

Until Then (Part 3)

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[0 : 00] I want you to think about this answer and don't answer out loud. What is the greatest threat against the church today?

What's the greatest threat against Christians today? Many people would say it's the liberal world around about us, today's liberal culture, because it seems to be on the attack against what we believe, really who we are as Christians who believe that God's word is true.

There's a lot of truth to that, but that's not the answer I'm looking for. Let me ask you again. Who or what causes the most problems for Christians today and does the most damage within local churches and to all Christians in general?

Well, here's a hint. It's been around since the first century. False teaching is the answer I'm fishing for. False teaching is what causes the most problems in the church today.

The source of most false teaching is false teachers within the church. The greatest problems that we as evangelical Christians have today is not really coming from the world.

[1 : 40] It's coming from within by people who are supposed to be teaching and preaching the truth, but aren't.

I want you to look at something that Christian writer Tim Chalice forcefully points out about this. He says, Satan's greatest ambassadors are not pimps, politicians, or power brokers, but pastors. His, that is Satan's priests, do not peddle a different religion, but a deadly perversion of the true one.

Now that's not only true today. It's been going on since the first century. Almost every Christian writer, if you read through the New Testament, almost every writer points out repeatedly, for you as a Christian, for me as a Christian, be on guard against false teaching.

Be on guard against false teachers. A lot of you in this room, you're familiar with the New Testament. You've read through it many times. Well, think about how Paul, how John, Peter, Jude, and the writer of Hebrews issued strong warnings over and over and over again that we've got to be on guard as to what we're hearing, what we're reading.

[3 : 23] We've got to be on guard against false teachers. The gospel writers quote Jesus in saying this on several occasions. One of the more well-known comes from the Sermon on the Mount.

I want you to look at how Jesus issued a warning. He said, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. When he uses the word fruit, he's talking about the way they live and what they teach. We are right now involved in a study of how God wants us to live in this world until we see Jesus face to face.

The previous studies, we talked about what's going to happen after a Christian dies. And in the course of those studies, we learned some things about the second coming of Christ.

We all in this room, we're going to see Jesus face to face one day. If we're alive and he returns to this world, we'll see him then.

[4 : 28] But if not, we're going to see Jesus face to face when we die. And we don't know when that'll be. But we know it's going to happen.

And so I want us to think, God cares about how we live as long as we're in this world. The day's going to come when our life's going to be over.

We're going to have to give an accounting of how we've lived on the day of judgment. Today I want us to return to 2 Peter chapter 3, where we've been for the last two weeks.

And I want us to focus mainly today on his warning that you and I, Christians, people in the church, we've got to stand firm in what we believe and make sure we don't get led astray by false teachers.

Let's read it again. 2 Peter chapter 3, beginning in verse 13. What are we supposed to do until that day?

[5 : 44] Well, that's the way he ends this letter. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace.

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you, according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures.

You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. We have, to this point, gone through the first, what I'm going to call the first two points of this passage.

[7 : 00] I want us to review what we've seen about it does matter how we live. God cares how we live day by day.

And he wants us to care right up to the day we die or the Lord comes back to this world. First thing we saw about how we ought to be living, how God wants us to live, is in verse 14.

We call this, get serious about your character. And we spent one whole week looking at that, and I reviewed it a little bit last week, so we're going to skip over it completely today. But God cares about our character.

Number two, make the most of God's patience. We looked at this in detail last week, but I want to hit some of the high spots quickly now. The reason why Jesus has not yet returned to this world is because God is being patient.

God is waiting for people to be saved, to turn from their sin and put their trust in Jesus. Peter emphasizes this in two verses. I want you to note verse 15, the first part from the New Living Translation.

[8 : 06] It says, And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved. And then back up in verse 9, The Lord is not, excuse me, The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

God's patience, Peter's telling us, it reveals that God does not want to destroy anybody. God is a God of grace. He does love people.

He does not, Peter tells us, he didn't want anyone to perish, but he wants, he requires people to turn from their sin, from their self-centered way of living.

He requires people to repent and come to Him through faith in Jesus. That's what God wants. That's what He's talking about here.

God is patient, but His patience, but His patience has an end. His patience will come to an end one day, and the opportunity to be saved will be no more.

