

DANGER!

2 Peter 2:1-3

Trinity Presbyterian Church

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In Peter's first pastoral letter, the Spirit was addressing Jesus followers who were being abused and persecuted for believing in and obeying Jesus. He wrote to encourage these Christians to stand strong and live lives that bring glory to God – even under persecution.

Now, 3 years after his first pastoral letter was circulated among the churches of the first century AD, Peter's second pastoral letter warns believers about the dangers of false teachers. Knowing dangers can help you avoid the danger – just as true today as it was more than 2000 years ago when Peter wrote this letter under the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

In the first chapter of this letter, we learned that Christians must grow in knowledge, fruitfulness, and obedience as their faith is anchored in Jesus. This growth enabled the believers of Peter's day – and us as well – to discern the truth so they can stand against the pressure of false teaching.

As we explore this second chapter of Peter's second pastoral letter, we will see the fact that there are, indeed, **false teachers** among them – and us - the **specific lies** that these teachers are pushing, and the **dangers of following** these false teachings. All things relevant to our day, too.

We live in dangerous times. We see warnings on the news about floods and fires, diseases, smash-and-grab thefts, viruses in our bodies and viruses in our computers, identity theft, cyber-crime, and the latest price increases. We get warning lights on the dashboards of our cars. Groceries have warnings that they contain sugar or artificial colors or nuts or gluten. Medicines meant to cure or alleviate symptoms carry many warnings of side effects or interactions with other medications. People fear pollution of air, water, and soil. People fear climate change. Yikes! It's just too dangerous to get out of bed! And dangerous if you stay there because your muscles will atrophy and there are mites in your sheets and you simply HAVE to get up to take care of certain things!

But those are all relatively minor dangers compared with the dangers of false teachers. The lies and heresies they push can lead people into an eternity under the just judgment of God almighty.

False teachers are nothing new. Even in the Old Testament – thousands of years BEFORE Jesus walked this earth – there were false prophets who contradicted God's true prophets. Why all this lying and leading astray? Just how dangerous are all these false teachers? How do we discern the truth to avoid listening to and following false teachers?

These 3 verses contain the truth and our response – **Because Jesus the Absolute Ruler has bought us, believers must follow the way of truth.** (vv 1 and 2)

First of all, Jesus says in the gospel of John, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life...."* Even in the original language, the definite article equivalent to our English word "the" is in this verse showing us that Jesus is not one way among many, one truth among many or one life among many, but He is unique. He is the one TRUE truth, the one true way to God the Father (He also says no one comes to the Father except through me), and the one true and eternal life (as promised by God when He said that He loved the world so much that He sent His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life).

All of this is absolutely true (don't let anyone ever tell you there is no such thing as absolute truth) because Jesus is the sovereign Lord, the absolute ruler, the highest Power, the very Author of truth.

To make his claim on us more binding than simply being the truth, our sovereign Lord has bought us! Not with silver or gold or anything of this world that is of passing value, but with His own blood – His life. His life is of infinite value because He is not only perfect man, but He is infinite, eternal, holy God. We are reminded of this truth again and again – we, those chosen by God and trusting Him – have been bought. We see this in 1 Cor. 7:23; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18 and 19; and Revelation 5:9.

So because we have been bought by the life of our sovereign Lord, we MUST live in the way of truth – His way, His truth – in all of life.

But Satan and his minions hate us, hate the truth, hate Jesus, and hate His church. So Satan sends false teachers into the church to try to deceive Christ's followers, lead us astray, and cause us horrible damage. Thus, this letter, written by the Apostle Peter by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to equip Jesus' followers to **beware**, to **recognize** false teachers and their lies and to **live** lives of truth that glorify God.

We will see from these 3 verses (2 Peter 2, verses 1 to 3) 3 general areas where false teachers try to lead God's people astray. But with every negative lesson and command, there is also a positive, implied command. In teaching on the 10 Commandments, for instance, the teaching is split into two parts – what the law prohibits and what it requires. So in the law about not murdering – we teach that anything leading to the death of another is prohibited. So by logical deduction, anything that leads to the health and life of another is required. We will use that same reasoning this morning as we consider the ways false teachers try to lead us astray through **sensuality**, **greed**, and **lying**.

Sensuality (v 2)

"Many will follow their sensuality and because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed." Let's examine this sentence a bit to get a sense of how strong the wording is in the original language. Even the word to follow is strong. We've probably all played games of following a leader – Simon Says, Follow the Leader, Freeze and others. These games can be fun and teach us to observe carefully so we can imitate the leader and not be thrown out of the game. The word to follow in verse 2 is a strong word indicating wholly following, closely imitating, obeying.

Yellow flags should pop up when a leader demands complete allegiance and obedience to himself. Such a leader is inserting himself into a position that belongs only to the One who has bought us, Jesus, the Son of God.

But the word to follow is wimpy compared to the range of meanings for the Greek word for sensuality. Listen to these words that spill out of the word for sensuality – Licentiousness, debauchery, lewdness, filth, lasciviousness, wantonness, violent spite which rejects restraint and indulges in lawless insolence. This is not the casual glance or desire, but a consuming fire that becomes part of one's life and corrupts every relationship.

Because of shameful ways of living being taught, encouraged and modeled by false teachers and leaders, the way of truth, the way that glorifies God and blesses others, comes to bad repute and is, in fact, blasphemed – another strong word. When unbelievers, the world at large, see those who claim to be Christians acting and teaching others to act in blatantly ungodly ways, they will revile the way of Jesus, the name of Jesus, and all those who truly follow Him. They will speak evilly of Christ, his ways and his people.

We have all seen this happen in recent years when well known leaders and teachers are caught in lewd, filthy ways of living, rejecting restraint and indulging in lawless insolence. And the shame that sticks to Jesus' name, his people and his church as a result.

Sensuality and shameful ways are one of the marks of false teachers. When leaders and teachers are seen to be involved with pornography, adultery, homosexuality, and other sins of the body. When they teach that such things are insignificant or irrelevant to our Christian life; when they twist the Scriptures to seem to make these practices within the realm of godly living – BEWARE! God has warned against these sins consistently throughout his Word. Not just for false teachers, but for all of us!

How are we then to live? God's plan from the beginning was for marriage to be between one man and one woman. We see this in the second chapter of Genesis after God created Eve to be Adam's wife and helpmeet. Psalm 119:9 cautions us to keep our way pure by living according to God's Word. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 says this, *"Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."* A high and holy calling, indeed!

Another strong passage is in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 – *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress or wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you."*

When you compare your way of life with these passages, how do you measure up? Are your desires in line with God's will? What you think about? Are you careful with your eyes? What you put into your mind through your eyes is like what you put into your body through your mouth. If you don't eat from a dumpster, then don't look at the visual equivalent of a dumpster. Do you regard and interact with members of the opposite sex with respect, remembering that Jesus is right there with you?

What you do with your body is important, but it starts in your heart. *"A person may think their own ways are right, but the LORD weighs the heart."* Proverbs 21:2

God's will for us, his children, is holy, dignified living that glorifies God and benefits others – the way of truth – because Jesus, the Absolute Ruler has bought us.

Greed (v 3)

"And in their greed they will exploit you ..."

Another way false teachers try to lead people astray is in their greed. What is especially dangerous about this is that they will appeal to our own sinful greed even as they aspire to greater riches, power and publicity for themselves.

There are so many scams out there these days that it just makes your head spin. They come at you from every direction – TV ads, the internet, friends, the mail, even the Christian community. So many Africans we have known live in a survival mode that any hint that faith, obedience, praying the right way, saying the right words, or going to the right church might produce a windfall of God's blessings and they are all over it. It's called the prosperity gospel and is one of the biggest lies out there.

These false teachers will pick up a word, phrase or even a whole story from the Bible and twist it to their ends – and to the destruction of their followers. Their lies destroy hope, shipwreck people's faith, and tear families apart.

They will take passages like Jesus saying *"I have come that they might have life more abundantly"* and immediately turn it into a promise for financial abundance. Or they take the verse about Jesus becoming poor so that we can become rich and turn that into a theological argument for financial success. Or they extrapolate the verse about giving and it will be given to you to mean that, of course, the more you give, the more indebted God is to bless your finances.

These guys are very creative in interpreting verses and taking them out of context to mean what they want them to mean. And do you think they are concerned about your bank account? Well, maybe, but only insofar as they can get what's yours to become theirs. Their ultimate greedy goal is their own wealth. Send \$10 to my ministry and God will bless you with \$1000 in return! Uh-huh. Right! There's something wrong when an evangelist has multiple homes and a private jet and limousines even as he pretends to represent Christ who didn't even have a place of his own to lay his head. BEWARE! It's not just false teachers who are greedy! Greed is the motive for a LOT of sinful living.

How are we then to live? Paul warns the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 – *"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds."*

We are to live **wisely** – being **innocent** as doves, crafty as snakes exercising **discernment** and wisdom. We are to be **generous**, but not drawing attention to our giving. We are to **look out for the welfare of others** more than our own. Listen to these words from Jesus and his sermon on the mount in Matthew 6, verses 19-21 – *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

What are treasures in heaven? Basically anything we do, say, or think that gives glory to God. A kindness done in Jesus' name. A word of encouragement that acknowledges that the word came from Jesus. How we use the resources God has put into our care – time, talents and material goods.

