

## INTRODUCTION

When I was a kid, I can recall nights before air conditioning when we left our front and back doors open all night with just the screen door closed. And my parents seldom locked the car; they even left the keys in the ignition. Times have changed! We now live in a time when we not only lock our houses and cars, but we have alarm systems installed to thwart burglars. Actually, in South Alabama, we did have alarms—they were called dogs! I saw a funny picture recently called "redneck car alarm"—three mangy mutts standing on the hood of an old Chevy!

Modern alarms systems have motion detectors and phone lines that automatically dial out when activated. The problem is they also trigger many false alarms. According to the Tyler Police Department, 99% of their alarm activations are false alarms, and they have to send two police officers to check out each call. And according to East Texas Alarms, 95% of the false alarms are caused by user error. That's why owners get to make a donation to the police department for false alarms! But if only 1 out of 100 alarms represent an actual emergency, an alarm system is a great investment.

In the second chapter of II Peter, the Apostle raises an alarm—and it's not a false alarm. It's an alarm about the dangers of false teachers. So I'm entitling this message "FALSE (teachers) ALARM!" Although this is a new chapter, this passage is linked with the last verses in chapter 1. Peter had just written about true prophets in 1:21, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Then He addresses the problem of false prophets in II Peter 2:1-3:

"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."

In Old Testament times, there were false prophets, and Peter warned there would be false teachers in the church. There were false teachers in the church 2,000 years ago, and they are still around today. As we consider this topic, I will first address false teachers and then compare and contrast them with faithful teachers. First, we must:

## I. AVOID FALSE TEACHERS

You may be tempted to think, "We must have some kind of problem in our church with false teachers, so that's why our Pastor is talking about them." Not at all. I don't know of any false teaching happening in our church at this time. If you suspect someone is guilty, let me know. Remember, a person doesn't have to stand up behind a lectern in a classroom to be a false teacher; heresies can slip in the hallways and homes at any time. Many of the false teachers today can be heard on radio and television. But I thank God that, as far as I know, this is not a problem in Green Acres. The reason I'm talking about it is because I teach through the Bible verse by verse instead of jumping around to a text of my own choosing. But I've discovered

through the years that God's sense of timing is impeccable. There is a reason why we need to hear this message. It's much better to address this topic when it's not a critical issue in our church.

The word Peter used for "false teacher" is *pseudodidaskalos*. "*Didaskalos*" means teacher, so the term really means a pseudo-teacher. Here are two reasons they should be avoided:

### **(1) Their message is dangerous**

Verse one says, "They will secretly introduce destructive heresies." Pseudo-teachers aren't merely an inconvenience, they are dangerous. That's why Peter devotes 22 verses to this problem.

In the 1960s there was a science fiction television show entitled "Lost in Space." It was about a family of space travelers named the Robinsons. Two other main characters were the evil Dr. Smith, and the family robot. Will Robinson was always getting into trouble, and just before the trouble struck, the robot waved his mechanical arms saying, "Danger, danger, Will Robinson." That's really what Peter is doing in this passage. He's saying, "Danger, Danger, children of God, there are false teachers in the church. Danger, Danger!"

The message of a false teacher will contain *parts* of the Bible, but they either add to it or subtract from it. On the last page of the Bible, God added this warning: "I warn anyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." (Revelation 22:18-19) The specific application of this passage deals with the book of Revelation, but the general principle applies to the entire Bible. Whenever you hear someone who adds to the Bible or takes away from it, be careful.

Today, you can find two extremes of false teaching in the church:

#### **(a) Legalism: Adds to God's Word**

Legalists never call themselves legalists. Instead, they claim to believe the Bible. In fact they believe it so much they unknowingly add to it. A legalist is someone whose lists of rules are longer than God's. This problem has been around since the beginning of time. You might say that Eve was the first legalist. She added to God's Word.

Remember when Adam and Eve were living in perfection in a Garden of Paradise? God said to them, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-16) But when the devil questioned Eve about God's Words, Eve said: "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" (Genesis 3:3) Did you catch it? God never said they couldn't *touch* the tree, He just said they weren't to eat the fruit. They could have climbed the tree or enjoyed the shade of the tree, but Eve unwittingly added to God's Word. She

built an imaginary fence around the tree.

In the days of Jesus, the Pharisees added so many man-made rules to God's laws that they had missed the point. They built a fence around God's rules until they had hundreds of additional rules. Jesus said these legalists were careful to tithe even the spices in their herbal garden, but they neglected justice, mercy and faithfulness. In a great example of Hebrew humor Jesus said, "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow camel." (Matthew 23:24)

How can you spot a legalist today? Dr. Richard Mayhue, Dean of Pastoral Ministries at The Masters Seminary in Los Angeles, has developed a list of his own. Here are the marks of legalism:

(1) Imposing additional rules of Christian conduct not found in the Bible. Baptists have long been known for their opposition to things like card-playing and dancing. We should oppose gambling because it exploits the poor, and we should avoid places where immorality is accepted. But that doesn't mean all card playing and dancing must be considered sinful!