[9 : 20] Immediately after the Lord comes back, or immediately after you die, your eternity is sealed. If you're a Christian, you're going to live forever, experiencing nothing but joy in heaven.

But if you're not a Christian, and we've seen this already in another study, you're going to spend eternity in the torment of hell. Now, God's patience can be seen in our lives right now in several ways.

I want to point out three. And I want to stress this a little bit differently than what I did last week, because it is a matter of eternal life and death.

So, look with me. God's patience can be seen, number one, if you are not a Christian, God is patiently waiting for you to turn from your sin and turn to Him by putting your faith in Jesus for your salvation.

If that appeals to you, if you think to yourself, I'm not a Christian, but I want to be, I am interested, that's a sign of God working in your life.

[10 : 36] And if you will humble yourself before God and just be open and honest with Him about who you are, what you are, turn from your sin and trust Jesus, He will save you.

Look at this, the Scripture says it just as clearly and plainly, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. that's you if you're not a Christian and you'll come to faith in Jesus now.

Number two, if you are a Christian living in willful disobedience to God, God is patiently waiting for you right now to confess your sin, to quit living the way you're living, to turn from it.

God's waiting for you to come back to Him humbly, repentantly. I want you to look at what the Scripture says. God will forgive you and cleanse you.

Look at this, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. unrighteousness. Most everybody in this room is a Christian.

[11 : 51] If you, or at least most everybody in this room claims to be a Christian, let's put it that way. If right now, you are experiencing guilt because there's some things or a thing in your life that you know is not pleasing to God but you're just continuing on in it.

If you're a Christian, you feel guilty. The Spirit of God within you will not allow you to be at peace with God or yourself as long as you are defying Him, refusing to cooperate with Him.

The Spirit of God is making you feel guilty and some of that may be coming out in depression or just frustration or anger at people around about you. The problem is not other people.

The problem is not your job. The problem is if you're a Christian and there's something that you know God's calling you to do or not do, stop doing.

And you just ignore Him. You just continue in your disobedience. If you are a child of God, He's not going to let you alone. If you are a good parent, if you were a good parent when you had children living at home with you, when they were willfully, defiantly disobeying you, disrespecting you, you didn't let it go, did you?

[13 : 22] You didn't make them feel good about their sin against you. They're defying you. You made their life as a good parent.

You can't allow that. It's not good for them. It's not good for the whole family. You've got to do something. And different people do it different ways. But you so worked in their lives, maybe, to cause them to experience pain physically to get their attention or to miss out on something to get their attention.

God works in our lives as our Heavenly Father through His Spirit sometimes to inflict pain on us to get our attention. Sometimes to withhold blessing to cause us to understand, to wake up.

And so what I want you to understand is if you are a Christian and you're not right with God, if you will confess your sin, turn from whatever it is, change your mind, renew your commitment to Jesus as the Lord, the Master, the boss of your life.

This verse of Scripture is saying that God will cleanse you. He'll give you a fresh start. He will forgive you. And you can experience that release, that right relationship, closeness with Him again if you will come to Him.

[14 : 58] But hear this. If you claim to be a Christian but there's no guilt about your disobedience or indifference, if you claim to be a Christian but there's no sense of the Spirit of God in you doing anything to change you, that is a great sign that you're not a Christian.

Even though you may be a member of this church, maybe you've been baptized, gone through all those things, but if there's no signs of the Spirit of God within us, then we learn from Romans chapter 8, we're not Christians.

And one of the things the Holy Spirit does in a person's life who's not a Christian is He so works to make their life uncomfortable, miserable for the purpose of bringing them back to the Lord.

That's God's discipline. You can read about it in Hebrews chapter 12. But there's a third thing I want you to think about this morning. And I want all of us in this room to think of this if we're Christians.

If you have unsaved family members and friends, it may be that God is patiently waiting for you to share the gospel with them.

[16 : 06] We need to be honest as a church. Maybe this does not apply, it wouldn't apply to every single person in here, but all of us who are part of this church family, we need to admit we are not doing what we need to be doing to share the gospel with people in our lives.

Because if we were doing what we needed to be doing, we would be bringing some new people to this church who had come to faith in Jesus and helping them to grow alongside us in this church or they would be going to some other church.

