

False Teaching:
A Theological Discussion of Heretical Teaching in the Church

Anthony J. Hunter

HU4281397

Indianapolis, IN

BIBL 1323 HYF2A: General Epistles and Revelation

October 7, 2022

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Message of False Teaching in 2 Peter	2
Chapter 1: The Protection	2
Chapter 2: The People.....	3
Chapter 3: The Promise	4
The Message of False Teaching in Jude	5
Conclusion	7
Bibliography	8

Introduction

The problem of the existence of false teachers was not only prevalent in our historical past, but it persists in our present context. According to the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, the world, indicative of the humanistic fallen nature of man, began its encroachment into the Church shortly after the Edict of Milan was passed in A.D. 313. Consequently, for twelve hundred years following, false teachers and their dilution of the Gospel message ran rampant until the times of the Reformation.¹ False teachers in the Church today is a sobering reality, especially considering the assumption that things typically get better with time like the aging of a fine wine or the value appreciation of prime real estate.

Despite our cultural rules of thumb, the Bible speaks clearly about false teachers and their propagation into current contexts. Jesus warned that there would be false teachers in the times of the end, which is an eschatological reference to the time in which we live today saying, “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” (Matthew 24:4-5)² Jesus calls these false teachers *deceivers* in this verse, and it is indeed deception that is at the core of teaching false doctrine. Those who commit themselves to the heinous task of misrepresenting and mangling the Word of God for their own purposes whatever those may be, are not only deceivers but are also doomed to an eternity in hell.

This paper will explore the concept of false teaching from the perspectives of Peter and Jude to provide additional spiritual insight on the subject. While the content may not be comprehensive, it will all be biblical as it is based completely on the Word of God.

¹ John F. Walvoord, and Roy B. Zuck. 1989. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old and New Testament*. Vol. 2. David C Cook. See notes on 2 Peter 2 - The Christian's Warfare: The Attack of False Teachers

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the King James Version Bible (KJV).

The Message of False Teaching in 2 Peter

Chapter 1: The Protection

Protecting one's mind with the knowledge of God and His Word is the first line of defense against the heresies of false teachers. In verses two through four of Chapter 1, Peter pronounces a blessing upon those who give themselves to the knowledge of God. Peter says in verse 2, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord..." (2 Peter 1:2) Here we see that the grace and peace of God are multiplied in one's life as they increase in the knowledge of God. The Word of God protects the mind against anything that would disrupt the flow grace and peace.

David writes in Psalms 119:11, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." This helps us understand that the Word of God protects the mind against that which is contrary to the Word and will of God, and Peter understood this in the early verses of his epistle. Peter continues illustrate that the Word of God is sufficient for everything needed to live a life of godliness, glory, and virtue, because these are gained through the knowledge of God. (2 Peter 1:3) Verse four culminates this line of thought by informing us that the knowledge of God's word is the source of, "exceeding great and precious promises..." (2 Peter 1:4) which aligns us with the nature of God and causes us to be content in Him and resilient against lustful desires.

Peter begins the epistle this way because he knows that the mind is the target of every false teacher. More succinctly, the mind is the battleground of faith, and the enemy uses false teachers and their tainted doctrines to wage this spiritual war. For emphasis, Paul instructs the Church at Ephesus to, "take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..." (Ephesians 6:17) The Apostle is admonishing the Church to prepare themselves

for spiritual warfare by protecting their minds with the helmet of salvation which is the message of the Gospel, and the sword of the spirit which is God's Word. False teaching seeks to undermine God's Word and it is necessary to use what God has said in response to the onslaught of the enemy.

Chapter 2: The People

False teachers are people of an unscrupulous character, and while they can be identified, it is possible for them to infiltrate a body of believers. Peter makes this clear in verse 1 when he says, "there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." (2 Peter 2:1) The most ominous aspect of what Peter is addressing is the fact that these false teachers are not always external but are also hiding among us. Like a chameleon camouflaged on the branch of a tree, a false teacher is almost indistinguishable from any other Christian and requires a sharp and adept eye to capture the differences and expose their presence.

False teachers possess a charisma that is captivating, and they can be effective in convincing some people that their false doctrines are true. Peter says in verse 2, "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." (2 Peter 2:2) It is bad enough to know that there are people within our ranks who dare distort the Word of God, but insult is added to injury knowing that there are Christians who will believe what they are taught. Therefore, Christians have no time to waste in growing in the knowledge of God, because the deeper they are rooted in the truth the less likely they are to be swayed by heretical instruction. Paul informs us in Ephesians 4:11-14 that the body of Christ has been gifted with what we need to grow into the fulness of Christ. We have apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to help us attain a spiritual level where, "we henceforth be no more

children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive..." (Ephesians 4:14) It is imperative that Christians commit ourselves to the process of spiritual growth as a primary weapon against the attacks of false teachers.

Chapter 3: The Promise

If God is real, where is He? This is one of the most prevalent questions posed by false teachers to demonstrate the supposed veracity of their argument. Their point is that a loving God would not perform nor allow the atrocities that have littered the landscape of human existence such as, war, infanticide, natural disasters that take thousands of lives, and general human brutality. Peter recognizes that false teachers use this deceptive tactic to create doubt to lure the spiritually weak away from the protective shelter of God's Word. He warns, "there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (2 Peter 3:3-4) In short, false teachers teach that there is no God, or if there is, He doesn't care enough to intervene with or prevent the tragedies that plague humanity.

False teachers mock Christians who have an eternal hope and who are patiently waiting for the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. These false teachers use persistence of adverse life circumstances as evidence that the promise of Christ's return is a fools dream because humanity continues its downward spiral and still there is not a second coming. Despite these satanic attempts to lead Christians away from God, Peter urges us to be vigilant, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Peter 3:13) No matter what heresies false teachers spread; we are called to stay true to the promise of eternity with God.

The Message of False Teaching in Jude

The topic of false teachers addressed by Jude is like what is presented in Peter's second epistle. A major difference between the two letters is that Jude immediately gets to the point and main message that believers must contend for the faith. Verses one and two provide a brief introduction and blessing upon the readers, but then Jude gets right down to business in verse 3. His intention was to discuss matters of general theology, but the issue of false teachers became so pressing that he changed his content completely, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3) The urgency of the letter is clear, and Jude is calling the Christian community to spiritual arms due to the presence of false teachers' presence in the Church.

As presented in Peter's 2nd epistle, false teachers have secretly made their way into the church and among the body of believers. Jude says in verse 4 that, "For there are certain men crept in unawares..." (Jude 4) The reference made is to *certain men*, this alludes to the inconspicuous way they became accepted members of the assembly. They were not wearing signs advertising their devious intent, and they did not vocalize their desire to draw believers away from the safety of the faith, simply slipped in without anyone knowing who they really were. The Apostle Paul speaks of this problem in his 2nd letter to the Church at Corinth, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." (2 Corinthians 11:13) We would all do well to remember that false teachers work in subtle ways to change ever-so-slowly what we think and believe.

Jude characterizes false teachers in unceremoniously descriptive ways, to provide insight as to how they can be identified. For example, Jude says in verse 12 that false teachers are “clouds without water, carried about of winds...” This metaphorical description applies to the doctrinal substance of the messages presented by teachers of heresy. Their messages may appear beautiful and grandiose, when they are light and fluffy without the ability to hold water. In modern context of the 21st century, the Christian community is replete with people like this; those whose message is pleasing and accommodating, but the substance is unbiblical and heretical. Jude continues to say that false teachers are like, “trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots...” (Jude 1:12) The emphasis here is that the fruit of false teachers remains in a constant state of decay, which means they never bear any fruit at all. These heretics are dead trees that don’t bear fruit, and the fruit they manufacture routinely dies to the power of the truth.

Jude calls on believers to remember that this is not the first time they have heard this message about false teachers. He says, “But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.” (Jude 1:17) This is strikingly like what Peter said in his 2nd epistle, and as such, behooves us to pay special attention to the importance of being aware of false teachers in our midst. False teachers are mockers, liars, and seek only to advance themselves at the expense of the eternal souls of others.

Jude does not leave his readers without an answer to the problem at hand. To ensure we are protected against the attack of the enemy through doctrinal error, Jude admonishes us to strengthen ourselves in the faith by praying in the Holy Spirit. (Jude 1:20) This is a spiritual solution to a spiritual problem, but it he does not stop there, he instructs us to, “Keep yourselves

in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” (Jude 1:21)

We are to commit ourselves to a life of God’s agape love, and to be ever watchful for the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The 21st Century is a spiritually deadly era. We live in a time where culture, society, politics, and religion all boldly stand for everything God’s Word is against. Our churches are more like country clubs than households of faith. The sermons being preached are more akin to motivational speeches than life-changing, Gospel proclamations. Pastors of churches seem to be more interested in politics than they are the salvation of souls. It is time that true believers in Jesus Christ rise up and contend for the faith we have received from the Word of God.

Bibliography

Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck. Bible Knowledge Commentary. Dallas, TX: Cook Communications Ministries, 1983.