

The Consequences of False Teaching

2 Peter 1

Brothers and sisters, last I week I asked you to consider how you would feel if you found out that the money we've been giving out to bless people in the name of Jesus... was fake.

And if this were to be true... I asked you to consider whether or not our project would actually still be blessing people.

Now these were rhetorical questions because the money we are giving out is not fake, its genuine, and we all know we wouldn't be blessing anyone by giving them counterfeit money.

It would, in fact, render the whole project and all our efforts ineffective and any good results that occurred would be undermined and become unproductive.

And the same is true brothers and sisters when the Church passes on fake good news about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, sin, salvation and scripture.

The only difference is that with fake cash you'll probably find out pretty quickly that you've been duped with a counterfeit – its not like you're going to take that \$100 bill and keep it stashed away for years and years until you finally use it.

But with false teaching – with fake good news – the consequences are delayed and you might not realize that you've got a forgery on your hands until much later.

It's like buying an imitation product that doesn't hold up or perform properly and malfunctions when you use it.

Like installing what you thought was a top of line fire-alarm system in your house years ago, only to find out it was fake when you had a fire... it didn't work and your home was completely destroyed and you and your family were lucky to have escaped with your lives.

That's how the consequences of false teaching eventually catch up to us.

False teachings will subtly undermine our faith and our "christian" life in such a way that that renders it ineffective and unproductive, but you won't really notice it until a major issue confronts us or we go through a crisis in life and even worse – when we have to stand before God as our judge, and only then do we discover we've believed in false teaching and been duped with fake-good news.

Now brothers and sisters, you need to know that the potential of this happening to believers is what keeps good pastors up at night – and as we learned last week it was also caused the Apostle Peter major concern as well.

And so he wrote this letter to the church, to address the problem of false-teachings and to equip believers to recognize and reject them and re-affirm the true apostolic teaching which he had passed on to them as an eyewitness to Jesus Christ.

So we are studying the letter of 2 Peter this month and this morning we're looking at chapter 1 to see what Peter has to say to us about false teachers teachings, so that... when major issues confront us as believers (like human sexuality) or when we go through some crisis in life (like a pandemic) our faith is genuine and will do what it is supposed to do for us in these situations and help us persevere to eventually survive standing before God as our judge.

So please get out your bibles and turn to 2 Peter 1:1 and make sure you are reading along because we're going to go through these verses and unpack what they have to teach us.

Ok – so the letter starts off with Peter giving his credentials. He is a "*servant and an apostle*" of Jesus Christ. So right off the bat there is advice for us here, check people's credentials. Who is it that is giving you teaching or promoting an idea and what is their relationship to Jesus?

Additionally – are they serving your faith and trust in Jesus with their teaching or are they promoting themselves and

their clever ideas? Peter learned about servant leadership at the last supper when Jesus washed his feet and then told the disciples *“the servant is not greater than the master, nor is the messenger (apostle) greater than the one who sent him”* (John 13) So is someone trying to outshine Jesus with their insights or are they shining a light on Jesus with their teaching?

This truth obviously went deep for Peter because it forms what he uses as his teaching and leadership credentials – a humble servant and messenger (apostle) of Jesus Christ the LORD. His credentials point people to Jesus.

And this letter is written to those who have *“received a faith as precious (or just as good as) ours”* So again – right off the bat Peter is offering believers the needed assurance that if you trust and believe in Jesus Christ’s righteousness instead of your own, your faith is just as good as an Apostle’s faith, its not inferior or deficient in any way.

And this is a first line of defence against false teachers, because they will take advantage of our doubts about whether

our faith is good enough, our uncertainty about whether God truly accepts us as we are, or our wondering if there is some sort of “secret” to the “abundance and amazing Christian life” that we need to be let in on.

So brothers and sisters Peter assures us at the start of this letter, the benefits of our faith *“grace and peace are ours in abundance”* not through any sort of additional knowledge, but through the straightforward regular knowledge *“of God and Jesus our Lord”* (vs2)

So the letter gets off to a very reassuring start for believers and then Peter gets right into the practical matters in vs. 3-7. Now we don’t realize this as we read it in English but in the language and terms he uses in these verses, Peter is actually mimicking the presentation of the false teachers.

You see once the false teachers had made their self-serving assertion that your faith and beliefs were inadequate, they would then dangle their goods in front of you by describing how their additional knowledge would make up for that

deficiency and allow you to truly experience “*divine power*” or live a “*godly life*” or to be enlightened and “*know what is really going on*” and then you could “*escape the corruption in this world caused by evil desires.*”

These are pseudo-religious terms, and Peter uses them because many people were pre-occupied with them – they would have been “*buzz-words*” for that time in the same way that people today are pre-occupied with “*living your best life possible*” or “*being tolerant and woke*” or escaping “*oppression*” and “*being true to yourself.*”

Now here’s the brilliant part. By incorporating these terms to explain – once again - how the apostolic faith is fully sufficient he simultaneously asserts that the teachings associated with these terms are false and insufficient.