We are being unfaithful in our responsibility as Christians to share the gospel, to be faithful witnesses, to make disciples, all the kind of things that the scripture calls us to do as Christians.

And so that's what I want us to understand right now. Your family members and friends who are not Christians, they will not be saved without hearing and understanding the gospel.

I want you to look at something Paul said in Romans chapter 10 verse 14. But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him?

[17 : 32] And then one more. And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? There's no doubt that our friends and family members around here, they certainly know something about God, about Jesus, about salvation, about heaven and hell.

They most likely have some type of understanding about all these things. But if they're not Christians, it could be that they have never heard a clear explanation of the gospel. Who Jesus is, what he's done in terms of dying on the cross for their sins. It could be they've never heard that the way that they respond is to turn from their sin and trust Jesus. But you know, you believe this way. You have responded this way if you're a Christian. Most of our families, family members and friends who are not Christians, they wouldn't be more open to hearing the gospel from us because they know we love them and we care about them. Now I know there's exceptions. Sometimes there's some exceptions in family situations. But overall, most of us, our family members and friends who are not Christians, they know that we love them, we care about them.

[19 : 06] And because we have that kind of relationship with them, they would listen to us share our testimony of how we became a Christian. They would listen to us talk about what Christ means to us.

They would listen and allow us to share the gospel with them out of respect for us, out of mutual love for us. So we need to do it.

If we care, we need to do it. I want you to ask God to help you share the gospel with someone you know, someone you love before Easter Sunday, April 21st, and that's six weeks away.

We are not, as a church, being faithful because we aren't seeing people come here with us to profess their faith. Most of us, not everyone probably, but most of us, we have people in our circles of influence.

If it's not a family member, if it's not a close friend, it's somebody that you maybe do something with, you fish with, you shop with. Somebody that maybe cuts your hair.

[20 : 20] Somebody maybe you do some odd jobs for. You know some people in your life who are not Christians. I want to encourage you to set Easter, Sunday, six weeks away as a date that between now and then you're going to pray for the person.

You're going to ask God to help you get prepared to share the gospel. And if you want some help doing that, ask me. I'll be glad to help give you some resources to help you get prepared to share the simple gospel message.

But between now and then, pray for that person, pray for yourself, get prepared, prepared, and ask God to open the door to give you an opportunity to actually talk to that particular person that you're thinking of now, no doubt, about their relationship with Him.

And be able to share the good news of Jesus with them, with the prayer, that you'll get to see them saved. You'll get to see God change them before your very eyes.

Make that commitment between now and Easter Sunday six weeks from now. Now, I want us to move on very quickly at how we need to be on guard against being led astray by false teachers.

[21 : 42] Number three, stay on guard. Peter tells us how to do this by pointing out two things. Number one, don't be led astray by false teachers in the last part of verse 16, first part of verse 17.

In verse 16, Peter describes false teachers who distorted Paul's teaching on the second coming of Christ. Look at it. There are some things in them that are hard to understand which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures.

He's saying that what Paul taught about the second coming was hard to understand. But instead of remaining silent, these false teachers, these people, they started talking about what they didn't know.

Peter describes it as they twisted Paul's words and taught what Paul didn't mean, what the scripture didn't mean. And he also says that false teachers distort other scriptures.

Now look in verse 17. He goes on to emphasize that we must stay alert and not be led astray by any false teaching. Not just on the second coming, but on anything.

[22 : 51] Look at it. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people. Now, how do you do this?

If you're a Christian, you're familiar with the scripture, you have heard many times, you have read many times, we are to be on guard against false teaching.

Well, how do you do that? How do you evaluate the Christian teachers that you read, that you listen to on a regular basis or at any time?

How do you evaluate me? You're supposed to be evaluating me. How do you evaluate your Sunday school teacher? That's going to make some Sunday school teachers feel sort of bad here. evaluate them.

Measure them. Just like you do me and any Christian who claims to be teaching or preaching God's word. Tim Chalice points out some helpful ways to evaluate all Christian teachers.

[23 : 56] I want to point out three. His top three that will help us to make good evaluations of those who are teaching us the things of God. Number one, sound doctrine, and the word doctrine just means teaching.