(2) Specifying that one English translation is the *only* authorized version. There is a group of Christians who insist the King James Version is the only authorized version. They even call it the A.V. They insist other Bible translations like the NIV and NASB aren't merely inaccurate, but they are tools of the devil. I love the King James Version, but to make it the only correct Bible is to go beyond the truth.

(3) Forbidding certain kinds of entertainment. There are some Christian groups that forbid people going to movies—any movie. They would have said "The Passion of the Christ" was evil because all movies are worldly entertainment.

(4) Keeping the Sabbath Day rules. Some Christian groups observe the Sabbath on Saturday in the same way the Jews did. Some groups go so far as to say that anyone who worships on Sunday has the mark of the beast. By the way, Sunday is not the Sabbath (get my book *Ten Requirements for America's Survival* for a thorough discussion of the Sabbath Commandment and if you don't agree with my interpretation, you're going to hell—Not really, but that's the attitude a legalist would espouse!)

(5) Outlawing certain musical instruments. I'm not necessarily talking about our Church of Christ brothers who don't allow any instruments in worship. There are some Christians who don't like guitars or drums in a worship service because they think they are instruments of the devil's rock music.

(6) Setting down particular dress/grooming requirements. There is a church in East Texas that has a barber shop as part of their ministry. When a boy or man gets saved, they take them into the barbershop so they can get a godly hairstyle—whatever that is. And these people also insist the only proper attire for church is a dark suit and tie.

(7) Demanding one method of schooling over another. I thank God for Christian schools and for the parents who choose to accept the task of home schooling. But when a person makes that

choice a test of fellowship with other Christians, they have stepped over the line into legalism.

Will someone in legalism go to heaven? Yes, if they don't go past it. Seriously, unless they substitute their rules for the grace of God, a legalist will go to heaven, but they aren't going to enjoy the abundant life between now and then! Whenever you're exposed to legalism, you should hear, "Warning, Warning, Child of God. Avoid false teaching!"

### **(b) Liberalism: Takes away from God's Word**

The extreme opposite of legalism is liberalism. Legalists take the Word of God seriously, but liberals don't. They don't really think it is divinely inspired. If Eve was the first legalist, Satan was the first liberal in the Bible. Remember, God said to Adam and Eve: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-16) But the first thing Satan said to Eve was: "You will *not* surely die." (Genesis 3:4)

Since 1985 a group of New Testament "scholars" (all liberal) have been meeting in what is called "The Jesus Seminar." These "scholars" met and discussed which of the Jesus' sayings in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were really authentic. They would read a statement from the New Testament, and then they would "vote" on whether they thought it was authentic or not. They had four different colored beads to use for their vote. A red bead meant they believed Jesus said that or something like that. A pink bead meant Jesus probably, or might have said something like that. A grey bead meant Jesus didn't say it, but it was close to something Jesus might have said. A black bead meant they thought Jesus didn't say it or anything like it. When they finished voting, 80% of the statements of Jesus got either a black or grey bead. In other words, these "scholars" claim that only 20% of the statements in the New Testament really came from Jesus. According to them, only one statement of Jesus in Mark is authentic, and in the Gospel According to John, *zero* are authentic. If they're scholars, I like Vance Havner's definition of a scholar. He said a scholar is someone who has been educated beyond their intelligence.

Because I'm a patriotic American, I admire Thomas Jefferson, who played a key role in the establishment of our country. However, Thomas Jefferson didn't really believe all the Bible. He rejected all the miracles and supernatural aspects of Jesus' life. Using this anti-miraculous bias, he took a razor and cut out parts of the Gospel accounts about the Virgin Birth, the miracles, and the resurrection of Jesus he didn't believe. Then he took the parts left and pasted them into a new book he published in 1820 entitled, "Life and morals of Jesus of Nazareth." His book ends when they laid Jesus in the tomb.

Today, there are Americans who claim to be Christians, but they deny the Word of God; for instance, when God's Word says clearly that marriage is between one man and one woman until death separates them, they say, "that's old-fashioned." Some wonder how a Christian denomination could vote to make a practicing homosexual a bishop. It's because that particular group tends to take a very liberal view of scripture.

After a generation that seemed to be leaning toward a more liberal view of scripture, I'm encouraged to see a shift back toward a belief in the absolute moral standards of the Bible.

People are flocking to churches where the Bible is believed and taught.

So, be on guard for both extremes of heresy—legalism that adds to God's Word, and liberalism that takes away from God's Word. The second reason these false teachers must be avoided is:

## **(2) Their motive is greed**

In verses two and three Peter wrote, "Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up."

