How to Be a Big Picture Christian

2 Peter 2:1-9

There were not only holy men who wrote out God’s inspired Word

Throughout the Old Testament and Israel’s history there were also numerous occasions where false prophets attempted to lead God’s people away from the truth

What is a false prophet?

“A pretended foreteller or religious imposter”

One example would be the prophets of Baal

There’s no question, we’re presently in an intense spiritual battle for the truth

Right from the inception of Christianity, there’s been an intentional effort by the devil to infiltrate the church with false teachers

What is a false teacher?

“A propagator of erroneous Christian doctrine”

This was most certainly true in Peter’s day and it is equally true right now

So what can we learn from the words he wrote long ago which have immediate application to us at this time?

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This second chapter from this letter is unique within the New Testament

There’s a similarity between its tone, language and content with Matthew chapter 23

In this chapter, Christ pronounces scathing condemnation upon the self-identified, righteous Pharisees

Peter, in many ways, echoes Christ’s words as he very harshly criticizes the ungodly false teachers who were intentionally leading others astray

This kind of communication seems strange and is even unwelcome in many evangelical churches in North America

What Peter writes seems to be far too unloving, harsh, uncompromising, and intolerant and therefore unacceptable

But’s there’s no ignoring what he wrote

It’s an unquestionable part of Scripture

So what is the purpose for it being there?

Here’s the bottom-line reason: truth matters

More specifically, what God says is true matters

Just how much does it matter? Immeasurably

This is what had the apostle Paul so evidently fired up in Galatians chapter one

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If the truth of the gospel becomes perverted, then one’s hope of reaching heaven becomes unreachable

What does one need to do when people are being told what is untrue?

Let’s say someone’s been told a minefield they’re going to walk into is perfectly safe but you know for sure most of those explosive devices have not been removed

You have a tremendously important obligation to inform them, awaken them, warn them of present danger

This is why the apostle Peter writes these verses in such an extremely straightforward way

He’s got to expose and negate the ruinous influence these false teachers will have on their unsuspecting victims

The devil is a very clever strategist

He works out his sinister plans through shrewd, secretive methodologies

“Secretly” = “introduce surreptitiously”

We have other words for this such as “covert, furtive, clandestine”

It literally has the idea of slipping in through a side door, unnoticed to everyone present

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Falsehood doesn’t come through the main entrance, announcing itself with total transparency

Jesus and the apostle Paul substantiated this

Matthew 7:15: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

Acts 20:29-30: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”

2 Corinthians 11:13-15: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”

What are some examples of these heretical teachings they will implant and disseminate within the church?

The devil’s main strategy is to influence people to believe what is not true regarding Christ

This includes denying Christ’s virgin birth, His deity, His substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection and His second coming

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To sum up – our main enemy seeks through false teachers to infiltrate, implant, infect, and immobilize the true gospel

These false teachings are immensely destructive in the sense that believing them can lead one into everlasting punishment

They will even go to the extent of totally denying Christ’s ownership over their lives

Their evil actions will invoke God’s swift judgment

Whatever influence they have will be brief according to God’s eternal timetable for enacting His divine wrath upon them

Even though this may be true, Peter turns next to an unsettling fact

Many professing Christians will become caught in their deceptive web of sinister deceit

The apostle Paul made reference to this in 2 Timothy 4:1-4

“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 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.”

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The tragic end result of this will be to bring unwelcome disrepute to the truth of the gospel

Recent examples within our own time have unfortunately proven this to be true

A lack of authenticity is easily observed by for what it truly is - blatant hypocrisy

The false teacher’s primary motive is revealed in verse three by Peter

Covetousness is at the root of their deceitful exploitation

Their love for material wealth is what causes them to influence people into supporting their lavish lifestyles

They will utilize the powers of deceptive rhetoric to achieve this goal

Proponents and proclaimers of the prosperity gospel give evidence to this

Who are some examples?

Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, and Benny Hinn

It is therefore very important to practice discernment in what you listen to and watch on your computer, television, radio or phone

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Give the most credence to those whom God has placed as leaders within your local church environment, rather than in people you don’t truly know

Even then, hold your leaders accountable by evaluating what they are communicating according to God’s Word

Be like the Berean Christians mentioned in the book of Acts who searched the Scriptures to verify what the apostles were saying was true

Now it may look like the false teachers will get away with exploiting others for their own benefit

However, God always has the final word

He, of course, anticipated their evil deeds from eternity past

Their condemnation has already been divinely sealed and they will be inevitably subjected to God’s imminent punishment

Peter outlines three historical examples to verify this: fallen angels, the Genesis flood, plus Sodom and Gomorrah

What these examples reveal is how seriously God judges unrepentant, willful rebellion

Intentional disobedience has eternal consequences

Their unwavering insistence upon sinful autonomy brought God’s judgment upon them

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One should never believe it’s harmless to be presumptuous with God

God’s judgment is certain, comprehensive and catastrophic and in every way

The angels who sinned is a reference to those who sided with Lucifer when he attempted to usurp God’s sovereignty

Even though they were beautiful, powerful, heavenly creatures, they were not exempt from the judgment of God

In Noah’s time, the world was filled with rampant wickedness

Only he and his family escaped the universal flood

God’s judgment was therefore wide sweeping, relentless, unavoidable and without mercy

The residents of Sodom and Gomorrah were living the most shocking, immoral lifestyles possible

There’s no way they thought any diving being could interrupt their corrupt behavior

But they most certainly were completely unable to escape God’s judgment

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However, even with all of this gloom, there’s a silver lining for the ones who live righteously before God

The only safe, secure place is to be on the side of His grace

This is what Lot’s life speaks to even though he was not an exemplary saint from the Old Testament

God responds with His mercy to those who humbly live for Him