

“Beware!”
Matthew 7:15; 2 Peter 2:1 – 3

Matthew 7:15

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”

2 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.

₂Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ₃In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”

Sometimes the best way to launch into a sermon is the dive straight in. So that’s what I’m going to do this morning building on last week and the Jesus Sermon on the Plain.”

I have to say that today’s sermon is not easy. It’s also not enjoyable in the sense of being light-hearted. And that is because it is on the subject of false teachers.

Half of the letters in the New Testament address false teaching in one form or another.

To Galatian believers Paul wrote:

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?... After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort?”¹

There were those *in the church* teaching that non-Jews had to observe the ceremonial law – especially circumcision – to be saved.

Jude “was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share” and yet he was “compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that the Lord has once for all entrusted to us, his people.

₄For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of

¹ Galatians 3:1;3.

our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”

In his letter to Timothy Paul instructs him to “command certain persons not to teach false doctrines any longer.”²

In Acts 20:28 – 31 Paul warned the Ephesian elders with these words:

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

Even from your own number some will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!

Remember that for *three years* I never stopped warning each of you night and day with *tears*.”

Three years!!! and with tears!!!

This was serious business.

There’s the temptation to treat false teaching so glibly; it’s something that happens over there but not here.

But as Scripture warns, even from your own number some will arise and distort the truth.

So we need to recognise ***there is such a thing as false teaching***.

There has been false teaching all throughout Church history.

There are false teachers and false prophets in the 21st Century Church and churches, just as there was in the 1st Century.

They are in the Church.

In the Church and churches today.

These are words spoken to us.

So:

“What does it false teaching look like?”

Tell the person next to you.

False teachers undermine:

The Person and Centrality of Jesus

² 1 Timothy 1:3.

Eternally co-existent with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.
He is the distinctive and definitive of self-revelation God to human beings.

False teacher will say, “No, Jesus didn’t really mean that” or “Jesus words were corrupted” or “All that Jesus taught was the love and acceptance of everyone no matter what”³ or “Here are some *new* words from Jesus”.

The person of Jesus Christ will always in some way be attacked by false teachers.

Salvation through Christ Alone

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

Peter is clear that false teachers deny the “sovereign Lord who *bought* them.” That’s language that refers to the work of the Cross.

So for false teachers relationship with God is found apart from Jesus death and repentance.

So it could be faith in Jesus plus human effort. Your salvation and relationship with God doesn’t just rest on what Jesus has done but what you can do.
Legalism is a horrible, horrible trap.

Or it’s common to say “All will be saved in the end”, and if I’m honest, if that is true, that would be great.
I also have to say that you don’t find it in Scripture.

So false teachers will either say, “Christ’s “Yes!” is greater than our “No!” and he will spend all eternity to convince all people who didn’t believe now to believe then [in the afterlife].

Or they will say, “Jesus is but one form and one path of many to God”.
Again that goes against the consistent teaching on Scripture.

Marriage and Sexual Ethics

One biggest things that made Christians stand out in the Roman world was the adherence to marriage and sexual ethics.

³ It’s important to define what ‘love’ is. In the current cultural climate ‘love’ means affirming and celebrating another’s choices without question.

Jesus defended male-female only marriage and condemned lust and sexual relationships outside of this union.

The Early Church also upheld this belief and were hated for it.

The Christian view of marriage is one of the few universal beliefs of the Church until about 5 minutes ago...

Someone may not like not this and think it crazy and even immoral but that Jesus and Early Church taught a clear sexual ethic is beyond any reasonable doubt.

And of course false teachers will do exactly that.

Peter speaks of their depraved conduct” and Jude says they “who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality.”

The Authority of Scripture

This is the key component of false teaching – the Scriptural is unreliable, is lacking, and no longer works in the 21st Century.

There are part of Scripture that are inspired and parts that are of human origin; parts that are to be embraced and parts to be rejected as backward, bigoted and regressive.

So some real world examples:

“Health, wealth and prosperity doctrine”

This says that God wants to you to be completely healthy, to have financial wealth and possessions, and that in everything you do, you will be successful.

And the means of achieving is your faith.

You exercise your faith by the verbal act of ‘speaking it into being’; then health, wealth and prosperity will be yours.

