

On Guard  
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Opening: There's a new term in the news in the last two weeks: "fake news" on social media. Has anyone seen some of the coverage on the "fake news" issue? **What's this controversy all about? Why is it suddenly big news?**

*Fake news is described as "...made-up-stuff being merchandized for clicks and profits. And since such fare spreads like wildfire on Facebook, the social network is under fire for not curbing [it.]"<sup>1</sup> "The New York Times [gave] examples: 'Donald J. Trump's supporters were probably heartened in September, when, according to an article shared nearly a million times on Facebook, the candidate received an endorsement from Pope Francis. Their opinions on Hillary Clinton may have soured even further after reading a Denver Guardian article that also spread widely on Facebook, which reported days before the election that an F.B.I. agent suspected of involvement in leaking Mrs. Clinton's emails was found dead in an apparent murder-suicide.' Both utter fiction."<sup>2</sup>*

**What is dangerous about the "fake news" problem? Why does it spread so quickly? How can you avoid being fooled by "fake news" sources?**

Today we see something more dangerous and damaging than "fake news," it's fake Christianity that is spread by false teachers.

Big idea: The way to avoid being deceived by false teaching is to get to know the only trusted sources of truth, your Bible and the Holy Spirit of God living in you.

2 Peter 2:1–3 (ESV)

**2** But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup> And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. <sup>3</sup> And in

their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

- Whenever something genuine is present, you will always have fakes.
- Verse one says, in Old Testament times of the true prophets there were also false prophets. Now we have teachers instead of prophets so for us today it's the danger of "FALSE teachers."
- When we think of false teachers we usually think about famous TV evangelists with big hair, big planes, big houses, and big egos. We definitely need to be on guard about those types.
- It's interesting though, we sometimes forget that false teachers and troublemakers can infiltrate the local church and be "among us."
- They secretly bring in "destructive heresies." The literal translation is, "*secretly bring in alongside.*" They do not throw out the truth immediately; they simply lay their false teachings alongside the truth and give the impression that they believe the fundamentals of the faith. Before long, they remove the true doctrine and leave their false doctrine in its place.<sup>3</sup>
- **What do we normally think about when we hear the word heresy?**
- The word *heresy* originally meant simply "to make a choice," but then it came to mean "a sect, a party." Promoting a party spirit [like a political party] in a church is one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). Whenever a church member says to another member, "Are you on my side or the pastor's side?" he is promoting a party spirit and causing division. A false teacher forces you to make a choice between his doctrines and the doctrines of the true Christian faith.<sup>4</sup>
- One commentator writes: "*...these false teachers were not teaching these things by mistake, but were setting out to capture the unwary. A hidden agenda was at work, for falsehood and lies were introduced secretly, in a deceptive way, rather than openly or properly.*"<sup>5</sup>
- **Look at verse one: What extreme position does verse one say false teachers gradually move toward? What do you think this means?**

- If teaching totally denies Christ that's an obvious heresy. But often, false teachers begin to minimize what we call the "centrality" of Christ.
- Notice the word *secretly*. It's rare for someone in church to openly deny Jesus. Downplaying the role of Christ is subtle. *"The false teacher will speak about how other people can help change your life, but if you listen carefully to what he is saying, you will see that Jesus Christ is not essential to his message."*<sup>6</sup>
- Important point: The message should be about "Christ alone." If the teaching isn't all about Jesus, it ISN'T TRUE Christian teaching!
- **What is the penalty for false teachers who deny the Master?**
- Look at verses two and three: Circle two key words that describe the method and motivation of these false teachers: "sensuality" and "greed."
- **"Sensual** in this context has nothing to do with sexual attractiveness. It describes the person who lives only by and for what they can get through their physical senses, and they live this way selfishly. Their motto is, "If it feels good, do it" or, "How can it be wrong if it feels so right?" (Guzik)<sup>7</sup>
- **When false teachers fall in a scandal, what usually topples them?**
- If their teaching is hollow usually their moral standards are also "hollow" and they will likely fall into immoral sexual relationships.
- With false teachers it's not only about lust, it's also all about the money!
- Let's be clear: a local pastor deserves to earn a decent living for their service. **How is this different than that? GREED vs compensation?**
- That word greed speaks both to the false teachers' desire to make a buck, and the carrot they dangle in front of their followers (i.e. think "prosperity" teachers!)
- The NLT states verse three well: <sup>3</sup> *In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed.* <sup>8</sup>
- Chuck Swindoll writes: *"If you want to build a big following, just develop a religion that removes the restraints on people's sinful*

*behavior and that also appeals to their base urges –pleasure, greed, selfishness.”<sup>9</sup>*

- Another great source of warning about false teachers comes in the little one-chapter book of Jude (tucked in between 3 John and Revelation.)
- Jude was the brother of James, possibly also the half-brother of Jesus.
- In his closing he gives advice about how true believers should deal with false teachers, especially in the local church. Beginning in verse 16 Jude describes these false teachers. (Reading in the New Living Translation.)

Jude 16–25 (NLT)

<sup>16</sup> These people are grumblers and complainers, living only to satisfy their desires. They brag loudly about themselves, and they flatter others to get what they want.

<sup>17</sup> But you, my dear friends, must remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ predicted. <sup>18</sup> They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. <sup>19</sup> These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God’s Spirit in them.

- Note the key terms/phrases in verses 16 and 17:
  - o Grumblers, complainers – They are tearing down not building up
  - o Their own desires – It’s all about what’s in it for THEM
  - o Brag about themselves – THEY have all the answers!
  - o Flattery is their technique to get what they want
  - o Creating divisions among you – Divide and conquer to gain power
  - o A close look reveals that they don’t have the “aroma of Jesus.”
- Be on guard for the troublemaker in the local church! *“If a false teacher can make a person critical of his pastor or church, or dissatisfied with his situation, he then can lead him astray into false doctrine.”<sup>10</sup>*
- **How can we equip ourselves to spot troublemaking false teachers?**

<sup>20</sup> But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit,\* <sup>21</sup> and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love.

- Build each other up! Pray for the help of the Holy Spirit! Trust Jesus!
- Consult your Bible for the truth and the Holy Spirit for discernment.
- As you grow deeper in your personal walk with Jesus you will be more and more equipped to spot a trouble-making false teacher.
- As you and I grow deeper in OUR faith, we need to help those who are “young” in their faith to avoid false teachers:

<sup>22</sup> And you must show mercy to\* those whose faith is wavering.

<sup>23</sup> Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others,\* but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.\*

- False teachers prey on believers who are “immature” in their faith.
- If someone who appears to be a false teacher is deceiving a new Christian, **how can a mature believer steer him or her away from false teaching without accidentally pushing them further TOWARD it?**

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Peter told us (2 Peter 2:1) *“There will be false teachers among you.”*
- False teachers are not just famous TV evangelists with big hair, big planes, big houses, and big egos; false-teaching troublemakers can be “among us” infiltrating the local church.

Pastor Colin Smith warns us:

*“...the church needs to be protected. Among the many wonderful people who come to through the doors of the church each year, some would do more harm than good.*

*They may seem the nicest of people, but they do not believe in the authority of the Bible or the exclusivity of salvation in Christ. We welcome such people, because they need Christ as much as we do, but we must not allow them to have influence in the church.”<sup>11</sup>*

- How do we guard against that?
- You should have a biblical standard you use to check out every teacher and leader you encounter in the church (including THIS TEACHER!)
- Is their message consistent with God’s word? If you ask them to defend what they teach can they lovingly point to the truth of scripture, or do they blow up and get defensive!
- Look for those warning signs:
  - They are tearing down not building up
  - It’s all about what’s in it for THEM
  - THEY have all the answers!
  - Flattery is their technique to get what they want
  - They create divisions in the church to gain power
  - What about their private life? What about their personal morality?
  - Does a close look reveal that they don’t have the “aroma of Jesus?”
- How do we develop a “radar” to detect a false teacher or leader?
  - Build each other up! Pray for the help of the Holy Spirit! Trust Jesus! In other words, consult your Bible for the truth and the Holy Spirit for discernment.
  - As we grow deeper in OUR faith, we need to help those who are “young” in their faith to avoid false teachers. Be sure to do it lovingly so you don’t push them FURTHER toward the fraud.
- The way Jude ends his letter is a good way for us to conclude this lesson. He gave a doxology giving praise to God and encouragement to us:

<sup>24</sup> Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. <sup>25</sup> All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus

Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/11/18/fake-news-and-election-why-facebook-is-polluting-media-environment-with-garbage.html>

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 447). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 447). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, C. (2007). *Opening up 2 Peter* (p. 57). Leominster: Day One Publications.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-traits-of-false-teachers>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik\\_david/studyguide\\_jud/jud\\_1.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/studyguide_jud/jud_1.cfm)

<sup>8</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (2 Pe 2:3). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>9</sup> Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary) by Charles R. Swindoll - Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. (December 1, 2014)

<sup>10</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 556). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-traits-of-false-teachers>