sin & can find salvation only through the Gospel of Christ. True, the Bible's replete with the call to seek justice & act on liberating the oppressed. We acknowledge this as an integral part of the biblical message near & dear to God's heart. The Gospel simply goes one step further in that it not only gives value to all, it also holds everyone responsible for their own sin, personal & corporate.

Therefore, we can't interpret that Jesus' kingdom was reserved *only* for the poor & oppressed. David, Moses, Abraham, Nicodemus & Paul were living proof, the wealthy, powerful & educated are also in need & equally welcome in God's Kingdom. Likewise, people such as the Samaritan woman at the well, one we might consider to be oppressed, are equally culpable for their sin & also able to receive grace from Jesus (remember Jesus confronted her sin). Everyone equal, according to the Gospel.

Critical theory & Intersectionality are having far reaching effects on society, the Church & our ability to communicate the Gospel. Christians need to be prayerful & thoughtful in considering the lens we choose to see the world through in order to stay true to the Gospel, seeking justice as it flows from the throne of Christ & the freeing power of the Gospel in the lives of others.

Another challenge to the church are political ideologies such as socialism & communism which view Christianity as subversive. In an article in *Touchstone* (June 2022) titled *Babylon's Furnace*, Rod Dreher explores the feelings of Christians who resisted & survived socialist or communist systems then emigrated to America. They believe there are clear signs we're headed towards a totalitarian regime - a one party system which controls all things. That authoritarian regimes only want obedience, **but totalitarian regimes want your soul.** That under them, everything's political, including your personal belief system. American Christians, conditioned as we have been to the therapeutic mindset, a desire only for safety & well-being, fail to perceive the totalitarian nature of 'woke-ness'. He says we'll surrender power to authorities which promise to protect & promote our therapeutic desires - especially in sexual freedom. Using the tools of Critical Theory & Intersectionality we have a recipe for disaster which has everything to do with theology, what we believe to be true of God & Humanity.

He states there are 5 things we can do to retain Truth in such a system which will inevitably bring about suffering & persecution for the Church. **Firstly, we have to prefer nothing but Truth** - that we have to make living in biblical Truth the bedrock of life & accept the consequences that brings - no matter what! **Secondly, we have to reclaim & defend cultural memory.** That the totalitarian state seeks to erase cultural memory in peoples in order to control & that social media/entertainment are effective ways of doing this through our willing participation. **Thirdly, we must establish & defend solidarity** - which he defines as the bonds among small groups of people like church. The state will demoralize the masses through isolation - but that we do this willingly in hiding behind screens, not connecting in real community. **Fourthly, we must strengthen our religion.** More than just going to church, but finding ways to live out old truths of Scripture. That without the biblical God we'll not be able to resist - we'll either be committed to the one true faith or apostatize under pressure. **And fifthly, we must embrace the value of suffering.** That if we're not willing to suffer the loss of social status, job, comfort, freedom, even our lives for the sake of Truth then we've already surrendered. Jesus didn't call admirers, He called disciples & disciples can't escape the cross - you can tell the difference between admirers & disciples when suffering comes.

Remember... *there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies...²Many will follow...bring[ing] the way of truth into disrepute. False...teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories...they're bold & arrogant...not afraid to heap abuse.*

But God remains sovereign & victorious. Remember, Revelation 21 speaks of the end of time...*“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them & be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” ⁵He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy & true.”*

⁶He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha & the Omega, the Beginning & the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God & they will be my children. ⁸But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters & all liars - they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

There is absolute Truth & we are stewards of God’s glorious message in Christ - a matter of life & death. There is eternal life in Christ, and eternal punishment for the enemies of God. As we await Christ’s return, let’s not be admirers only, but true disciples of Jesus, willing to be obedient to the faith even to death as Rev 2:10 says!

Include open prayer time with mic’s