

Don't Be Fooled

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By Pastor Sharon Tidd

Anyone ever found yourself needing to caution someone about the people they're hanging with? I have on a few occasions, and it's never an easy conversation! As I read 2 Peter 2, I got the feeling that Peter found himself in that place. As we shared last week, he knew his time on earth was coming to an end soon, so this was his last opportunity to share the things that mattered most for the believers who would remain. There was plenty of trouble in the wind. Outside the church, persecution of Christians was at an all-time high. Inside the church, false teachers who had become impatient with Christ's delay were claiming that He wasn't coming back. And worse yet, they were concluding that that gave them license to live however they pleased, certain that when they died they'd still go to heaven and all would be well. These false teachers were doing their very best to drag others into their lifestyles; lifestyles that had again become steeped in sin ... heresy, exploitation, slander, pride, drunkenness, gluttony, adultery, greed ... just some highlighted by Peter. He doesn't pull any punches as he describes the lives they are living; lives they are encouraging other believers (especially new Christians – verse 18) to embrace! He says, "They promise

freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity!” (verse 19). For Peter, these were the last people he wanted his converts to be hanging out with!

Some of what Peter says is a little hard to hear, isn't it? He comes across as extremely judgemental, which seems odd given Jesus' instructions to “judge not, lest you be judged”

(Matthew 7:1). But remember, these are God's words, as Peter had declared (2 Peter 1:21). Peter is writing here as one “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). God is righteous and just in his evaluation of these false teachers, and the words Peter writes reflect God's assessment. Factor in the fact that Peter is like a spiritual Dad to the Christians he is writing to, and you can understand the depth of emotion that he brings to this Word from the Lord. He doesn't want his spiritual children to be pulled away from the path of righteousness by wicked men who claim to be Christ-followers.

Peter knew with certainty that Christ was coming back in victory to claim His own. And Peter understood that at His Return all would stand before God's judgement throne to give an account for their lives. The false teachers Peter warned about would not fare well on that day (verse 20-21). Their lives at that moment gave proof to the proverbs, “A dog returns to its vomit” and “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud” (verse 22)!

Peter did not want those that he had led to Jesus to be fooled by these false teachers. He didn't want true believers to be tricked into sacrificing the life of truth and righteousness God offered for false promises of "freedoms" that could not bring life. Peter says, "These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. (verse 17)" Jesus is the Living Water! Walking with Him, in righteousness, brings refreshing; it quenches our soul's thirst for real life!

Peter has already reminded these believers of the importance of "doing the math!" ... of adding to their God-given faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love – the things that would make them effective and secure in their calling as Christ-followers (1 Peter 1:5-7). He's also reminded them of the importance of "holding to truth!" ... of remembering and living out the teachings of the Gospel, as declared in the Scriptures (1 Peter 1:19-21). Now, as he continues his letter, he cautions them with everything within him, "Don't be fooled!" And that message is something we need to hear just as strongly today.

There are many within the Christian Church who make false promises of wealth and prosperity and moral freedom. Their teachings counter the Word of God which calls us to be live good and holy lives ... calls us to sacrifice and put others first ... calls us to walk with God in humility and poverty of spirit in this

world. Don't be fooled! Hold to Truth! Do the Math! Any within the Church who claim that "in Christ" we are freed to live as we please, are not speaking God's Words! The calling of a Christ-follower is to live as Jesus lived, in truth and righteousness, love and sacrifice.

To counter the false teachings of his day, Peter argues in favour of Christ's return and God's certain judgement by looking to the past where God has shown Himself to be a God of righteousness and justice. When one third of the angels fell with Satan, in judgement for their wickedness God banned them from Heaven and His holy presence (verse 4). When the great flood came, it came in judgement on the wicked. But Noah, the righteous one, and his family were spared (verse 5). When Sodom and Gomorrah was torched by God for its sin and lawlessness, Lot (who was tormented by the wickedness he saw all around him) was rescued and saved (verses 6-8). When the diviner Balaam was tempted by the promise of wealth, God had his own donkey rebuke him to get him back on the narrow path (verses 15-16)! There were plenty of historical examples to choose from; all recorded in the Holy Scriptures which God has given as "light" (2 Peter 1:19). Each of the events chosen by Peter affirms both the righteousness and justice of our God. History shows that the wicked will be judged while the righteous will be saved. Peter declares, "The Lord knows how to rescue godly

men from trials and how to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgement” (verse 9). “Especially,” he says, “those who follow the corrupt desires of the sinful nature and despise authority” (verse 10).

Peter is, in essence, crying out to his brothers and sisters, saying, “Do not be fooled! These teachers are wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15).

Accepting their teachings, following their example, will cost you big time! God is holy and righteous, and He will punish those who choose unrighteousness (verse 10).” Peter is confident that the harm that these evil teachers have done will be paid back to them because God is a just judge (verse 13)!

So what are we to do today in response to this teaching from God, given through Peter? How do we heed the warning, “Don’t be fooled?” I think there are five practical things that we can do:

1. Use the light of Scripture as our litmus test. Any teaching, inside or outside the Church, that contradicts the Word of God is not of God! If you don’t know the Word, spend more time reading and studying it. The better you know the Word the more effective you will be at using it to test the teachings you hear.
2. Trust the Spirit of God as your primary teacher. Rely on Him to help you discern the truth as you listen to preachers and teachers in the Church.

Pray to Him to guide your understanding as you sit under biblical teaching.

3. Recognize that true teachers “do the math”, “hold to truth”, and “walk the walk”.

If a Christian leader is pursuing “freedoms” that don’t reflect godly values and standards, and is trying to draw you along, walk away! True Christian leaders are eagerly pursuing God’s righteous ways!

4. Live out Christ’s righteousness. Jesus’ life and ministry is carefully recorded in Scriptures, providing a solid example for us to follow. He lives within us, through the Spirit, enabling us to live in righteousness. If being like Jesus is your heart’s true desire, you won’t be fooled and led astray!

5. Remember, God is a Just Judge. If you stay close to Him and walk in His ways, you need not fear the Day of Judgement. We have been saved by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ. That gift of salvation can only be lost if we choose to walk away ... if we choose “to turn our backs on the sacred commands” as the false teachers of Peter’s day had (verse 21).

Trust God’s goodness to rescue you from trials and keep you steadfast in your faith until Christ calls you Home!

Don't be fooled! The life God offers you through Jesus Christ is rich and abundant and free, but it is a life of truth and righteousness. Anything less, is counterfeit! Choose the real deal. Choose Jesus and His Righteousness. It won't always be easy; trials will come; temptations will arise ... but God will be with you and will hold you safe if you keep your trust in Him.