If he were writing this letter today it might sound like this “*His divine spark has given us everything we need in order to live our best possible life and be true to ourselves, through the inside information of him who called us by His own glory and*

goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you can “connect with the universe and become woke” having escaped the “oppression and marginalization” in this world caused by “systemic inequality and power imbalances.”

When I say it this way you all recognize these buzz-words and what they refer to, and you know its not Apostolic faith, but the ways in which I’m spinning these phrases to describe Christian teaching makes them somewhat correct – and thus somewhat corrected - from the false teachings they represent.

For example “*living our best possible life and being true to ourselves*” reflects the false belief that our ultimate purpose comes from how much potential we achieve in this life and that each of us is accountable only to ourselves in the end.

However, when I use this phrase and spin it to communicate the apostolic truth that Christ’s redemption restores human beings for God’s original intentions so that we are true to his purpose and we receive the best life He created us for, it kind

of discredits the phrase's original meaning. Do you see how that works?

Ok – So now that the sufficiency and completeness of apostolic faith has been established, he must encourage believers not to use that as an excuse to behave badly.

Because brothers and sisters, false teachers are often so intent on advancing their ideology they believe the ends justify the means and they bully and slander and cancel those who disagree with them, and their false teachings will offer some kind of loop-hole that minimizes the importance of behavior or provides an excuse or loop-hole for sin.

So in vs. 5-7, Peter gives us a list of interconnected virtues that believers must exhibit in their lives and add to their faith, such as goodness, knowledge, self-control, etc... not to make up for some deficiency of the faith – but to demonstrate what the true apostolic faith is capable of producing in one's life.

And displaying all of these virtues is an attractive testimony and Christian witness to the non-believers of Peter's day, who very much valued them as part of living a virtuous life.

If Peter were to have written this list today it might have gone something like this *“add to your faith, morality and to morality, self-understanding, and to self-understanding, tolerance, and to tolerance, diversity, and to diversity, equality and to equality, love.”*

Not because Peter needs to describe the apostolic faith with contemporary terms – but because contemporary terms need to be redefined and corrected by the apostolic faith – especially love.

So, vs. 5-7 are especially helpful to us in addressing the fake good news about love that is currently circulating in the church. I'm not going to go into great detail here, but its enough to notice how Peter sets up this list, the virtues are interconnected with each other, each one leads to the next, and this clearly shows that what it means to Love someone, is

specifically defined by all these other virtues and thus “Love” can not be a vague excuse for people in the church to just “*live and let live.*”

In fact if we are using “Love” to mean “*Live and let Live*” then truly we have become as Peter describes in vs.8 “*unproductive and ineffective*” in what we know about Jesus Christ and we are nearsighted and blind as he says in vs.9 and we have truly forgotten that we were “*cleansed from past sins*” because there is no need for cleansing from sin when you “*live and let live.*”

Now the good news brothers and sisters – the real good news in this chapter is that we can counter the consequences of fake good news, we can avoid them – it doesn’t have to turn out that way for us.

And last week Sunday we looked at the rewards which come from exercising our calling to discern that Peter describes in vs. 10-11 and I’ll summarize that by stating that if we simply act on the faith that was given to us when God chose (elected)

to save us, we will not be duped by fake-good news and those acts of faith become instances where we experience Christ’s Kingdom in this life – and assures us that we will be welcomed into it in the next life.

That’s genuine good news brothers and sisters – hang on to that, and don’t forget it.

Now the next section of this chapter in vs. 12-15 shows just how much Peter has matured from his early days as an impulsive disciple.

Instead of chastising the believers that they have been lazy and negligent in remembering the faith, or saying their knowledge and faith thus far is inadequate for the task of discerning and needs some additional insight (wouldn’t that be ironic) which he will now teach them, or saying something prideful like “*of course you missed this falsehood, that’s something only very experienced apostles like myself would recognize – you’re lucky I’m still around...*”

Peter humbly reminds them “*they are firmly established in the truth they already have*” and he doesn’t need to give them deeper or special insights that he’s come up with to combat falsehood, he only needs to remind them of what they already have.

And for as much as he has instructed believers themselves to “*make every effort*” (vs. 5,10) he himself will do so as well. He says “*I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things*” (vs.15)

Now as we learned last week - this is why Peter wrote this letter to them – so they could have something written down to remind them. But Peter’s efforts also include lending his credentials to endorse what the other apostles have written down and shared in the gospel accounts.

And out of all the experiences they had as apostles with Jesus, Peter refers to Jesus’ transfiguration in vs. 16-18 as the defining episode of apostolic and gospel testimony.

Which is curious... why not refer to the crucifixion or their encounters with Jesus after his resurrection??

Well here’s the issue brothers and sisters, most fake good news about Jesus acknowledges that Jesus existed and that he was crucified, but it reduces Jesus in some way to being just a good teacher who symbolized what is possible with our capacity for god consciousness.

