

Until Then (Part 4)

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- [0 : 00] Why do you believe and live like you do? What's the strongest influence in your life?
- Another way to ask this, what caused you to adopt the personal values, morals that you live by today?
- You know, most people make decisions about what they believe and how they live according to one of three sources of authority.
- One is their personal experience. A lot of people just do what they feel like doing. Or they base their decisions based on what has worked well in the past, their experience.
- Some people base their morality, their values on what we'd call cultural norms. That's really what everybody else believes and does.
- [1 : 10] Another way to say that, it's just what everybody else is doing. They follow the crowd. And then the third source of authority is some kind of external source of authority.
- For Christians, that would be the Bible. For other religious people, it might be some other authoritative book. But the truth is, all of us in this room, we're sometimes influenced by each one of those sources of authority.
- Sometimes you just do things because you feel like it, don't you? And it's not even right, but it's how you feel at the moment. And sometimes we all sort of get caught up in what everybody else is doing, and we just follow the crowd.
- It's the easiest way. And then, as Christians, there are hopefully many times that what we do is intentionally an attempt to be obedient to what the Bible says.
- What most consistently influences you? Or who most consistently influences your decisions about what you believe and how you live?
- [2 : 40] Here are some questions. They'll help us all to decide. What are you doing with your money? How do you spend your time? On what basis did you make the decision on how, in a general rule, you spend your money and your time?
- What led you? What leads you to do that? What are you teaching your children and grandchildren about priorities? About morality?
- About their faith? And other things that matter most. What are you teaching them? And we teach a lot of things. Don't get me wrong.
- But what is your source that you're drawing from to influence those who are looking to you and soaking up what you say and do?
- What or who is having the strongest influence on you, the way you think, what you believe, the way you live right now? We're involved in the study of how God wants us to live in this world until we see Jesus face to face, which is going to happen when we die, the moment we die, or when He returns to this world, if we're alive at that time.
- [4 : 04] We're in 2 Peter chapter 3, and please, if you would turn back there, because we're going to focus on one particular verse this morning, verse 17. We're continuing our study of this series about how to live till we see Jesus.

Today we're going to continue to look at what we started last week, our responsibility to guard against the influence of false teachers. And also, we're going to be looking at our responsibility to maintain strong and stable biblical beliefs.

Let's look at 2 Peter chapter 3, beginning in verse 13. Peter is moving from what he's been talking about in this chapter 3, about the second coming of Jesus, into how he wants to encourage his readers to live until they see Jesus.

I hope most of you remember, before we got into this series, we spent four weeks looking at what happens after we die, what happens after a Christian dies. And so now, we're in the fourth week of looking at how do we live until then.

And Peter is giving us some good counsel. Begin in verse 13. But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

[5 : 40] 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. Peter's telling us how one day we can look Jesus in the eye without fear, without regrets.

The Bible is trying to tell us when it talks about the second coming and these kind of things, as sure as we're alive right now and you look around and you see one another, one day everybody's going to see Jesus.

[7 : 13] We can be prepared when that day comes not to be scared to death, not to have so many regrets of what I should or shouldn't have done, but Peter's telling us some things that will help us to be ready to see him have a smile on our face.

Let's look at him. We've been challenged to get serious about our character, to make the most of God's patience, and last week we looked at stay on guard against false teachers.

I want you to look one more time the latter part of verse 16 or the second sentence in 16 and verse 17. He's talking about staying on guard against false teachers. There are some things in them, Paul's letters he's talking about, 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. Most translations say, be on your guard, that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

We looked mostly at verse 16 last week, so I want us to focus more on verse 17 now. The warning is clear. Look at it. He's saying, don't be carried away by those who twist scripture to support erroneous teaching and lawless living.

[8 : 45] We need to understand. Whenever someone twists what is obviously the clear meaning of scripture, they are turning the truth of God's word into false teaching.

That's why they are described here as teaching error in verse 17. Now, Peter also points out that these people who are doing this, they are lawless people.

He has described them in detail in chapter 2. In fact, that's what chapter 2 is. It's a description of false teachers, what they believe and how they live. Now, he describes them as not only teaching things that are contrary to God's moral law, but they live immoral lives openly.

I want you to look at some of the phrases he uses to describe these immoral people. I'm quoting from chapter 2 and I'm using here the New Living Translation. He's talking about how they are immoral people.

