

“WHAT FALLING AWAY LOOKS LIKE.”

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Scripture Texts: II Peter 2:1-3

Introduction.

The goal of chapter one was to encourage us and build up our faith that we would be diligent to make our calling and election sure.

Peter began by exhorting us to continue to cultivate a living, active, growing faith through virtue, knowledge, self-control, godliness and love. And he exhorts us to pay close attention to God’s Word as the lamp for our way in life.

The goal of chapter two is to warn us of the dangers if we don’t do that, and if in fact we wander away from our faith.

Not everyone follows the way of Jesus. Some follow cleverly devised myths (1:16), some blaspheme the way of truth and introduce destructive heresies (2:1-2), some are seduced by what their itching ears want to hear to suit their own passions (II Timothy 4:3).

If chapter one is the carrot, chapter two is the stick.

And if you think you are not in danger, you don’t have a good sense of how seductive and pleasing the easy path is. It’s led by man-pleasers, people to appeal to our wants and needs and desires.

II Peter 2:1-3, the serious impact of false teachers.

Peter is a faithful pastor. He loves his people and it is evident most when we warns them of danger and seeks to guard their souls from false teaching. The people of the churches he is writing to are under the influence of false prophets, false teachers, false pastors.

Peter says just as there were false prophets in the OT, there are false teachers in the NT times, and there are still false prophets and false teachers in our time. And as much of the falsehood come from within the church as from without.

As I have shared before, I warned my sons going to secular or Christian colleges, they both faced dangers to their souls. In secular colleges Satan is a roaring lion. In Christian colleges Satan is an angel of light. And of the two, the second is more dangerous because the second is much more subtle.

My brother lost his faith through the Bible and theology department at a Presbyterian college.

Don't be deceived into thinking that it can't happen here. That is exactly what Satan wants you to think, so you let down your guard. Of course, it can, stay alert.

This is not a far away problem. It is all around us. A previous pastor at a Whatcom County Church renounced the faith a couple of years ago. A pastor in my classis in OK lead this church astray to the point that the church finally folded. We have our own controversy in our own classis with a couple of pastors in Seattle who are not teaching and preaching in conformity with the Word of God and the orthodox position of our confessions.

There is a pastor in a CRC church in Michigan who has received attention over his holding to something called Kinism. I had never heard of it until last week. It is a heresy that is gaining traction in reformed circles. It basically says we should only stick with our own kind, we should only be involved with, worship with, and marry people of our same race.

I don't read GQ Magazine but I was put on to an article in the most recent issue about "21 Books You Don't Have to Read."

"The Holy Bible is rated very highly by all the people who supposedly live by it but who in actuality have not read it. Those who have read it know there are some good parts, but overall it is certainly not the finest thing that man has ever produced. It is repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious, foolish, and even at times ill-intentioned" (Jesse Ball).

We are post-modern now and post-Christian. Biblical authority has lost its hold. The Bible is old news, yesterday's news.

Peter's warning is just as relevant today as ever.

Notice the nature of Peter's warning is in the future tense. Many will follow, the truth will be blasphemed, they will exploit. Peter is not just writing about his day, nor is he just writing to his day. He is writing to all who live between Jesus' Ascension and Jesus' Second Coming.

What does a false teacher look like?

How can you recognize one? How can you protect yourself and your family and children?

First, they are devious, they don't come in the front door, but secretly through the side door. They disguise their teaching, it looks similar. To paraphrase the late great Francis Schaeffer, they will take one of our words or doctrines, unscrew the top, dump out the traditional meaning, put in some new meaning, and then screw the top back on. So, you won't be the wiser unless you ask the right questions and examine more deeply.

They are not clear, up front, they are vague, nebulous, nuanced, they twist meaning or change meaning. To the immature or weak Christian what they say can sound good, when in fact it is heresy.

It won't start with a "that's wrong" but with a "did God really say that." They use clever words, smooth and flattering words. They use words that make us feel good and comfortable. They avoid the "s" word, sin.

This is common among the health and wealth pastors. I heard Robert Schuller in a chapel service at my seminary tell us not to talk about sin, it was too negative.

Second, they will subtly deny the Gospel of Jesus Christ, denying parts of Jesus' teaching, saying things and doing things that were not compatible with a confession of Jesus is Lord.

They might deny Jesus just by not talking about Him, leaving Him out of the conversation. They might deny Him by saying He was just a man. Or most seriously of all they will deny His atoning work on the cross, denying He is the only way of salvation, denying that He had to bear the full wrath of God.

If Jesus is not absolutely central to their teaching and if the cross, the crucifixion and resurrection, are not central in their gospel, then they have a false gospel.

They are often known more by what they deny rather than what they affirm. Common denials are the inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, full deity of Jesus, salvation by faith alone or in Jesus alone, and an eternal hell.

