

**Kirk of St James**  
**Sunday August 17, 2025**  
**Sermon: "The Dark Side"**  
**Chad Bolton**

I have lost count how many times I have heard or read a pastor or minister or some self-proclaimed religious guru referencing our 2 Peter passage this morning, warning his listeners of the dangers of false teachings. It is, for better or for worse, a passage that is often used to expound upon the supposed evils of this world, that take form in the shape of some doctrine, ethic, or ideology. Unfortunately, more often than not, it's used simply as a rebuttal against anything that does not align with the speaker's viewpoint.

For example, last year, my parents were visiting and my father hauled out and handed me this book. It's called "Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers"; it's written by John R. Rice in 1941. It was given to my father by a former pastor. I am unclear as to how the pastor got his hands on this book, and even more unclear as to why he passed it along to my family, but lo and behold, it's now in my possession. I had a pretty good idea what it was about and what I'd find contained within, but I read it anyway. And this morning I'd like to share with you some passages from it.

First on the topic of the submission of wives, the author explains (and I quote):

Wives must be subject to the rule of their husbands if they fit into God's order of things. Does some wife who reads this find her heart rebellious against her husband? You do not want him to rule you? You do not want to obey? Then you feel just like all criminals in the penitentiaries and jails feel. They, too, are rebels against God-given authority.

But what if, you may be wondering, a husband is leading his wife into immoral action? Well, the author, Mr. Rice, has an answer for that too:

The way for a woman to win her unsaved husband is to be subject to him. If being a Christian doesn't make a woman into a good wife, then that is a poor recommendation of Christianity to the unsaved husband. No woman can be a good Christian who is not a good wife....

Some woman says "My husband wanted me to go to the tavern with him and drink beer." Another says "My husband wants me to attend the picture show with him."

No doubt that is true. Since you are the kind of Christian you are, your husband sees no reason why you should not drink beer or attend the picture show. But if you were the kind of Christian wife that God has pictured in his Word, so surrendered to the will of God that the rebellion is taken out of your heart, and that you have become, because you are a Christian, the kind of wife that every husband wants, submissive and loving and faithful and holy and good – if you were that kind of wife, being subject to your husband as unto the Lord, your husband would not want to desecrate and defile and lead into sin such a lovely Christian character.

That is essentially a very long way of saying “If you only obeyed your husband more, he wouldn’t sin or cause you to sin.” But the book doesn’t stop there – there’s the question as to whether women should preach. Rice says of women preachers:

“They do good, but how much harm they do! First, the rise of women preachers has meant the rise of multiplied sects of people with false doctrines of every kind...Feminism in the churches is a blight that has grieved God and made ineffectual His power and it has disillusioned the people and lost their confidence. I have no doubt that millions will go to Hell because of the unscriptural practice of women preachers....

The Bible fits in every part, in practice and teaching. Paul said, “Let the woman learn in silence, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”. It was in exact accordance with the teaching and practice of all the Old Testament and all the New Testament. No prophetess in the Bible violated this plain command. They did not teach men nor teach the church and they did not take any place of authority over men.

Did you notice how seamlessly Rice merges this idea of false doctrines, or false teachings, with his own reading of Scripture? Essentially false doctrine boils down to any idea that goes against anything written in the Bible. To not follow the Scriptures in every letter and detail, is to sin, and apparently, a sentence to eternal damnation.

Case in point, women with bobbed, or short, hair. Rice writes the following:

In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians we find a remarkable teaching which ought to stir the heart of every woman. The Lord says, “For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.” The word “power” here means authority.

The Revised Version says, “A symbol of authority on her head.” A woman ought to have a symbol of her husband’s authority or her father’s authority on her head. That is, a woman should wear long hair to indicate that she is submissive to the authority God has put over her. And this special reason mentioned here for a woman having long hair is that angels look on, and for their sakes a woman needs to have long hair! ...When a woman with bobbed hair and a rebellious heart come to pray, angels who hover near and see her head and see her heart are tempted to sin: are tempted to commit the sin which such women commit, the sin of rebellion against authority... From this Scripture it becomes evident how hateful is the symbol of bobbed hair to God. And how it reveals the stubborn self-will of modern woman who is no longer willing to take the place God assigned to godly women.

And here’s the kicker. Behind all of these opinions comes the authority which Rice claims to speak. He says:

The questions are controversial, so we fearful preachers avoid these questions. Many prefer to go by modern opinion without searching the Scriptures...But note this, that the controversy is never about what the Bible says on these questions. There is no controversy there for the Bible is so plain that there can be no dispute. The only dispute is whether or not the Bible means what it says, or whether what the Bible says can be binding in this modern day. Bible-believing Christians ought to take what the Bible says to settle these questions.

And here once again we come to the crux of the matter - that false doctrines are anything which may reside outside of literal and strict adherence to that literal interpretation. Rice’s book is a master class on claiming Biblical authority while endorsing his own cultural views to the exclusion of all others, labelling them as false teachings.

Perhaps you have been referred to as someone who holds to false teachings. Perhaps you have been the target of someone who has used 2 Peter against you, brandishing scripture and wielding it like a weapon. Perhaps you have been persecuted because someone believed false doctrine was dripping from your lips because of a particular topic that didn’t fit their cultural view of what it meant to be a Christian.

And this whole thing of false teachings becomes even more complicated because we do need to be careful because there are people and teachings out there who will use religion to manipulate others into spiritual, physical, or financial ruin, so we *do* have to be on our toes. But I would like to suggest this morning from very personal and raw experiences that more often than not, in our current cultural climate, the ones who point to other ideas that simply don't align with them and say "This is a false doctrine," or "This is a false teaching" – those who take the 2 Peter passage we read this morning and use it to advance their own cultural views - are perhaps the most dangerous teachers of all.

