

**BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 2 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair**

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It's become trendy today for some people to have a life coach, which raises a few questions for me. If I was to choose someone to be my life coach, what would I look for? I think probably before I was too interested in what someone would have to say, I would like to first confirm that this person is actually living the life that I long for. If my life coach is dysfunctional and has no real skill in living, to then choose to follow this person, according to Peter, would be sheer madness. That's what we want to talk about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Peter, Chapter 2. Peter's been reminding us of the importance of considering your source of truth. Of course, Peter has advocated that our truth comes from the authoritative, reliable, inspired Word of God. There is this sobering reminder, if that's not our source of truth, then it's pretty much just someone's opinion. He has a concern, now, with the false teachers and their ability to influence the people in the churches that he's writing to. We kind of wrapped it up in Chapter 2 Verse 10 with the description that they indulge the flesh and they despise authority. I suggested that's a very good description of many in our culture today.

Billy Graham. Billy Graham was not a perfect man, but really quite a remarkable life—a life lived in obedience to his call to preach the Gospel. I think for the most part the coverage in the media has been favorable, but as often happens, it also brought out the hate-mongers—people who just utterly hated Billy Graham and his message. You say, "Well, what did they hate about him?" Well it's simple. They indulge the flesh and despise authority. In other words, they are people that want to live as they please and they are offended, they are angered that someone would have the audacity to suggest it's possible that some behavior is sinful and offensive before a holy God. Those are the false teachers of our culture. Peter goes on to describe them with attitudes and characteristics in Chapter 2. It's a bit of a grocery list, but we'll just kind of manage our way through one at a time. They are:

Daring, self-willed... (Daring means bold, but I think maybe better defiant; they're just defiant. "I'm going to live the way I want to live, and nobody's going to tell me otherwise." The idea of self-willed is that same idea. It's arrogance; it's a determination to live their life the way they choose to live.) ...they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.  
(\*NASB, 2 Peter 2:10b-11)

That's a little bit of a confusing verse. There's some discussion as to the specifics of it. What exactly were the false teachers doing or saying? But the basic idea is it's a reference to demonic spirits, and these false teachers revile them. It could mean anything from laughing at them, mocking them, to dabbling in these spiritual powers. So, these false teachers mock, laugh at, dabble in powers they know nothing of. What Peter tells us is: even the angels, meaning the good angels, who are far more mighty

and powerful than us, would never do something so utterly dangerous and reckless. It's just a reminder: as God is marginalized, the powers of darkness have more freedom.

I would kind of picture it as the demonic powers in the world are like a sleeping tiger. Anyone with the slightest degree of common sense would stay away from the sleeping tiger—just leave him alone! But these false teachers are so clueless; they're so arrogant; they're so reckless that they've taken a stick and they're poking the man-eating tiger and Peter's warning is, "This tiger is going to wake up." There is such a thing as evil in the world. Even the good angels who are more powerful and mighty than us would never be so reckless as to do something like that.

There's been lots of discussion about gun control. That's fine; that's a good discussion. There's also lots of discussion about mental illness. That's fine; that's a needed discussion. But there's been almost no discussion about the real problem. We simply, as a culture, will not say it, so I am going to say it: Evil is real, and it is powerful! We as a culture are minimalizing, marginalizing God, and as we do that, we are laughing at, we are mocking, and we are dabbling in the forces of evil. We are poking a sleeping tiger and Peter's warning is, this tiger is going to wake up, and unless something changes, you have only seen the tip of the iceberg of the evil that is possible in our country! I would suggest to you, at the end of the day, the answer to this problem is not gun control; it is not mental health. The ultimate solution to this problem and what we need as a nation is revival. (Applause) And until we come back to an understanding of God and who He is, we are going to unleash this tiger and there is going to be evil beyond anything we've seen so far. That's what Peter is warning us about—the false teachers do not understand this!

Verse 12:

But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,

What Peter is saying is these false teachers are acting like animals that operate out of instinct. Animals do not operate according to a moral code. They don't think and reason. They operate according to instinct, and the world of an animal is: "Kill or be killed". It is the survival of the jungle. We've been enjoying in our house the Planet Earth, a Blue Planet series on BBC—absolutely fabulous! Nature is beautiful; it's wondrous; it's mysterious; but it is also excessively violent. One of the things that is abundantly clear every time we watch one of those episodes is you could reduce nature down to: "Kill or be killed". Life for animals is about survival—one more day— "Kill or be killed." That's kind of the flow of the instinct of an animal as they exist. What Peter is saying is that we as people, made in the image of God, can do better. We can think; we can reason; we can conform our behavior to an agreed upon moral code, that allows us to experience a level of life together in community, that is distinct from the law of the jungle that defines nature. But when the false teachers are operating purely on the basis of instinct, it will create a "Kill or be killed" culture. It is the path of destruction. There, ultimately, are no winners in that system.

We live in a culture that I would suggest to you has actually made a virtue of selfishness and self-absorption. Now it's disguised; it's kind of communicated in clever language, but at the end of the day, what we as a culture believe most, is that you need to be true to yourself. You need to not compromise; you need to be who you authentically are, which are words that, in our culture mean, "If it feels good,

do it!" "If that's who you are, go for it!" In the words of Peter, it's indulging the flesh and to deny the flesh is compromise. If this selfish, self-absorption, "Do as you please," "If it feels good, do it," concept is a virtue, then what is the great sin of our day? The great sin of our day is to deny the flesh what it wants, and to actually conform your behavior to some sort of external, moral standard of behavior, is the great compromise. It is the great sin of our day. But stop and think about this: If everyone in the culture is considering this indulge the flesh, selfish, self-absorption, "If it feels good, do it," virtue, what kind of a culture does that create? It creates the law of the jungle— "Kill or be killed!" Everyone's trying to use everyone else for their own personal gain. In such a culture, everyone ultimately loses! That is the teaching of the false teacher—to operate that way! He says, Verse 13:

...suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. (In other words, the payoff for that belief system is suffering the consequences...is devastation.) They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime.

Basically, they celebrate their sin in the daylight. By and large, sin brings shame; it brings guilt, and because of that people tend to sneak around and hide it in the darkness, both literally and figuratively. But the false teachers actually revel; it means they celebrate their sin in the daylight. Another way of saying it would be they're shameless. They advertise their destructive, sinful behavior. "Indulge the flesh! Be true to yourself!" The great sin is to deny your flesh what it wants. So, they promote their message in the daylight.

They are stains and blemishes, (Vs. 13b)

Basically, think about you and your integrity as wearing a white outfit. So, you have your white shirt and white pants on, but you get too close to these false teachers and pretty soon you're being affected by the spatter of their evil! Now you have grease stains and oil stains that are really hard to come out. Imagine we're all white, top to bottom, but over the months we start to notice some people are coming back with more and more stains, more and more blemishes. What happens? These false teachers, by virtue of their teaching and behavior, begin to spatter you with blemishes and stains that chip away at your integrity a little at a time.

...reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, (Vs. 13c)

The deceptions could be translated their hypocrisies. They revel, again, they celebrate their ability to be so deceptive in order to lead people astray. The idea of the carousing most scholars think is a reference to what were called the love feasts in the churches of the First Century. A First Century love feast was basically a potluck. It was an opportunity to gather together and to enjoy some time together. So, these false teachers are coming to the love feast and they're pretending to be part of the family, but their intent is to deceive and lead people astray. They actually celebrate their own hypocrisy.

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Arnie: So, Bryan, Peter talks about false teachers as mockers and people who indulge in the flesh and actually celebrate deception. That just sounds awful, and I know it is awful, but actually we see that kind of behavior all around us today, don't we? And sometimes it's promoted by some superstars.

Bryan: Absolutely. So, the illusion is very powerful. The messaging is very effective and that's part of what makes it challenging. But I think it's helpful those same people that market the message are the

same people that for the most part, their own personal lives are a mess. And it's helpful to realize that it's an illusion, but the reality isn't nearly that attractive.

Cara: Bryan, you alluded to demonic powers being like this sleeping tiger. In other words, things that seem harmless or curious to people may actually be very dangerous, but I'm going to require some examples on that.

Bryan: Yeah, so I'm not an expert by any means, but more and more it's in books. It's in games, it's in video games. It's in different activities that people come up with. It's in movies. I think just that dark demonic theme is become more and more common. The other way that you see it that might be a little bit different is if you think of the sleeping tiger as temptation, and people flirting with temptation, thinking, I can handle it. It's not going to happen to me. I see it all the time as a pastor, and the enemy's pretty crafty. And he lures people in, and they start to flirt with it, and next thing you know, they're sitting in my office in a disaster.

Cara: How do you discern though where the line is between what's appropriate and what is inappropriate?

Bryan: Well, certainly the Holy Spirit dwells within us and is there to lead us and convict us. I also think the whole idea of keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. I'm not an advocate of reading a lot of stuff about Satan and demons and spiritual warfare. I just think that tends to build people's curiosity. Focus on Jesus, full speed ahead, and trust the Holy Spirit along the way. I think that's probably best.

Cara: Well, if some of these demonic practices are starting to become more mainstream, it's kind of like opening this dam to this flood of evil and it's daunting to me as a parent to think that I'm preparing my kids for this kind of world.

Bryan: So, it is daunting, and I think my concern is that parents are going to put all their energy into protecting their kids rather than preparing their kids. You can't hide from this world. We have to live in it. So, we have to figure out how to prepare our kids to live in a world like this. And a parent can only do that if he or she knows how to do it himself.

Cara: So how do we do that though, through church? Or how do we learn to do that?

Bryan: Well, I think it is a team effort. It's like we've been talking about, it's based on the truth. And so, there's lots of resources from things we offer here at Back to the Bible. Certainly, your local church, mentors, people involved together to know the truth, to stand on the truth. But I would say we have to take it away more seriously than I think a lot of Christians do, or we're going to be in trouble.

Cara: Right. So, it goes beyond, "Hey, don't watch that filth", or ....

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely. [Yeah, okay.]

Arnie: So how do we live skillfully in such a world? We don't want to be naive about the world around us.

Bryan: Yeah, so it's complicated and it's like we talked about earlier, we do it together because it is complicated, to learn and grow, figure this out together. But I think principally speaking, we have to develop skills to exegete the Bible. And that's part of what we do here at Back to the Bible, and then exegete the culture, and then try to understand how the Bible fits with the culture, and get really clear

on what's happening, which isn't easy. But I think without that clarity, it's going to be confusing, most of the time.

Cara: These people who are led astray, they really think they're loving God and honoring God and all of that. I know what God's going to do to the false teacher. I mean, they're in bad shape, but what about the person who sincerely wants to know Christ, who wants to be saved, but they're in that situation? You know what I'm saying? It's just, I'm so sad for that. Like what do I do to help out that situation?

Bryan: So that's a great question. I can't help them unless I myself know the truth. So, the more I understand the culture, the more I understand the truth and the more I understand what's happening, and then it's a matter of rolling up our sleeves, getting involved, and trying to help. But you can only help someone to the degree they're willing to receive that help. So, it's not a simple answer, but I do think we have to think that way. They're victims of the enemy and we have responsibility to do what we can to rescue them.

Cara: I just, I mean they're there sincerely, I just worry about their souls. It just bothers me because I just worry about their souls.

Bryan: And part of that's trusting God. You know, there's a supernatural piece to that, [Right.] that is part of the story. And we do our part and trust God will do His part. [Right].

Cara: Well, the book of Jude also has a lot to say about these false teachers. It's a very pervasive problem even for the church back then as it is today.

Bryan: Yeah. So, it's interesting to think this was 2000 years ago and such a big problem and it's a huge problem now, because the enemy's a liar, and that's what it boils down to. So, it's always going to be a problem. Jude is very similar to Second Peter, and we're actually going to be looking at Jude here in a couple of weeks.