Or he is painted as a historical figure who spoke truth to power and died an unfortunate death as a result – which hopefully inspires us to be better people and challenge authoritarianism and stand up for the oppressed.

And any encounters with the resurrected Jesus that we find in the gospels are dismissed as being – like Peter says - “*cleverly invented stories*” and we must remember that Jesus’ resurrection was an unwitnessed event.

But – at the transfiguration – Peter, James and John were all eyewitnesses to Jesus’ revealing of his divine glory and power,

and they saw Jesus' speaking with Moses and Elijah, and then they heard the voice of Yahweh declare "*this is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased*" and all these many years later Peter considers this event to be the one event... which best defines and proves the genuine good news about who Jesus truly is.

So Which means that we would do well to remember and use the details of what happened on that mountain to discern fake good news. Any teachings which claim Jesus is just a human being, or tries to separate Jesus from the Law and the Prophets, or pit him against the Law and Prophets or denies that Jesus fulfills the Law and Prophets - are false!

As a matter of fact, Peter wants believers to understand that the Law and Prophets, the Old Testament, "*the prophetic message*" as he calls it in vs. 19 is completely reliable.

In contrast to how false teaching and fake good news will render our faith ineffective and unproductive – Peter wants believers to know that the Old Testament is a reliable means

by which we can be reminded of and remember the apostolic faith.

Listen to how he endorses it - you could almost picture this as a blurb on the back of a book cover... "*You would do well to pay attention to this book's prophetic message, as to a light shining in a dimly dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*" I guess we could call that a glowing review!!

So, studying and reading and meditating upon the Old Testament scriptures and how they point forward to Jesus Christ helps us to identify genuine truth, causing us to see it standing out as a warm inviting light amidst dull and dismal group of imitations and forgeries.

And it will continue to that for us until the Lord Jesus returns and our faith becomes sight. Amen!

But, that's not all that the Peter is implying in this endorsement brothers and sisters.

He wants us to know that the Old Testament is also fully capable of introducing us to apostolic faith in Jesus Christ – bringing us out of the darkness of trusting in our own efforts and other false beliefs... into the light and a new day of receiving a faith and righteousness that comes from our God and Savior Jesus Christ - the morning star rising in our hearts.

Much like the Apostle Paul says in his 2nd letter to Pastor Timothy 3:15- albeit a lot less poetically - that the Holy Scriptures *“are able to make you wise for salvation in Jesus Christ!”*

And the Peter is quick to point out that the capacity of the Old Testament to do this does not come from any one particular prophet, lest this turn into an opportunity for more false teaching, but rather it is from God - who spoke through the prophets *“as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

So Peter makes the same point about the prophetic message of the scriptures as he does about Jesus - they are both divine and come from God, and any teaching that would reduce that

their divinity or reliability or their sufficiency... is a false teaching, it is fake good news and we must call it out as such and denounce it so that we avoid the consequences of it.

There is no small amount of irony in the fact that if for some reason we are deceived into believing that our faith in Jesus Christ is somehow inadequate, or that the apostolic testimony is insufficient – that what we end up adding on to our faith in order to make it adequate and sufficient will actually be the very thing that will prove to be inadequate and insufficient when our faith is put to the test and when we stand before God as our judge.

So, what do we do with Peter’s exhortation to us this morning?

Brothers and sisters let us make every effort... to ensure that the apostolic faith we have received from God in Jesus Christ, where the Holy Spirit convicts us that we are sinners, unfaithful covenant breakers in all areas of our lives, who need Jesus Christ’s covenant faithfulness in place of our own wilful

disobedience, who need the blood of Christ to pay for that sin, and who realize that apart from God's grace and mercy electing to save us in this way – we would be lost and condemned and damned to hell for eternity...

Let us ensure that such apostolic faith is spinning and countering whatever pseudo-religious buzz words and concepts make their way into our lives.

So that becoming woke means that our eyes are opened up to see this spiritual reality...

So that being tolerant and accepting means that we extend the same grace of forgiveness to others as Christ did in choosing to save sinners like ourselves – before we had even realized we were sinners!

So that living our best lives means co-operating with the Holy Spirit as He transforms us and give us hearts that desire to be obedient to God's law and His created design for this world, in anticipation and preparation for His Kingdom in the next.

And let us live in such a way that our actions and our virtues testify to the sufficiency that apostolic faith – and Agape Love.

That the gospel of Jesus Christ is sufficient on its own to combat racism, injustice and inequality – and does not need to employ violence, or intimidation or cancellation tactics as false teachings do - because Christian victory comes through defeat and our life comes through His death.

And in this time of dismal ideological darkness let us continue to pay attention to the scriptures. They are light for us – pointing us to the coming dawn of the new day when the gospel of Jesus Christ will be completed at our Lord's return and the entire creation will be caught up in the glory and majesty of Jesus Christ – and we will be eyewitnesses to it.

And brothers and sister – let us make every effort to bless others, serving them as messengers with genuine good news about Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and sparing them from the consequences of fake-good news.

Amen.