Sound teaching originates with God. False doctrine originates with someone or something created by God, something other than God. Paul emphasized that the gospel he taught originated with God. He wanted the Galatian Christians to understand because they had believed his gospel. Many had been saved. The church had been formed. All was well, and after Paul left, false teachers came in and they changed the truth of God's word.

Here's what Paul says. I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Sound Bible teachers make it clear that the message they preach is not their own. It is the word of God. And they will show you in the Bible where they find what they teach as we see next.

[25 : 13] Number two, sound doctrine grounds its authority within the Bible. False doctrine grounds its authority outside the Bible. The Bible is God's inerrant word.

It is completely authoritative. It is the way God's revealed himself, who he is, how he is, what we are to believe, how we are to live. Doctrine that originates, teaching that originates in the mind of God is recorded in the word of God.

Now I want you to look at an example we see in Acts of Christians evaluating the teaching that they were hearing and it was coming from Paul and his associate Silas.

Luke is writing the book of Acts. He tells us that the Christians in Berea, not over here in West Greenville now, but another place. But the Christians in Berea received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

These Christians, these people in Berea, they knew, they were Christians, they understood that sound teaching would be consistent with all the other scriptures as we see in the next point.

[26 : 23] Number three, sound doctrine is consistent with the whole of scripture. False doctrine is inconsistent with some parts of scripture. What a biblically sound teacher will say about one passage, it will be consistent with what the Bible teaches everywhere else.

Paul told Timothy, do not allow people to bring in strange, different doctrines than what you already understand. Look at it. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.

He made the point even in stronger language toward the end of the letter. He said, if anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing if they teach something different from Scripture.

He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Scripture is all inspired by the Spirit by the Spirit of God. So ultimately, Scripture has one offer, the Spirit of God.

[28 : 01] It will be consistent. And if what someone teaches you in this passage, for example, if it doesn't line up with the other general teachings of Scripture on this subject matter, that's a false teacher.

Or that is a miss, he is, he's just wrong and may not intentionally be wrong. We can summarize these three points with one simple statement.

Look at it. Sound Christian teaching originates with God, that's its origin. Is grounded in the Bible, that's its authority. And agrees with the whole of Scripture. Scripture is consistent.

Now quickly, the people that you're listening to, people that you read for biblical knowledge and help and guidance, is this true about them?

If you see that it's not, throw away their books because it's heresy. Don't listen to them. Don't be misled by someone who is so far off base that they can't fit this criteria.

[29 : 08] Now, sound teaching will not only guide us to develop right beliefs, but it'll help us to develop the right kind of behavior because that's the ultimate goal of teaching. I want you to understand, every Christian book that you read, every sermon you hear, every lesson in Sunday school, it's all designed not to, certainly not to entertain, not to just inform, but it's designed to help you live like a Christian in every area of your life.

It's designed to help you to live like you're supposed to live, like God wants you to live in your home as a husband, as a wife, parent, as a child, as a brother or sister. Let me ask you, what do you believe about God?

What do you believe about Jesus? What do you believe about salvation? What do you believe about life after death? Is it biblically sound?

Are you sure? You should be and you can be. I want to encourage you to make knowing, understanding, and applying the truth of Scripture your lifelong pursuit.

And as you do, evaluate your Christian teachers in light of the clear teaching that you have of God's Word and only listen to and follow those who make it clear that what they're teaching is biblically sound.

[30 : 50] Let's pray together. Dear God, help us right now to hear you and to clearly understand how we need to respond to your Word this morning.

For some people, Lord, it may be just to simply wake up and evaluate what they're reading, what they're listening to. Help them to do that. For some, Father, it may need to throw away some books. Stop listening to a false teacher. Lord, we also, this morning, we need to be more faithful witnesses. Help us to make the commitment that we will develop relationships with people that's already in our circles of influence.

And we will seek to share the gospel with them before Easter Sunday morning. And Lord, we pray that you'd give us the privilege of bringing them to church with us where they can confess their faith through baptism, where they can get involved in our church and grow along beside us as your children.

[32 : 12] Show us how we need to respond right now. And you just do that. Whatever God's calling you to do, you do it. If I could pray with you, I'd be happy to do it right here, right now. Just listen and obey the Lord.

Thank you.