

You probably heard the news this past week that President Donald Trump has decided that people in the United States will be allowed to buy prescription drugs from Canada, because of the exorbitant cost that is paid for medications in our country to the south. Of course after the announcement there was a great wave to responses – both positive and negative – regarding the purpose and politics and the effects that would have on people both sides of the border. And also, of course all of this very well could just be another example of what we know of today as “fake news.” We hear the phrase “fake news” quite often in these days and we see or hear examples of “fake news” every time we watch or listen to any kind of news media. “Fake News” is a type of journalism of calculated propaganda that is usually written and published with the intent to mislead in order to damage an agency, entity or person - in order to gain financially or politically. For media outlets, fake news is an opportunity to attract readers and viewers necessary to generate online advertising revenue – because publishing a story with false content attracts users and benefits advertisers and improves ratings. We have also seen that fake news and the popularity of social media have increased political polarization and cultural division, - which then competes with legitimate news stories - which then causes confusion as to what the truth really is.

The relevance of fake news has increased in post-truth politics of our day. We looked at this last week in 2 Peter 1:16-21 where the apostle Peter exhorted the persecuted churches in Asia Minor to hold fast the truth as written in the Word of God - in the midst of a culture that was saturated with the fake-news of man-made myths that were manufactured truths that had no basis in fact. The serpent Satan cast a false truth that deceived Eve in the Garden that led to the fatal fall of humanity - and he continues to do so even today. In John 8:44 Jesus said that the devil, *“was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”* The nation Israel was constantly being led astray by false prophets. Throughout Israel’s history false prophets rose up and claimed to speak for Jehovah God. Elijah had to contend with the prophets of Baal for promoting a pagan religion. Jeremiah and Ezekiel exposed the counterfeit ministry of false prophets in their day who preached the gospel of comfort and prosperity.

This has been going on since the beginning of creation – and sadly, we often see the same in the church of today – where, when it comes to the truth of God’s Word, we sometimes make up our own truth as we go along. This is why Peter has been so passionately adamant about the truth of the Word of God. This is why last week he declared: *“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:19-21). In today’s text Peter tells us that, just as there arose false prophets alongside the true prophets of God in the Old Testament, so also there will arise false teachers alongside true teachers, who will try to mislead the church in the New Testament times and in the church today.

*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.* 2 Peter 2:1–3

As we begin, know when the Bible talks about wolves or false prophets or false teachers - it is generally speaking about anyone and everyone who tries to influence, deceive and exploit people for their own selfish gain. In the context of Peter writing to the churches – he is then speaking of anyone and everyone in the church who tries to influence, deceive and exploit people in the church for their own selfish gain. In order to warn us to be alert to false teachers, Peter presents 4 common traits we see in false teachers.

1) Deception. *“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.”* This theme runs throughout this entire chapter. To begin with, these teachers’ teachings were false; Peter called what they taught *“destructive heresies.”* The word *heresy* originally meant “to make a choice,” but then it came to mean “a choice that divides.” A false teacher will force you to make a choice between their beliefs and the beliefs of the church. And so whenever a church member prods another member to take a side against someone in the church, they are promoting false truth and causing division. Not only is a false teachers’ message false, but their methods are also false. Instead of openly declaring what they believe, they come into the church under false pretenses and gives the impression that they are true to the Christian faith. The literal translation of the phrase *“will secretly bring in”* is “They secretly bring in alongside.” This means they do not point out the truth immediately; they lay their false teachings alongside the truth and give the impression that they believe the truth of our faith. But they ultimately remove the true faith and leave their false faith.

In 2 Peter 2:3, Peter points out that the false teachers used *“false words.”* The Greek word is *plastos*, from which we get our English word *plastic*. This means that false teachers know the words that can be twisted to mean anything they want them to. False teachers use our vocabulary, but they do not use our dictionary. They talk about the great words of the Christian faith, but they do not mean what we mean. Immature followers hear false teachers and think that they are sound in the faith, but they are not.

Satan is a liar and false teachers are liars. Both use the Bible, not to enlighten, but to deceive. Keep in mind that false teachers are not innocently ignorant of the Word of God. They know the truth of God’s Word but they deliberately reject it and instead they teach and promote their version of God’s Word.

2) Denial. *“Even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.”* False teachers are better known for what they deny, than what they affirm. This is a huge issue in the church. False teachers call themselves Christians, and though they will often talk about Jesus taught, they *“deny the Master”* because *they will not submit themselves to Jesus teachings.* Peter says these people are going to arise in our midst, we can expect it to come, and they are going to look and sound like a deep and mature Christian. They will probably be friendly, personable, loving and caring. They may even appear to have the answers to life. But they deny the very basic foundation of the truth of our faith in Jesus Christ, which is *submission* to Jesus Christ. *“They will deny the Master who bought them.”*

3) Sensuality. *“And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.”* The term *“sensuality”* literally means “licentious conduct.” But this is not about sexuality, because Peter is not concerned about sex here. “Sensual” refers to anything that has to do with the senses. That is, sensual people base their lives - on the flesh, in the here and now. What tastes good, what looks good, what feels good, what you wear, what you buy, what you drive, what you live in. These things in themselves are not wrong, but for sensual people - that is the sum and substance of their lives. Peter tells us false teachers are those who live just in one world. They don't live in the realm of the spirit. They are not concerned about the ultimate values of spiritual things. What matters is them and now and the things of the world. Peter says that will be the focus of the sensual person's thinking. And many will follow these people because they have a very attractive philosophy of life. Many will be turned on to the sensuality of false teachers - and what is worse, many will be turned off to authentic Christianity.