Look at these verses. They're evil teaching and shameful immorality. Those who follow their own twisted sexual desire.

[10 : 03] They commit adultery with their eyes. They lust. And their desire for sin is never satisfied. These people are not just immoral people.

They're arrogant. They are in people's face about it. Look at it. These people are proud and arrogant, daring even to scoff at supernatural beings, angels, without so much as trembling.

They talk flippantly about angels as if they're on their level, I think is the idea. And then the next verse, they love to indulge in evil pleasures in broad daylight.

Most normal, most normal people of whatever stripe have enough shame about them to hide their sinful behavior.

I mean, we do that, don't we? When we are going to do things that we know are not right, we don't want everybody to see it. we're ashamed.

[11 : 18] We'd be embarrassed. But Peter's describing people who claim to be Christians now. They are so blatant in people's face in the way that they live, they do it in broad daylight.

They don't care. Their goal was to entice others to join them in immoral living. Look at it. They lure unstable people into sin. With an appeal to twisted sexual desires, they lure back into sin those who have barely escaped from a lifestyle of deception.

Now, as bad as all that is, that's not what's so dangerous. What is most dangerous about these false teachers is that they claim to be Christian teachers?

They were in the church or had been in the church. They didn't ignore Scripture. They did something worse.

They claimed to be teaching it, but they twisted the meaning of God's Word to support their erroneous and immoral teaching. They were what Jesus described false prophets as in the Sermon on the Mount.

[12 : 43] They were wolves in sheep's clothing. Now, look back at verse 17 at the specific warning that's being made.

I put it in bold, the first part of this. Take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people.

Now, I want you to think about how are most Christians, how do most Christians go astray? When you do things that you know are not right before God, when you disobey God's Word, how does it come about?

Excuse me, please. Do you wake up one morning and think, I think I'll just defy God and lie to my wife about what I'm going to do today?

Do you ever wake up one morning and just think to yourself, I am going to try to ruin my good friend with slander, with gossip?

[13 : 53] You don't do that, that's crazy. No, normal person. If you do wake up and think those things, there's something wrong with you. It's not just that you're not a Christian, there's deep problems in you.

What we do, we don't intentionally rebel against God, we don't sit around and plan it. The way most of us go astray is we get sort of carried along based on how we feel at a moment, based on what other people are doing.

Maybe we want to follow the crowd or other people are tempting us and we just go along with them. Sometimes we do things because it just seems like doing this thing that I know it's not right, but it seems like it'll be the simplest thing to do.

It'll be the easiest thing to do. it'll cause me the least amount of trouble to say, speak this lie, to be deceptive, to not do what I said I would do.

I want to back up. This is how we do because this is how super saint Christians do. The human author of the passage we're reading is Peter.

[15 : 23] Most of us in this room know how he gave in to fear and denied that he even knew Jesus three different times on the night Jesus was arrested.

But that's not the only time Peter stumbled and fell morally, spiritually as a man of Christian leadership.

Peter stumbled on one occasion by giving in to peer pressure and acting hypocritically in front of some young Christians.

Peter not only did it and other Christians not only did it, but Barnabas, another well known respected church leader in the book of Acts, he joined Peter in the crowd and acting hypocritically.

I want to show you what I'm talking about. It's in Galatians chapter two. The problem was Peter and some other Christians and then Barnabas, they were at one point engaging in just normal Christian fellowship with non-Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians.

[16 : 43] Christians. But some more Jewish thinking Christians came to that area and Peter and some of the others thought they're going to be mad at us, they're going to think that we're less than what we ought to be by mingling with the Gentiles.

So Peter and Barnabas, they withdrew. And what Paul says, they were being hypocrites. Look at it. He says, but when Cephas, that's another name for Peter, when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned and the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

Now I want you to think, Simon Peter, the leader of the apostles, Barnabas, he is the one who actually mentored Paul, got Paul involved in teaching and having influence.

Peter and Paul, or Peter and Barnabas, they got caught up in the crowd. They gave in to peer pressure.

They got carried away. They sinned. They were hypocritical in front of a lot of young Christians, so much so that Paul called them out publicly over it.

[18 : 19] If that could happen to those guys, that could happen to us, can't it? We can get carried away more easily than them.