Third, the fruit of their teaching will be destruction. It is not life-giving but death-giving. It is not the path of salvation, but the path of ruin. Those who teach this and those who follow will share a terrible destiny. God's terrible judgment hangs over them. Those who lead others into judgment face an especially terrible judgment. Woe to those who lead children astray.

Ideas have consequences, ideas lead somewhere. Everyone is on a trajectory.

Fourth, they will be popular. Many will follow. People are often attracted to what is new and different, the latest and greatest. It is scary how quickly people buy up the books promoting something novel.

The Power of Positive Thinking.

The Passover Plot.

The Prayer of Jabez.

The Da Vinci Code.

The Shack.

Your Best Life Now.

90 Minutes in Heaven; Heaven is for Real; The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven (not true).

Jesus Calling. It's not the voice of Jesus, but of a 21st century western woman.

"I knew that God communicated with me through the Bible, but I yearned for more. Increasingly, I wanted to hear what God had to say to me personally on a given day. I decided to listen to God with pen in hand, writing down whatever I believe He was saying" (Sarah Young).

A similar danger to the desire to be popular is the desire to be accepted which leads us to avoid controversy or conflict, to go along with the consensus.

This is true of our fear of saying too much about Genesis 1-3. We don't want to appear anti-science and anti-intellectual, so we waver on creation and lean toward evolution.

Or we don't like being told we support cosmic child abuse by a mean harsh vengeful God, so we back away from substitutionary atonement and redefine sin, repentance and holiness.

There is constant pressure on the evangelical church today to bend and accommodate its message to the culture.

From the inside the pressure appears as moralism, try harder to do better, that God blesses nice and good people; and legalism, do this and don't do that, keeping certain man-made rules to get God's favor.

We don't obey to get God's blessings. We obey in response to God's blessings, which are all grace.

Fifth, they are motivated by immorality and greed. Most cults and sects are centered around a denial of the Gospel in some form, and practice immorality and greed. They turn Christianity into a license for sin. They exploit the good will of believers for money.

They practice immorality under the cloak of religion, more interested in the sensual than the spiritual. They practice covetousness under the cloak of religion, profiting from others. Jesus and the disciples were all poor, and even what they had they shared.

Why doesn't it bother people when famous spiritual leaders live in multi-million dollar houses and have private planes and vacation in exotic places (I hope Catalina Island is OK). If there was full disclosure of their salaries and benefits then there would be some accountability.

Don't send money to TV preachers, to anyone who you don't know, and who isn't accountable to a board of elders.

God gives us local shepherds who live among us and are known by us, we can see the outcome of their lives and they are accountable to elders.

We must stand against anything that denies Jesus, exploits people and blesses immorality. The church in America must stop caving in to the pressure of our culture on sexuality. Advocating sexual immorality is heresy and an offense against our Lord who died to deliver us from our sexual sin. Practicing or promoting sexual activity outside of marriage is a denial of Jesus and His perfect wisdom for sexual fulfillment.

Implications and application.

We should not be surprised by how many false teachers and heretical teachings there are. Jesus said it would be that way and it always has been and certainly is today. The truth is you can't keep up with all of them.

The internet has made it easier than ever for wolves in sheep's clothing to infiltrate and harm the flock. We must be more vigilant and more discerning, testing the spirits and the teaching. Teach your children and grandchildren to be discerning.

There are computer tricks you can do to get your site moved up on the Google hit list. I notice when I am Googling any number of Christian topics that LDS sites feature prominently in the first few pages of search results.

I tested this by typing in Jesus. The second site was LDS. Bible, LDS was fourth. I typed God and by page three things were getting weird.

This world is a spiritual dangerous place to live, there are dangers all around us. Our enemies are without number. We are constantly being tempted to sin, to fall away, to be drawn away.

We live in a world of counterfeits. Fake news, fake products, fake jewelry, fake money, fake websites, fake IRS or Microsoft people on the phone. I had a fake grandson call me last week to bail him out of jail.

TV is filled with false teachers and preachers and healers. Satan is a counterfeiter promoting a false gospel.

We must know the Word of God. We must know the Gospel. When we know the real thing, we can better discern the counterfeits. We need to be discerning of what we read, especially on the internet.

We are helped and guided by the historical positions the church has taken through the ages. We can use the creeds and confessions as guides toward what is orthodox. What has been held and taught not just for a few years, but for centuries. It has stood the test of time.

Peter is dealing with teaching that is of the most serious kind, that denies the Lordship of Jesus and the teaching of the Bible and the call to living a holy and godly life.

What we believe matters, it matters eternally. Eternity is at stake. These are life and death concerns. So, we must be vigilant to watch our own life and doctrine closely. Guard your souls.