4) Greed. *“And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”* Greed drives the false teachers as well. They exploit believers with their false words for the sake of material gain by teaching and preaching a prosperity Gospel to those who are in love with the world. But greedy false teachers throughout history have been marked by sexual sin, a lust for money, and dishonesty. False teachers are also greedy for attention and they will do so by exploiting people's hunger for God because everyone is born with a hunger to know God – by teaching and preaching a therapeutic gospel that promises to bind the broken and heal the hurting.

*“Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”* Long ago before these words were written, Moses decreed that false prophets should be judged. In Deuteronomy 13:10 Moses declared that the punishment should be: *“You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from the Lord your God.”* The apostle Peter is not advocating stoning false prophets today. In these days God takes care of that issue. What Peter is saying is that God will judge false teachers who deceptively cause divisions, who do not submit to Jesus Christ, who live their lives for the world, and who are greedy for money and attention. *“Their condemnation is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”* In verses 4 through 10 Peter documents this punitive principle with detailed arguments proving God’s definite judgment on the false teachers - and he uses Old Testament examples to do so.

Fallen angels. *“For 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”* (2 Peter 2:4). If God has eternally condemned the sinful angels, then how much more certainly will he condemn the false teachers and their followers.

Noah and the world. *“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”* (2 Peter 2:5). If God did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others - then will he even more definitely judge the false teachers, while at the same time preserving the godly. True born-again followers of Jesus Christ may be a small minority, but God will most certainly and assuredly protect them.

Sodom and Gomorrah. *“If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly”* (2 Peter 2:6). If God condemned Sodom and Gomorrah, then how much more certain it is that the same thing will happen to the ungodly who reject the gospel and the false teachers who have caused division in the body of Christ.

Lot. *“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)”* (2 Peter 2:7–8). If God rescued righteous Lot, who was greatly distressed and even tormented by the conduct of the wicked in Sodom, then how much more will he rescue the godly. *“Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority”* (2 Peter 2:9–10a). Having made his case for God’s certain judgment on the false teachers through events from the Old Testament Peter, then proclaims God indeed knows how to rescue Christians from trials and struggling. In the case of Peter’s audience, this would have evoked hope of divine deliverance from the false teachers and their influence that they were experiencing in the midst of suffering persecution. It would also give them the hope of vindication that God will keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment - and He will punish them in a partial, preliminary way before the final day of judgment, especially toward those who engage in defiling passion and who *despise authority*. Peter’s thoughts and words here causes him to once again protect the churches by warning the churches about the false truth of the false teachers by giving them descriptions of the character of the false teachers.

*“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”* (2 Peter 2:10b–11). False teachers despise authority and they are recklessly bold and arrogantly willful, behaving in ways that even the fallen angels avoid. In so doing, they recklessly dismiss any thought that these demonic forces have any power over them or that their willful sins will open them to demonic attack.

*“But these, 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 as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you”* (2 Peter 2:12–13).

False teachers operate in irrational ways. They act like animals, following neither reason nor truth but instinct, ignoring even the most basic of human values. Yet they behave like this while teaching a false gospel while posturing as Christians, even to the point of taking the Lord's Supper in the church.

*"They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!"* (2 Peter 2:14). The eyes of false teachers desire adultery with virtually everyone they meet. Their lustful appetite for sin is never satisfied. Even worse, they entice unsteady people to join them in their decadence. False teachers are characterized by unquenchable sexual sin.

*"Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness"* (2 Peter 2:15–16). False teachers follow the way of Balaam, which is a life spent gaining things at other people's expense by means of wrongdoing. Balaam was condemned for his greed. He was supposedly a man of spiritual insight, but God can use even a donkey to contain someone who is following the way of madness rather than a responsible human being.

*"These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved"* (2 Peter 2:17). Peter reveals the extreme importance of dealing with false teachers in the church - by reminding us again the about the deadly influence false teachers have on the church. They are *"waterless springs"* in that they promise spiritual refreshment but instead reveal themselves to be mists driven by the wind, sowing confusion and division, devoid of any Kingdom value. The gloom of utter darkness has been reserved for them, as for the fallen angels and the unrighteous before God.

*"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"* (2 Peter 2:18). False teachers entice by sensual passions those who are barely escaping from the clutches and bondage and condemnation of sin. False teachers prey on new and weaker Christians - teaching them that they can do whatever they wish and no harm will come of it.

*"They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved"* (2 Peter 2:19). False teachers operate under the guise of freedom, but in actuality they entice others to become as they are, slaves of corruption, the real truth of a false freedom.

*"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 never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: 'The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire'"* (2 Peter 2:20–22). Peter declares that it would have been better for these false teachers to not follow in the path of the knowledge of our Lord Jesus - only to abandon that path and return to a life of sin and darkness. False teaching is fatal to the hearer and the speaker. I say these words in the context of the apostle Peter's letter in the Word of God regarding false teachers in the church. And I say these words in the context of the news last month that Josh Harris, evangelical Christian author, conference speaker, long time pastor of Covenant Life Church – has separated from his wife and disavowed his books and announced that he no longer considers himself a Christian. I also say these words in the context all of the conflicts and divisions that occur in churches all around the world – and the conflicts and division we went through a couple years ago. The truth of God's Word is this: No one is immune from being taken in by false teachers. And no one is immune from becoming a false teacher. And no one is immune from being taken in by the teaching a false, a fake gospel. Our only help and hope is our submission to Jesus Christ and truth of the Word of God. In John 15:7-8 Jesus declared: *"If you abide in me, (submit to me) and my words (the truth of God's Word) abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."* Amen!