I think the reason why many individual Christians, churches, and even denominations have rejected the truth of Scripture concerning such things is human sexuality and marriage is due to their being carried along or carried away by the error of false teachers.

It didn't happen overnight. The two most about-faces that has taken place in this generation in terms of churches, denominations, individual Christians turning away from, rejecting the clear teaching of Scripture about human sexuality and the institution of marriage.

Nothing has been quite like this in this generation. The about-face, the change has taken place. But I want you to know it didn't happen overnight. It happened over many years. As Christians started twisting the truth of Scripture about these issues to make the church less offensive to the culture.

This twisting of Scripture evolved into the rejection of biblical authority and replaced it with no authority.

[19 : 49] Do what you want to do. So now instead of looking at what the Bible teaches about homosexuality and same-sex marriage, we have some Christians, we have some churches, we have some entire denominations that are looking at what the culture says and calling that normal.

They're looking at what people say they feel and let that be the determining factor about what they believe. Now to make matters worse, some of these liberal churches still claim to believe in the authority of the Bible.

I want to give you a specific example of a church that's done this. It's First Baptist Church of Greenville, South Carolina. Now, I want you to understand I'm not picking on them.

I'm not singling them out for any particular reason. I'm using them as an example because they have come out publicly in the Greenville News on Channel 4, WIFF.

They put it in their documents, these erroneous teachings about these issues. Here's the examples.

[21 : 06] As a part of their current mission statement that is listed on their website, you can go and see it today, they state this, we believe in the authority of the Bible.

In their church mission statement, they have this sentence, we believe in the authority of the Bible. Yet, in an article that was in the Greenville News on August the 4th, 2015, the church's senior pastor is quoted as saying this, there's no family value system in the Bible that we would lay into the 21st century.

He's more clear in the next statement. What we believe about marriage and family is culturally driven, not biblically driven.

There's a quote from the pastor of Greenville First Baptist Church. Now, that article in the Greenville News also pointed out church policies about these matters.

And I'm quoting, today, First Baptists can perform same-sex marriages. And the next one is on their website, one of their documents.

[22 : 22] And members, no matter their sexual orientation, can serve in leadership roles and can be ordained as ministers. Now, I want you to hear what I'm saying.

Any church that claims to believe in the authority of the Bible, but rejects what the Bible actually teaches on these issues, that church is guilty of twisting Scripture and teaching error.

I don't care if it's a Baptist church, Presbyterian church, non-denominational church, Episcopal church, Methodist church, any church. It's also true about any individual Christian teacher.

Anyone who teaches anything that openly, clearly, blatantly contradicts what the Bible teaches, that church does not believe in biblical authority.

That church is rejecting biblical authority and biblical truth. And that church is guilty of teaching error. They're guilty of providing false teaching.

[23 : 50] Now, we as Christians, we're being told by Peter that it's our responsibility to stay on guard against such false teachers to make sure that we don't get carried away, get caught up in their false teaching, their erroneous teaching.

A person can get caught up in a church or among Christians like that because a lot of them are your friends. You love them. You have a history with them.

It doesn't matter. We have a responsibility not to get caught up in, not to be carried along by such false teaching.

If you're a parent with children still living in your home, or if you're someone who has influence over children, period, you need to make sure that you are teaching them the truth of Scripture to help them to develop biblically sound beliefs and values because if you don't do it, nobody will do it.

I want to stress that. If you are a Christian with children in your home, grandchildren, if you're a Christian who has influence over young people, they are not going to hear, they're not going to be taught from the world biblical values.

[25 : 26] They're not going to be guided in terms of what they should believe about God and the things of God. Moral living by anyone outside of Bible-believing Christians, Bible-believing church.

But if you're a parent, grandparent, you are the first, you're the primary one that God's going to hold responsible for teaching them. It's good to teach your children how to fish, how to hunt.

It's good to teach your children how to play ball. I have worn out my shoulder playing football, throwing football with Will. I don't have any regrets.

I just take a lead and keep on doing it. I love it. But I also, as his grandparent, want to teach him things that matter a whole lot more than football.

Things that are a matter of life and death, eternal values. And you need to want to do that with anyone that you have influence over. We are responsible not to be led astray and then to teach those we have influence over not to be led astray.