One of my favorite film franchises is Star Wars (the original trilogy). Within this fictional universe, there are groups known as Jedis (the good guys) and the Sith (the bad guys). Both groups harness a mysterious energy field created by life that binds the galaxy together, known as The Force. The Force can be used for various purposes, some good, some evil, depending on the one wielding it. The Force was originally meant for good; it was meant to enhance life, to change the world for the better. But the Sith – the bad guys - often corrupted and abused the Force for their own nefarious, selfish purposes. Their misuse of the Force was often referred to as the Dark Side.

I think there's a good parallel here between this fictional idea of the Force and our very real scriptures and even our religious tradition as a whole, and how we decide to wield them. Will we use the Bible and our faith as the life-giving tool it has the potential to be, or will we use it as a weapon to either destroy or conform all those into our image, our point of view? History has posed this question to Christian civilizations and societies throughout the millennia and unfortunately, we've often gotten it wrong:

- The Crusades (1096-1291): European Christians launched military campaigns against Muslim territories, often citing religious duty and biblical scripture as justification for their actions.
- The Spanish Inquisition (1478-1834): The Catholic Church used biblical texts to justify the persecution, torture, and execution of individuals accused of heresy.
- Witch Hunts (15th-18th centuries): Many accused witches were persecuted and executed based on interpretations of biblical texts that were believed to condemn and identify witchcraft.

- Slavery in the Americas (16th-19th centuries): Some slaveholders and supporters of slavery used passages from the Bible to defend the practice, claiming it was sanctioned by scripture.
- Apartheid in South Africa (1948-1994): Some proponents of apartheid used biblical scripture to justify racial segregation and discrimination.
- Or, if you want something more frequent, when you get back home, simply Google “Bible verses against woke culture” and read some of the blogs that come up.

Our use of the Bible – our use of our faith – can be for good or bad. I mean, Rice isn’t making up Bible verses - much of the scripture he quotes does say the things he claims they say. The Apostle Paul has a lot to say about women being submissive and quiet and not in positions of authority. That was the cultural experience and expectation of his time. But is Paul still right in this regard? Do his views still hold? To answer that, I ask you, *how did it feel when only the men were asked to partake in the responsive reading this morning?* I suspect it was awkward and uncomfortable and felt discriminatory; that it felt wrong. As it should.

Now one may say in rebuttal to me, “Ah, but Chad, you see, that is the world’s lie to you, setting you at odds with God’s Word.” But I don’t think so. If we as Christians truly believe that God is at work in the world because he loves this world, working in us and through us to bring about his coming Kingdom, then it's very possible and probable that new life-giving expressions and experiences of God will arise. I believe our faith is a living faith (it’s why our subordinate standard in the PCC is literally called Living Faith); and like any living thing, it changes, it evolves, it adapts, it grows. Our faith is not closed, it is not dead; it is alive.

You may have heard of the slogan “God’s Not Dead” that some evangelical groups use. Many use it as a sign of spiritual defiance, of standing up for religious beliefs in a secular society. And yet the underlying current from many who proclaim these words is a call to return to this scriptural paradigm of what once was; a world where expressions and experiences of God do not change, do not widen, do not grow; a world where God and faith remain static, in fact ironically, a world where God is, for all intents and purposes, actually dead and no longer relevant. But if God is truly not dead, if He truly is alive, then we should be confident he's also big enough to handle change and to reveal himself in new and exciting ways as the world changes. And so, I believe we truly come over to the Dark Side of our religion, when we automatically embrace the sentiment

that anything not aligning to our viewpoint is false doctrine. Some of our faith's darkest days occurred when adherence to a few Bible verses trumped everything else.

Now you may be thinking to yourself right now, "Okay, but Christianity has shed much of its darker side as society has progressed. Rice's book is from 1941, that's a long time ago. Times have changed." But how much have times changed? Really?

Last week, CNN ran a news item on their interview with a Christian nationalist pastor from Idaho whose church following has been growing steadily. You may have seen it. His following has grown so much that they just opened a satellite church in Washington, DC. The lead pastor – Douglas Wilson – and his staff made their position on particular cultural matters very clear. One of the pastors claimed "In my ideal society we would vote as households and I would ordinarily be the one to cast the vote." When Wilson was asked directly if he accepted women in leadership roles, he replied, "In the church, no, because the Bible says not to." He went on to also talk about how women should not be allowed in the military because men and women are not equal in the world. When further pushed to explain the role women should have in society, he said, "Women are the kind of people that people come out of...within the confines of marriage, the husband is the head and the wife is submissive." And, to no surprise, when asked why he thought his church was growing, he used the false teaching ploy, claiming, "People came because they were chased here by Covid restrictions, blue state governors, chased here by pastors and elders who flaked on them...a lot of people were discovering they did not have the Christian leadership they thought they had."

Friends, if we choose to let it, our religion, can be used for extreme darkness. And sometimes it's easy to miss because it hides behind a kind of authority that dismisses anything contrary to scripture. So, my challenge to us all this morning is to call it out when we see it – and you know what, we don't have to look too hard, even on our little island of PEI. My challenge to us is to name it for what it is - a misrepresentation of our tradition, perpetrated by those who are quick to label others as false, when they themselves wield scripture for dark and dangerous purposes. Our faith – our scripture - it can be dangerous because *it is* so powerful; *it can* change lives. And so, it becomes our responsibility, as Christians who believe in a living God to ensure our faith remains a force for good, and not for the Dark Side. Amen.