Do you consciously think of the money and goods at your disposal as belonging to God and you are only the manager? That will have an impact on how you use those resources. They are not yours to use willy-nilly, but they came from God and belong to God. Would your bank account reveal greed – or generosity to the glory of God? How is your heavenly bank account? Rich with eternal deposits?

We must all take stock from time to time to confirm if we are bringing glory to God in all of our life or if we are greedily accumulating praise, goods, and attention that rightfully belong to God. Greed is the motive for pride, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth in its insatiable desire for MORE.

God's will for us, his children, is cheerful, generous living that glorifies God and benefits others – the way of truth – because Jesus, the Absolute Ruler has bought us.

Lying (v 3)

"...(T)hey will exploit you with false words."

False teachers speak false words. They quote God's truth, but pull it out of context and twist it to their own ends. They deny the truth and authority of God's Word. They subject God's Word to the culture instead of subjecting the culture to God's Word. They make false claims about themselves applying degrees and titles they haven't earned.

God has many harsh words about false teachers and prophets. God is truth and everything he says and does is true. Lying teachers and leaders are an affront, an insult, to him and his truth.

One of the 10 Commandments warns us about lying – bearing false witness. Proverbs 6:16-19 shows us how much God hates lying – *"There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, and feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies and one who sows discord among brothers."*

If God hates something and finds it an abomination, we must steer clear. He is not mocked. We reap what we sow. Listen to these words about the fate of liars from Revelation 21:8 – *"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."*

We are pretty free with the truth these days. In fact, so common is lying that people have very little faith in the media, politicians, and lawyers. But how often are our words less than totally true? "We must get together sometime." (Fingers crossed – and it never happens.) A friend (someone who deserves the truth) asks, "How are you today?" And you respond, "Fine." When in your heart you are far from fine. What would it hurt to say, "I'm struggling and would really appreciate your prayers."

Our standards for what we call a lie are pretty loose. God's standards are not. You can't build a friendship, a family, a business relationship on lies. God warns in the last part of verse 3 from our passage today, *"Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."* Messing with God has eternal consequences. BEWARE! False teachers play fast and loose with the truth. And because of your own propensity to add a little salt to a story, to speak or even think deceptively.

So how then are we to live? Just as God's Word has much to say about lying, it also has much to say about being truthful. Jesus tells us in his sermon on the mount to let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no". In other words, say what you mean and mean what you say. The prophet Zechariah in the Old Testament tells us – *"These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in our gates judgments that are true and make for peace."* Ephesians 4:25 tells us – *"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another."*

Telling the truth gives glory to God who is Truth and benefits our neighbor. Is what you say true? Is what you MEAN true? Do you keep in mind that God is present during every conversation? We are told in Matthew 12:36 – *"I tell you, on the day of judgment (we) will give account for every careless word (we) speak."* How many ways are you careless with the truth?

God's will for us, his children, is to speak, think, and mean the truth at all times to glorify God and benefit others – the way of truth – because Jesus, the Absolute Ruler has bought us.

Conclusion

In these 3 verses we have seen or deduced that **Because Jesus the Absolute Ruler has bought us, believers must follow the way of truth.** How do we follow the way of truth? We must be able to discern the truth and feed on the truth so that it fills our hearts and minds. Part of discerning the truth is knowing it and being able to tell when we are being led into untruthful ways, thoughts,

attitudes and desires. False teachers and leaders are always ready to try to lead us astray. They do this through, among other things, emphasizing sensuality, being greedy and lying. To avoid these traps, we must live in the way of truth guided by God's Word as he shows us how to live with mutual respect and dignity, being cheerful and generous givers, and being people of truth in thought, word and actions. God has told us plainly in his Word how we must live. He has shown us in the life of Christ what holy living looks like. He has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us and to remind us of Jesus' words.

But what do we do if we find ourselves enthralled with sensuality, captive to greed, hiding behind lies?

When the Spirit has shown you these sins, confess to Him. God has assured us that when we confess HE is faithful to forgive and to cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness.

First of all, we must know and worship Jesus as our savior, depending on nothing else for forgiveness, hope, eternal life and confidence to stand before God Almighty. Jesus, the Absolute Ruler, has bought you with his life. All you have to do is trust him. Do you?

May God help us to recognize and avoid false teachers and to walk in the way of truth at home, school, the market place – wherever we are – to his glory and the benefit of others.