[26 : 40] We are called as Christians, remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, we are called to be salt and light in this world. We're called to be salt and light to everyone in our circle of influence.

We need to do it in the most loving way we can, the most positive way we can, but we need to do it. And if we don't do it, no one will. Before we leave verse 17, we need to note the warning that's directed at sound, mature Christians now.

Look at this. He's saying in effect, don't let anyone undermine your doctrinal stability. Look at the verse. Take care that you're not carried away with the error of lawless people and the next part's the new part, bold, and lose your own stability.

The idea is not that a true Christian can lose their salvation. That's not what he's talking about at all. True faith, true saving faith will continue. Saving faith is a gift of God.

It's a work of God in a person's life. And so when God does this work to save someone, to grant faith, God's going to continue. He's never going to give up on that person. Paul points it out in a good clear way in Philippians 1, 6.

[27 : 50] Look at it. He says, and I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. A person that appears to be a Christian, a person that starts out maybe looking like they're a Christian, but then they just quit.

They renounce their faith. Or they just turn away and walk away from any kind of commitment and start living like an unbeliever. They're demonstrating that their so-called faith was not real.

John describes such people in his first letter, 1 John 2, verse 19. Look at it. They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.

He's talking about false teachers. He called them little antichrists. But they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

He's saying not that such people lost their salvation. He's saying they never were saved. But true Christians can become unstable. We saw how Peter and Barnabas did.

[28 : 57] But by the grace of God, they bounced back. They got off. They fell momentarily into hypocrisy. But God brought them back.

I know some men who went to seminary with a strong belief in the inerrancy of Scripture back in the 1970s and early 80s.

But they came out denying that the Bible is God's Word without error. Back in those days, Southern Baptist seminaries, they were liberal.

But by the grace of God, all of that has changed and they are solidly biblically sound today. You can't teach there and not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. But some of those men, they went in doctrinally sound and they fell away from their belief in real biblical authority.

And some of them never came back. They preach a watered down Bible. I know Christians, individual Christians in the pew, who never questioned the truthfulness of the Bible.

[30 : 12] But when their child came out as gay, or their marriage got hard, or they started making a lot of money, or they developed close friendships with liberal Christians or unbelievers, they changed some of their views on moral issues.

They either ignored or twisted the Scripture to fit their changed values. I want to stop here and say, if I've hit a sore spot with you, I want you to thank me.

It could be that you think to yourself, there was a time when I was totally committed to where the Bible speaks, God speaks. But I've wavered.

I've drifted. I've fallen away from being truly sound in what I believe and how I live. If God's made that clear to you and that's bothering you, thank God because that's His way of calling you back right now.

Confess your sin of betraying Him and His Word. Renew your commitment to God and His authority as expressed through His Word.

[31 : 36] Do that right now. But we all this morning need to listen to this warning from God's Word and stay on guard. There's always going to be something, someone, certain things in your life, certain things that you experience, certain ways that you feel.

You're going to be tempted to be carried along by false teaching and fall away from a true commitment to the absolute truthfulness of God's Word.

We're going to come back next week and see that the best way to avoid being led astray is to stay focused on a growing relationship with God. And we're going to look at what all that involves.

But now I want to ask you one more time. Who or what is influencing you? Really? What's influencing you?

Is it your personal experience? How you feel? Or is it cultural norms? What everybody else is doing? What the crowd says? Or is the teaching of Scripture really the number one source of authority in your life?

[32 : 55] I want to encourage you right now. Make sure that you are standing firmly on the truth of God's Word when it comes to what you believe and how you live.

And if you will do that day by day, not question God, but question yourself and other people, you will not be carried alone.

You will not fall. God will keep you safe. He'll keep you secure as you remain close to Him and obedient to His authoritative and truthful Word.

Let's pray together. Dear God, help us now to just see what it is, to see clearly, understand what we are allowing, what we're turning to, to influence us and guide us in what we believe and how we live.

Lord, help us to see that we can love people and disagree with them. We can care about people but not be carried along by their twisted views of truth matters.

[34 : 15] Help us, Father, to be more concerned with what you say than what the world says. Show us how we should respond to you.

Help us to do that. Let's just, in an attitude of prayer, obey God as He speaks about our commitment, our being carried away if we are. I'd be happy to pray with you during this time if you come during the next few minutes.

But listen and obey the Lord. God penalty