

"Counterfeit Liberty" - 2 Peter 2:12-22

At the beginning of this second Chapter in 2 Peter, we read the following:

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. (2 Peter 2:1)

This is why Peter wrote this letter. It is designed to protect Christians from a danger that comes from within visible Christianity.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is clearly presented in the Bible. There is only one truth. The Bible delivers this truth. But there have always been those who will do their best to twist it to their own gain. Paul tells Timothy:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, (1 Timothy 4:1-2)

In Second Timothy, he repeats the warning:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

That warning is also for you and it is for me. You must recognize false teachers. You must turn away from them. You must reject them.

Just as there have always been false teachers, there will always be those who are vulnerable to these false teachers. How does that happen? Well, first of all, understand that false teachers gain power by telling you what you want to hear. Their message will sound good to you, but that's because they appeal to your flesh. They appeal to your baser instincts.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

One of the things human beings long for is freedom. We don't like to be in bondage. "Give me liberty or give me death," cried Patrick Henry and it is not an unreasonable demand. God wants us to have liberty. God wants to break our chains because in our natural state, we are slaves. We are slaves to our sin nature, and we are slaves to Satan.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to give us liberty and *if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (John 8:36)* We naturally long for that liberty, but what false teachers offer is phony. False teachers offer counterfeit liberty.

Let's read our text for this morning. I'll be starting with 2 Timothy 2:12 and reading to the end of the chapter.

But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as

those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A DOG RETURNS TO HIS OWN VOMIT," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter 2:12-22)

Peter goes to great lengths to describe the characteristics of false teachers. He's pretty blunt. I don't think anyone would wonder what he thinks about these guys.

Let me just briefly highlight some of these characteristics. Peter says they are like natural brute beasts, that is, unthinking animals acting on instinct alone. They are dangerous and they need to be caught and done away with. They apparently are not able to comprehend the beautiful truth of scripture, so they speak evil of it. They slander God's truth. They slander Jesus Christ and as we covered last week, their judgment is inevitable. They will receive the wages of their unrighteousness. And what is the wages of sin? Death! An eternal swim in the Lake of Fire.

Peter calls them spots and blemishes. They feast with the Church, pretending to be of us. In the First Century, Christians would often share a communal meal as part of their worship. We read about it in Acts, for example:

*So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.** (Acts 2:46-47)*

They had pot lucks too! They called them "love feasts".

But of course there were tares among the wheat. There were those who masqueraded as Christians and participated in the communal meals. They may have looked like Christians, but were not saved.

The same thing happens today, and it's not all bad. In fact, I pray unbelievers would come to our worship services. I want them to enjoy our pot luck fellowships. How better to allow them to experience the peace and joy and love and freedom we all have in Christ? And perhaps they will learn to want that saving grace for themselves.

But I don't want them teaching Sunday School! I don't want them leading Children's Church. I don't want them discipling or mentoring baby Christians. We don't want unbelievers teaching us about the Bible; that would be disastrous because those who are unsaved, still have eyes full of adultery. They cannot cease from sin. Their hearts are trained

in covetous practice. They are still accursed! If we allow them to teach or to lead, they will entice unstable soles. (verse 14)

Peter compares them to Balaam. You can read about him back in Numbers 22-24. He was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the nation Israel. You see, he was a prophet, but he tried to cash in on his gift. He was a prophet for hire, misusing the gift God had given him and of course, God would have none of it. When Balaam tried to curse Israel, God forced him to bless the nation instead.

And so later, Balaam went undercover. He worked with the Moabites to seduce the nation into sexual sin ... that's in Numbers 25. Balaam was driven by a love of money and material reward, not by a love for God. And boy, doesn't that describe so many of the false teachers that fill the airwaves and Christian bookshelves today?

Listen, these folks are out to get you. They are agents of Satan trying to entice you away from God's truth. Here is what they use for bait:

For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. (2 Peter 2:18)

The bait is "great swelling words of emptiness". Their sales presentation is slick. As I said before, it's going to sound really good but they allure through the lusts of the flesh. Their lure is lewdness.

Today, the pitch often goes something like this: They say, if you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are saved, saved by grace alone. (Okay, so far so good. It's true, but the most effective lies are always salted with truth.) But then they say if you are saved by grace alone, it really doesn't matter how you live your life now. You can live anyway you want. You can have anything you want. You can do anything you want. In fact, many assert that you cannot sin anymore so whatever you really want to do is okay.

Really, they actually say that?

Yes! There are so-called Christian teachers who actually teach that.

Have you ever heard of the "Word of Faith" movement? (I'm probably going to step on some toes, here, but if I step on yours, I beg you to do some prayerful soul-searching.) If you haven't heard of the Word of Faith, I'll bet you have heard about some of the high-profile pastors and teachers that are part of this doctrinal system: Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Paul and Jan Crouch, Fred Price, Joel Osteen. There are many more. I suspect some of you might even have one or more of their books at home. They are very influential. They are very popular.