Do you remember the story of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker? In the early 1980s their PTL ministry was begging for donations. And people gave millions. Their empire came crashing down when it was discovered they had squandered much of the money on themselves. In 1987, they were brought to trial and Jim Bakker was convicted of mishandling \$158 million. During the trial, it was revealed that Jim had 47 bank accounts, six mansions, luxury cars, an air conditioned dog house, and \$60,000 worth of gold-plated bathroom fixtures. Over 114,000 people donated a thousand dollars each for the promise of a year at a hotel at Heritage USA. After the trial, Jim Bakker was sentenced to 45 years and paroled after serving 5 years. Those people who donated to Heritage USA received a settlement of \$6.54 each.

The greed and sin of Jim and Tammy Faye gave a black eye to Christian ministries. Since then, the term "tele-evangelist" is synonymous with cheats, liars, and robbers. Peter wrote that these false teachers have brought the way of truth into disrepute.

I was channel surfing the other night and there on BET was Robert Tilton back on the air begging for people to send him money again. You wonder how people can be so gullible! Anytime you hear someone talking more about money than Jesus, you know they are a false teacher. The Bible says, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (I Timothy 6:10)

There are many false teachers, and the best way to recognize them is to compare them to faithful teachers. If you are going to avoid false teachers, you should:

## **II. APPRECIATE FAITHFUL TEACHERS**

False teachers are like counterfeit money. I heard a funny story about some counterfeiters whose press malfunctioned and instead of printing out \$20 bills, it printed \$18 bills. One of the crooks said, "We'll just have to destroy these bills." But another one said, "No, don't destroy them. Some folks out in the country are so dumb, they won't recognize that their fakes." So they decided to check it out. They drove way out into a rural area and pulled into a little gas station. One of the crooks walked in and slapped down the \$18 bill and said, "Can you give me some change?" Without missing a beat, the old man at the counter said, "Sure, do you want three sixes or two nines?" It would be easy to spot an \$18 bill as a counterfeit, but sometimes it's hard to recognize counterfeit money.

When bank tellers are trained on how to spot counterfeit money, they aren't shown counterfeit bills; instead they are shown genuine currency. The idea is to come so familiar with real money that when false bills come before them, they'll recognize them. The same is true with false teachers. The best way to spot one is to know what a faithful teacher is like. Paul wrote to Titus about the characteristics of a good teacher: "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9) Notice two qualities of a faithful teacher:

### **(1) A GOOD TEACHER declares God's Word consistently**

This passage of scripture is important because it challenges all of us to teach the Bible. The reason I'm committed to teach the Bible is because I never want my messages to dissolve into pep-talks about the power of positive thinking. If I ever say anything contrary to the Word of God, I hope you will come to me and hold me accountable.

We have almost 600 teachers in Green Acres. Every single one of them is committed to teaching the Bible. Our Bible classes are not current event seminars or self-improvement groups. There used to be a phrase "God said, I believe, and that settles it." It sounds good, but the truth is: God said it, that settles it, whether I believe it or not.

### **(2) A GOOD TEACHER cares for people compassionately**

We have some of the finest teachers in the world who open God's Word Sunday after Sunday here at Green Acres. Whether it's the youngest preschool class, or the oldest group of Forerunners, our teachers not only teach, they show they care for the members of their classes.

Sherry Guinn pours her life into a group of second graders every Sunday. She has taught children for 36 years. Kari Barber, Children's Ministry Associate, wrote about her: "Sherry goes above and beyond the call of duty by sacrificing her time not only on Sundays, but also throughout the week to make sure that the children leave her class knowing who Christ is, what He did for each of them, and how much love He has for each one." Sherry, we appreciate you and all the others who work with children!

Ned Smith has been teaching youth for more than forty years. Student Minister, Walter Ballou says: "Ned Smith is faithful because he rarely misses a Sunday even when he is sick or has a chance to go hunting. His priorities are making sure his students are taken care of even during the week and are taught the Word of God every Sunday." Ned, we appreciate you and all the others who work with teenagers!

John Ussery has been teaching Single Adults for fourteen years. Singles Minister, Bryan Grant says: "Every week John encourages his class to give God control rather than seeking to remain in control; to persevere through hardship instead of quitting; to be guided by the truth rather than feelings; and to seek God instead of seeking deliverance from difficulty." John, we appreciate you and all the teachers who minister to Single Adults.

Donnie and Charlotte Gentry teach young married couples. Adult Education & Outreach Minister, Tim Roberts says: "Donnie and Charlotte's faithfulness is seen in the way they develop lasting relationships with the adults they teach." Donnie and Charlotte, we appreciate all of you who teach adult couples.