It’s also often referred as the “Word of faith movement” or “Name it and claim it”.

It’s false teaching seeded with truth. Yes, God can and does heal miraculously. Yes, poverty is scourge and success is to be celebrated.

Yet this doesn’t accord with Scripture.

Timothy, as just one example, didn’t experience healing for his stomach and his *frequent* illnesses.⁴ (Paul’s prescription – have a little bit of wine...☺).

⁴ 1 Timothy 5:23

It doesn't accord with reality either.

People get sick and die. Financial struggles can suddenly overtake us.

We fail in all sorts of areas.

Christian psychologist Archibald Hart recounts Nancy's story, a 32 year old who had given up on life.

"She is convinced that there is no God, no purpose, and no hope. She sees no prospect for a happy and fulfilling future. All she envisions doing is enduring what is to come, or better still, finding a way to get out of the life business as soon as possible.

During her first therapy session with me, Nancy spoke of abandoned relationships, shattered ambitions, and excruciatingly lonely nights. Nothing she had dreamed of for her life had materialized; every dream she had ever imagined had been shattered. Her present state of mind had begun three years before when she was employed by a large organization as a sales manager. Through diligence and hard work she had made her way up the ladder of promotion, past others older than she, and was soon competing very effectively in a field traditionally dominated by men. At first she'd found her work satisfying. It has occupied most of her waking mind and given her a sense of fulfilment. She has dated some, but had not met the right man yet. "There's still lots of time for this," she had reassured herself while she was ladder-climbing. Then things began to go wrong. She became restless and unhappy. Seeds of discontentment emerged. Her life, which was once a beautiful garden, was now growing weeds. Beauty gave way to ugliness."

So what went wrong with Nancy? It all started when she picked up a Christian book on health, wealth and success. Central to the book was the idea that God wanted everyone to be wealthy and successful. Nancy swallowed this alluring half-truth; hook, line and sinker. "Nancy became obsessed," writes Hart, "with the idea that she wasn't being as successful as she could be and that she deserved a better deal from life. She became profoundly dissatisfied with herself and her circumstances. She decided that she had settled for the clouds when the stars were her destiny." These were the things that Nancy said to herself about her life. Believing she was entitled to better, Nancy resigned her job. But better didn't come. Within six months she was depressed and on the verge of bankruptcy.

Dr. Hart's diagnosis – "She had simply bought into a series of erroneous ideas that had distorted her belief system."⁵

This morning I am going to name names.

If the names are not recognisable then be thankful because the names are not super important in themselves.

They may be names that others have recommended.

[In case you're concerned, the practice of 'naming names' was something Paul and others did on many occasions⁶].

Nadia Bolz-Weber



Bolz-Weber is ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She is an intelligent and articulate communicator who's appreciated for brutal honesty and upfrontness with her own struggles and fondness for foul language.

"I can't imagine that the God of the universe is limited to our ideas of God. I can't image that God doesn't reveal Godself in countless ways outside of the simple system of Christianity. And in a way I need a god who is bigger and more nimble and more mysterious than what I could understand or contrive."⁷

⁵ Recounted by Mick Duncan in *Wild Ones* (Springvale: Urban Neighbours of Hope, 2006), 61.

⁶ 2 Timothy 4:9 – 10; 14 – 15; 3 John 9 – 10.

⁷ "ELCA Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber"

<https://www.exposingtheelca.com/elca-pastor-nadia-bolz-weber.html>

“So I thought, I wonder, we can look at Paul that way. You know like sometimes he was just going off on his snotty opinions, he has some authority to speak on it but that’s not necessarily the Word of God.”⁸

“The Bible’s not clear about ****!”⁹

“Now, there are issues of justice and exploitation within the porn industry, no question, but it doesn’t mean consumption of pornography should be shamed. There is ethically sourced porn.”¹⁰

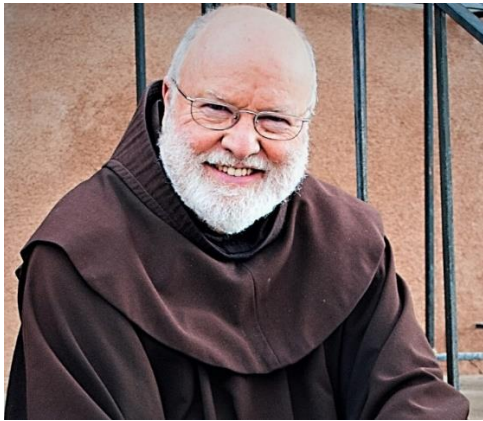
“If the teachings of the church are harming people, then we need to rethink those teachings.”¹¹

So yes is unhelpful to heap further shame on those who already feel unashamed for their actions - a better Biblical option is to point them towards the mercy and justification offered by Jesus Christ.

To say that there is something called ‘ethical source porn’ is just ridiculous akin to ethically source cyanide.

And to say the Bible isn’t clear is ludicrous.

Richard Rohr



Richard Rohr is a Franciscan monk, speaker and author.

⁸ “Pulpit Fiction Podcast - Thursday Night Special 8: Nadia Bolz-Weber!”

<https://www.pulpitfiction.com/archive/2017/02/24/thursday-night-special-8-nadia-bolz-weber>

⁹ “Nadia Bolz-Weber does ministry differently”

<http://outinjersey.net/nadia-bolz-weber-does-ministry-different>

¹⁰ “Nadia Bolz-Weber on Pornography as Part of Sexual Flourishing”

<https://juicyecumenism.com/2018/11/07/nadia-bolz-weber-pornography-part-sexual-flourishing/>

¹¹ “Nadia Bolz-Weber on Pornography as Part of Sexual Flourishing”

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He is jovial and approachable and immensely popular with a growing influence.

“Christ . . . was clearly not just Jesus of Nazareth, but something much more immense.”¹²

“Every time you choose love . . . you are in touch with the Divine Personality. You do not even need to call it ‘God’.”¹³

“You don’t have to follow Jesus or practice the tenets of any formal religion to come by salvation, you just have to “fall in love with the divine presence, under whatever name.”¹⁴

“God is saving everything and everybody... If Christ is truly the “savior of the world” then God’s shape, form, meaning, and message are all far bigger than any single religion.”¹⁵

“Too many Christians have started and stopped with Jesus, never coming to know the Universal Christ. Many who are not Christian have started with the Christ by some other name – after all, there is only One God, One Love.”¹⁶

Clearly Rohr denies Jesus Christ as the definitive revelation of God.

He denies Acts 4 verse 12:

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.”

He believes that salvation is found in all religions.

Rohr teaches all will be saved.

Although claiming to be a Christians he evacuates the Christian faith of its core tenants.

So in response people will say,

“Well you know, it’s their opinion and there’s different opinions”.

¹² Everything Is Christ’—and Other Muddled Messages from Richard Rohr”

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/universal-christ-richard-rohr/>

¹³ ‘Everything Is Christ’—and Other Muddled Messages from Richard Rohr”

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/universal-christ-richard-rohr/>

¹⁴ “Richard Rohr Reorders the Universe” <https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/richard-rohr-reorders-the-universe>

¹⁵ “Bigger than Christianity”

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/bigger-than-christianity-2016-10-31/>

¹⁶ “Bigger than Christianity”

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/bigger-than-christianity-2016-10-31/>

What would you say to that?

Well of course *there are* opinions... about the “End times” or the nature of heaven and hell or how people should be baptised or the violent passages in the Old Testament

The list could go on.

Yet there are core teachings on which the Christian faith stands or falls.

As Jude writes, this is the “salvation we share” and “the faith that the Lord has once for all entrusted to us, his people.”

So what’s our response to all of this?

- *Watch out! Beware!*

Isn’t it obvious?

Well, no.

If false teaching and false teachers were obvious there would be no need for Jesus to say “Watch out!” “Beware!” Stop being so naïve!”

It’s can begin so subtly.

“Wolves in sheep’s clothing”

“They will *secretly* introduce destructive heresies”

They “*secretly* slipped in among you” Jude says.

Watch out for those memes, those YouTube clips, those influencers and people they roll out every Easter to tell you ‘what really happened to Jesus dead body’.

The thing is, they can look like me.

Our best response can be found in Acts 17:10 – 11:

“As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

The Bereans were grounded in Scripture. That keep on going back to Scripture to test if what they were being told and what they heard was true.