There is a fair amount of diversity within the movement, but basically, here is what it's all about: They believe in what they call the "force of faith". They believe that this faith-force can be manipulated by human language. Before the fall in the garden, Adam and Eve had unfettered access to this faith-force. According to them, Adam and Eve had incredible, God-like creative power. They could even speak things into existence by engaging this force through language. Of course, Satan messed that up, so Jesus had to intervene, die on the cross and then send the Holy Spirit to restore our ability to manipulate this faith-force.

Sound a bit strange? Yes, it is. It is nowhere close to Biblical, but here is where it gets completely out of control. The Word of Faith preachers teach that we can manipulate this faith-force with our own words. It's up to us. If we have enough faith, there is nothing we cannot do. In fact, God Himself is subject to the faith-force, which means, if you have enough of the right kind of faith you can get God to do anything you want Him to do. You

can name it and claim it. You want health? Just speak the right words with enough faith and you've got it. You want wealth? Learn to manipulate the faith-force. Oh, and if you're having trouble with that, send a generous donation my way and I'll manipulate the faith-force for you. Or buy my book and I'll teach you how.

Of course they don't actually say it like I did, but that's the core of their doctrine.

Now, none of this lines up with what Scripture teaches, but that's okay with them because they say personal revelation always trumps scripture. "It doesn't matter what the Bible says, God spoke to me. I am God's anointed. If you question me, well, you are speaking evil of God's anointed and you are blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Of course you know, that is the only unforgivable sin."

These are lies from the pit of hell, people. These are great swelling words of emptiness. They entice unstable souls. Unstable souls are those that do not have a firm foundation. Their faith is built on sand rather than the Rock.

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

So your faith must be built ...

... on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, (Ephesians 2:20)

And here, in this Book, is where we find the foundation. It can be found nowhere else. You won't find it in some sort of creative revelation. You won't find it is an extra-Biblical vision. You won't find it with some TV huckster.

Please, don't take the bait false teachers are dangling in front of you.

Look again, if you will, at verse 19.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. (2 Peter 2:19)

They passionately promise freedom. They say you can be free from the bondage of poverty, free from the bondage of illness, free from the bondage of family strife, but they are promising counterfeit liberty. What you need to be set free from the bondage of sin. If a TV preacher tells you that Christians cannot sin, he is pitching a pack of lies.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:10)

Theologians have a word for this heresy; it's called antinomianism. Antinomianism describes the teaching that Christians are under no obligation to obey the laws of ethics or morality. In other words, if you are saved by grace, you cannot sin anymore, so do whatever you want. It is a sinful twisting of the concept of God's grace. Counterfeit liberty!

We are saved by the grace of God alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. That's what Ephesians 2:8 says. You cannot be saved by any righteous works because even our righteous works are stained by the fall.

And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; (Isaiah 64:6)

We cannot be saved by good works, but we are saved for good works.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ **Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)*

Authentic liberty frees you from your sin nature and allows you to perform the good works God has prepared for you to do. Authentic liberty is only available in Jesus Christ. It is only available to those who confess Him as Lord and believe on His holy name. The liberty we find in Christ does not free us to do whatever we want; it frees us to do what God wants.

Those Word of Faith preachers are placing their will ahead of God's will. How do you think that's going to work out for them? Well, in the short term, maybe not bad because they are on top of the Ponzi scheme. They are still milking gullible people for their hard-earned cash but make no mistake, God is not mocked!

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. (2 Peter 2:20)

There is a Biblical principle at work here. Jesus puts it this way:

And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:47-48)

There are many who hear the truth of the gospel, even participate in the fellowship of believers, the *koinonia*, listen to the word preached, and maybe even make a strong statement of faith, but they don't really believe. They have no fear of God. They represent the seed sown among thorns, and the cares of the world soon choke out what little faith they might have had. Peter says that these folks are worse off than if they had never heard the gospel.

For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. (2 Peter 2:21)

You folks here have heard the gospel preached. You know that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and the wages of our sin is eternal death, eternal torment. But God still loves you and God proves His love in that while we were still sinners, Jesus Christ died for us. The eternal Son of God came to earth as a human being and shared our common lot. He was tempted in all ways, just like we are, but He never sinned and then He took that perfect, sinless life to the cross to pay for your sins and my sins and the sins of everyone who believes. He was buried in a rich man's tomb, but on the third day he rose from the dead and appeared to many witnesses. And He is living today so you can have a living relationship with Him. To apprehend that relationship, all you have to do is call on His name, confess your sins, and accept Him as your Lord. If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

You've heard the Gospel. Do you believe it? If you do, then don't let yourself be drawn away by false teachers who promise a counterfeit liberty.

But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A DOG RETURNS TO HIS OWN VOMIT," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Peter 2:22)

Please don't return to your own vomit. Don't wander away from Jesus and indulge in your sinful flesh. It matters how you live. Your life is hidden in Christ. Your duty is to glorify Him in everything you do.

Not my will, precious Lord, but Yours be done in my life!