Verla Stroud teaches women ages 50-60. Tim Roberts says: "Verla has a true sense of calling which enables her to faithfully teach the Word of God Sundays. She lets her class members know that she truly loves them." Verla, we appreciate you and all the other teachers who share God's Word with men and ladies classes! If you know someone who faithfully teaches God's Word and shows compassion to the class members, let them know you appreciate them!

## CONCLUSION

False teachers weren't just present during the first century, they abound in our time. About the time Green Acres got started in 1955, a young Methodist preacher in Indianapolis was getting disgruntled, so he broke away and started his own church. His name was Jim Jones, and within a year he changed the name of the church to The People's Temple. It was a mixture of Pentecostalism and Socialism. He claimed to be a faith healer and would even lay hands on people with cancer and "extract" the cancer from their bodies in front of an amazed congregation. Of course, the "cancer" was later discovered to be chicken liver he had hidden in his coat. They were desperate for money, so Jim Jones sold monkeys in the church for a \$49 contribution. The People's Temple grew, but Jim Jones was convinced nuclear war imminent he started making plans to move the congregation to Northern California. In 1961, the People's Temple became part of the Disciples of Christ Church and Jim Jones was ordained by them.

By the early 1970s the People's Temple had grown to over 3,000 members, and Jim Jones was a local celebrity. The church was racially mixed and offered a multitude of ministries for the homeless and jobless. He openly endorsed political candidates who shared his agenda for socialist causes. He seldom referred to the Bible, although his sermons were 3 to 4 hours long and the People's Temple conducted services five nights a week. He preached what has been called "Marxist Christianity" (an oxymoron), preaching on social justice and racial equality. Those are important doctrines, but he neglected other Bible truths.

After several articles appeared in the mid-1970s exposing some of the abuses and bizarre practices of the People's Temple, they bought property in Guyana, South America. Guyana was chosen because it had a socialist government at the time. The communal experience was named Jonestown.

Members who spent time in Jonestown reported it was more like a concentration camp than a community. Members worked for 14 hours a day for six days, and seven hours a day on Sunday. Jim Jones delivered rambling sermons every night. Convinced the CIA would try to ambush Jonestown, Jim Jones often had what he called "White Nights." In the middle of the night he would turn on all the lights and start preaching over the loudspeakers. Members were required to gather and to drink what he declared might be poison; they had to do it to show they were willing to die for him.

Former members and family members became so alarmed they finally convinced a California Representative, Leo Ryan, to visit Jonestown on an official fact-finding mission. Twenty six years ago, this month, (November, 1978) Congressman Ryan visited Jonestown with some members of the press. He invited any members who desired to leave with him. Sixteen members prepared to leave with the Congressman. As they were preparing to board the chartered aircraft, men from the People's Temple drove up and began shooting. Congressman Ryan, along with five others were killed.

Congressman Ryan is the only U.S. Congressman to be killed while performing his official duties. Meanwhile, back in Jonestown, Jim Jones called all his followers to gather, and he began the gruesome process of directing all of them to drink grape flavored drink that contained cyanide and other drugs. His last sermon was taped, and the words are eerie as he calmly directs his followers to start drinking the poisonous concoction. This time, it was not a drill. On the tape, the weeping and suffering can be heard, until finally there is no sound except the sound of Jim Jones shooting himself.

A few days later, when the military detail finished counting the corpses, there were 914 dead, including 276 children. The cover of *Time Magazine* called it "The Cult of Death." The major in charge of the military detail made an amazing observation about Jonestown. He said, "There were no Bibles in Jonestown." Here was a man who started preaching Christ and ended up preaching communism. He started out with the focus on the Bible and ended up with the focus on himself. One sad picture shows the chair Jim Jones sat in as he "preached" and a sign above his chair read, "Those who do not remember the past, are doomed to repeat it." He should have had the Bible verse that spoke about him that said, "They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves." (II Peter 2:1)

False teachers aren't merely a nuisance, they are dangerous! We should *avoid* false teachers and be alarmed at false teaching, but we should also appreciate faithful teachers who teach the truth of God, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of God! The most important truth the Bible has to teach you is how you can have a full and meaningful life. We're all sinners, and our sin has separated us from our Creator. But God loves you so much, He sent His only Son so you can have eternal life. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23) Have you accepted God's free gift?

## OUTLINE

### I. AVOID FALSE TEACHERS

(1) Their message is dangerous (Revelation 22:18-19)

(a) Legalism: Adds to God's Word

(b) Liberalism: Takes away from God's Word

(2) Their motive is greed (I Timothy 6:10)

### II. APPRECIATE FAITHFUL TEACHERS

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. *Titus 1:9*

A good teacher:

(1) Declares God's Word consistently

(2) Cares for people compassionately



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If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes