



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

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Message Title: Exposing the Madness Pt. 2

Release Date: Friday 10/18/19

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 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.

...reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, (NASB, Chap 2, 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. Everybody gathered; 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.

Now I'm going to suggest to you today that we, as a culture, are okay with hypocrisy. I don't know how else to explain it. The level of hypocrisy in our country—in our politicians, in our leaders, in our preachers, in our athletes, in the media—is through the roof! And for the most part, there is no uproar. So I can only conclude: apparently we're fine with it. Now I know what some of you are thinking. Some of you who are Republicans are thinking, "I know exactly what you're saying. It's those Democrats." And those of you are that are Democrats are thinking, "I know exactly what you're saying. It's those Republicans." Well, let me give you a newsflash: It's everywhere...it's everywhere! It's in the media, in churches, in our politicians, in our leaders, in our athletes—it is everywhere! But here's something to think about. If you are deeply offended by the hypocrisy of someone on the other side but are willing to just kind of turn the other way with the hypocrisy among the people that are pushing an agenda you agree with, that in itself is hypocrisy! We as the people of God need to be the people of truth. Either hypocrisy is right or it's wrong, wherever it's found. These false teachers thrive on their ability to deceive with their hypocrisy. That's part of what makes them so dangerous. It says in verse 14:

...having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin,

Literally the Greek here is eyes full of adulterous women. It's the idea that if the virtue is to indulge the flesh, then everyone is an object to be used for my own pleasure. Therefore, they're constantly looking at the women as objects to be used for their own personal pleasure. Stop and think about it. What kind of a culture do we create when we've made selfish, self-indulgent behavior a virtue? All of the people

on the receiving end of that are going to get wounded; they're going to get used, get hurt, and destroyed! What kind of a culture is that?

There's been a lot of attention on sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, sexual harassment; it's been a big point of discussion. But one of the things that is very frustrating is now all of a sudden you have people in these industries—in Hollywood, in the media, in networks—all these industries are suddenly outraged, but the truth of the matter is this has been going on for decades, and they all knew it was going on! And it was okay with them until it was suddenly exposed, and now they are outraged! Come on! Some of us have been outraged for decades and we have said so. But now suddenly that it's exposed, now we're outraged. This raises a couple of interesting questions to me. First of all, if relativism is true—if there is no absolute moral standard—what is the basis of the outrage? If we're going to live consistent with relativism, we would have to say, “If the perp thinks that's okay, then it's okay!” Who are we as a culture to say it's not okay? Yet what we're seeing across the land are people that are utterly outraged at this behavior. So what is that? I would suggest to you it's a reflection of what is true—that as people made in the image of God, deep in our souls we do know there is such a thing as right and wrong, and we know that is wrong, and it comes out in moments like that—where people say it is wrong, and rightfully so! It is.

But here's another thought about this. What is actually happening that's creating this outrage? I would suggest to you that we all have to live in the culture we've created, and now we're living in it and we don't like it! So suddenly it's like, “We don't like this; we don't want this; we want a different world! Whether you're talking about the violence, about the racial tension, about this sexual abuse, we've created a culture we have to live in, and now that we're living in it, we're saying, “Wait a minute, we don't like it!” There is a better way, but the better way has to be travelling the path of life as defined by God's Word, not by the false teachers.

...having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, (Vs. 14b)

That word enticing is a word that was used to describe baiting a hook, like when you're fishing or baiting a trap. It's basically the idea that they are intentionally deceiving and trapping unstable souls. So who are the unstable souls? The unstable souls are those who thought following the false teachers as a life coach would make them happy, would bring them pleasure and safety and security and peace. But instead, it's deeply unfulfilling. It's heart-breaking, devastating, hurtful—and what happens is then the search becomes more desperate. “This isn't working! What else can I try?” And the more we're disappointed, the more it fails. The more it's unraveling, the more desperate we become and we get to the point where we'll listen to anybody; we'll believe anything; we're willing to try anything. That's the unstable soul. So they're putting the bait on the hook or the trap and saying, “You know, how about trying this? How about trying that?” And people are very easy to deceive when they get desperate and cannot find what they're looking for.

He says,

...having a heart trained in greed, (Ch. 2, Vs. 14c)

That word trained is the Greek word from which we get the English word gymnasium. They go to the greed gym and they work out. They're not just greedy; they're trained in their greed. They've figured out how to perfect their greed. I mentioned greed in the Bible is not just money. It's money, it's position, it's power, it's control. Greed is the idea that if the virtue is my own self-indulgence, if the virtue is indulging the flesh, then everyone else is an object to be used or abused in order to satisfy my longings. What is the greed? The greed is the desire to use you, abuse you, control you, do whatever is necessary in order to advance my cause, in order to satisfy the longing within me. They have trained in it, become really good and effective at that. So he ends that by saying they are

...accursed children; (14d)

We would use the language they are children of the curse. In other words, they are subject to the judgment of God which he talked about earlier in the chapter. The last description, verse 15:

...forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but he received a rebuke for his own transgression; for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. (Vs. 15-16)

If you're not familiar with this story, it's in Numbers, Chapters 22, 23, and 24: I'll give you the short version:

Balaam was a prophet. When he spoke blessing, the people were blessed. When he spoke cursing, the people were cursed. So the King of Moab fears that the Israelites are becoming too big and powerful, so he seeks to hire Balaam to curse Israel. So they negotiate and Balaam says, "You know, if you're willing to pay me enough, I'll do it." So they work out the deal. But God shows up and says to Balaam, "No, don't even think about it!" So Balaam says to Balak the King of the Moabites, "You know, God showed up and said, 'No, I can't do it.'" So the King of the Moabites comes back and says, "You know, let's add some gold; let's add some silver: what else do you need?" He upped the ante and Balaam says, "Alright, I'll do it." So Balaam gets on his donkey. He is headed to the place where he will stand and curse the nation of Israel, but suddenly the donkey stops and the text tells us that the donkey can see in the trail the Angel of the Lord, which most scholars believe that to be the pre-incarnate Christ, meaning Jesus in the Old Testament. So Jesus in the Old Testament is standing there stopping Balaam. The donkey sees Him but Balaam does not, so the donkey stops. This makes Balaam angry, so he's whacking the donkey. The donkey then lies down. He's like, "I am not moving!" And then God speaks through the donkey. (Now this is kind of the Bryan version) but the donkey turns to Balaam and says, "Are you mad? Can you not see that the trail is blocked by the Angel of the Lord? I am not taking one more step in that direction." Peter is referring to that story and saying, "You know, even a dumb donkey, (You can mutter under your breath your terminology (laughter) can figure out that this is the wrong path." To willfully choose to go against God is sheer madness.

Every single one of us has dozens of voices coming at us every single day—voices through people around us, through the media, through the internet, through movies, through Hollywood, through the media—dozens and dozens of voices every day. And they're all seeking to tell you how to live. They all want to be your life coach. All of us need to think long and hard, about: who are we going to allow to be our life coaches and to teach us how to live life? What is the source of those words? What is the source of that advice? To listen and follow someone such as the people described by Peter would be absolute sheer

madness! Why would anyone do that? We as the people of God are not left in the darkness. We have been given a roadmap—a light in the darkness—the authoritative, reliable, inspired Word of God that is there to direct us down the path of life—that we might experience the life that our souls long for!

Cara: Bryan, I could say that it's crazy to have a false teacher as a life coach. But I see so many Christians buying these books and things and you would think that we would know better than that.

Bryan: Well we should know better, but it is easy to get confused. And I think a lot of Christians struggle to discern what's true in Christianity and what's not. And it's easy to get off track. So one of the really practical things we've talked about in this study is look at the life of the life coach. To me, if you're going to be my life coach, I'm going to see how you live life and decide whether I want to copy that or not.

Cara: They seem to live extremely well.

Bryan: Yeah. Well by the world's standards. That's true.

Cara: Well before I was a believer, I went and bought this book, because I was, you know, they claimed Christianity and I was curious about it. So I bought this book, and two chapters in I was like, this didn't really give me a purpose for my life. It just told me how I could think better about my life. You know, it didn't really work.

Bryan: I do think, again, I know I'm kind of repeating myself, but it is really helpful to look at how people live their lives, when you wrestle with the questions of who I'm going to listen to. Because some of the people I know that live the most simple, quiet, ordinary lives, they have really happy marriages. They have really well-developed children. They live out their values. Nobody's going to notice them unless you look for them. But it is an interesting commentary on, what does a life well lived actually look like? [Um hm.]

Arnie: So Bryan, I know, I mean, you and I personally have talked about false teachers and you'd say it always goes back to Genesis Three.

Bryan: So yes, I do always say that. And it's a great point because I do think it does always go back to Genesis Chapter Three, when the serpent tempted Adam and Eve and the lies had to do with questioning the goodness of God. The lie was about whether or not life will be better by surrendering to God, or me functioning as my own god, and questioning whether or not there'll be consequences to my choice to disobey. So I think you can take every temptation and it roots back to wrestling with those questions.

Cara: He's definitely persistent. Even now I find that I personally have to be on guard, because he's constantly trying to tell me that God can't be trusted.

Bryan: Right. So I think it isn't like one lie fools everybody. We all have different lives. We have different vulnerabilities. As a pastor, I tend to be in a public position, so there's certain lies that I would be more vulnerable to than somebody else. So kind of assessing your own risk and realizing we're all vulnerable, we just have to figure out where and be extra guarded there.

Arnie: So the idea of a false teacher actually being trained in greed was really an eye opener to me. And they're popular because we're greedy and it's so attractive to us. And they just play on that. But nevertheless, how do good Christians, even pastors, fall into this trap of greed?

Bryan: Yeah. So as we've said before, greed isn't just money. It's power, it's position, it's influence, it's all that stuff. And I think pastors all comment, "Since I'm a pastor". I think it's easy to start very

sincerely, but you start to gain attention. You start to figure out what people want to hear, kind of moves into money and status, think it creeps in slowly. It's easy at some point to be driven more by applause than by God's call. And I think it happens all the time. The other question I have, that's kind of related to this, is I just wonder, how many seminary students today dream of one day being the next Christian celebrity? And you think, how messed up is that? How contrary is that to really what God's called us to do and be?

Cara: It seems that whether we admit it or not then, every one of us has a life coach.

Bryan: Yeah. So we're all influenced significantly by other people and there's nothing wrong with that, as a matter of fact, there's a lot of good in that. The issue is be careful and choose who it is you want to follow, whose life you want to emulate, and never forget that we all have the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. He's the best life coach of all.

Cara: Amen.