

# Cleverly Devised Myths

2 Peter 1:16

<sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16 (ESV))

As I sat down before the Lord this past week and began to ask Him for the message He intended for me to bring to you, my attention was immediately drawn to these first words of this verse, “cleverly devised myths”.

And as I began to consider them carefully, I realized that these three words are probably a good description of the condition that many churches, both in Peter’s day and in ours, exist and operate within Sunday after Sunday. “Cleverly Devised Myths”!

What do I mean by that? It is as simple as looking around us at all the many churches that are holding worship service right at this moment. Why are we here in this church and why are they there in theirs? It is because each of us like the things we believe about God and we then congregate as best we can with a group of people who believe as we do.

Is that a wrong thing to do? Not necessarily, but it can be? Are they wrong in their beliefs and are we right in ours, or are we perhaps wrong in our beliefs and them right? Are we all perhaps wrong, at least to some degree?

Those are some to the question that should well up within our thoughts when we read and consider such words as these here in verse 16.

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The implication that can be drawn from these words is that this is how church groups are sometimes formed. A preacher begins to preach sermons and doctrines that have different and “cleverly devised myths” intermingled within them, drawing itching ears to come and hear his philosophies. And before anyone realizes what has taken place, some of his church members have moved away, but others who like his new preaching have come from other churches to join with him.

Am I saying that he is wrong in what he is doing. I don’t know without examining his doctrines. He may be!

But what qualifies to be called a “cleverly devised myth”? What is a “myth”? My dictionary defines a “myth” this way . . .

“A myth is a traditional or legendary story, often with portions invented and fictitious, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, and is most often one that is concerned with deities and religion.”

Here in our scripture text, the Apostle Peter is implying that some preachers and teachers may at times interweave “mythical” teachings and beliefs in with the true gospel, and done in such a way that it becomes difficult to recognize the difference between made-up myths and real truth.

Do we think that the same kinds of error might be present within the churches of our day? May I give us a strong and needful warning that yes, “myths” are present within our modern day churches and they are probably rampant.

How do “cleverly devised myths” get a foothold within our minds and within our churches? I have no doubt that most of the myths have their origins from within the demonic realms, there where they seek to find a home within dissatisfied church congregations, and where they find ways to gain access into the doctrines that the preacher preaches.

And the more “Amens” the preacher hears from his congregation, the more he keeps preaching what he thinks they want to hear.

May I suggest a few “cleverly devised myth” that are so obviously present with the churches of our day.

One “cleverly devised myth”, a very subtle one that is a theme that I often warn about from this pulpit and is one that is so very common within the more liberal Presbyterian denominations of our day, that of substituting organized routines of worship for that of intimate relationship with Christ. By that I mean, as long as we recite the usual liturgy in church each Sunday and as long as we privately do our obligatory thirty minutes of daily bible reading, adding in a few prayers, tithing our income, and then being sure to attend church as often as we can, we believe that we have fulfilled the necessary elements to qualify as true worshipers.

But folks, such “cleverly devised myths” have spelled the downfall of much of the Presbyterian Church US, as well as some of the Methodist denominations, and is creeping steadily into the Baptist churches.

The substitution of routine programs and biblical philosophies for an intimate loving relationship with the person of Christ is a “cleverly devised myth” and it will destroy a church and all its members.

Other “cleverly devised myths” can be found within many of our Charismatic churches, the “myth” that it is never God’s will that you and I be sick, or that we would suffer, or that we should ever be poor. Such myths have won the hearts of many within the “prosperity gospel” and the “name it and claim it” groups. Yes, God is good and He loves us and He want us to be well cared for, but folks, our dear friends in those Charismatic churches are looking in the wrong places for their doctrines and beliefs. These scriptures are clear and plain and we find within them that in this life, there will be sufferings of many kinds, hunger, poverty and sickness. And it is only as we surrender such doctrines to Christ that we will find relief and comfort. Simply put, the doctrines of “prosperity gospel” are “cleverly devised myths”.

Another of the “cleverly devised myths” that is gaining headway in leaps and bounds in today’s church culture is that of the acceptance of homosexual behavior into the worship of the church. Yes, God loves and wants to save all those who fall into the sin of homosexual behavior, but He does not accept their sin as being OK with Him and within His church. Homosexually is a sin like all other sin and it must be turned from and removed from the souls of those who practice it. It must never be incorporated into the doctrines and beliefs of the church. It is nothing more than a “cleverly devised myth”.

Another of the “cleverly devised myths” that is especially painful to me because I hear it being espoused by members of my own family is that God is a “God of love” and that all the things of God must be measured to that standard and no other. And because He is complete in His love, He will never hold anyone accountable for their sin. He will in some way make a provision so that no one will ever be condemned to hell.

Folks, more people than we realize believe this “myth”, that God is just a big grandfatherly teddy bear who will figure out a way to make everything turn out OK, regardless of the sin involved. Why do people choose to believe such myths? Often it is because as they look at their beloved family members wallowing in sinful behavior, they desperately reach for possible alternatives that will keep them from facing the real truth that their loved one might possibly go to hell.

It is a dilemma that they can find no other answer for, so they contrive “cleverly devised myths” to sedate their anxieties.

Such “cleverly devised myths” as these and others like them go on and on and are as common as each of our churches allow them to be.

But what are you and I to do about them, these “cleverly devised myths” that might be trying to worm their way into our church? You and I must, on a regular basis, go back and rehearse to ourselves and rehearse to each other the basic truths of God that are contained within these scriptures. And those basic truths are these . . .

1. There is only one God and there is no other.
2. And God is absolutely Holy and righteous,
3. And not only is God Holy and righteous, He is good in all that He “is”, and all that He “does”.
4. And God loves each of us with a deep, abiding and everlasting love.
5. But unfortunately, on our side of the equation, there is a condition called “sin”, a resident inclination present within each of us to want to do things that are wrong, things that are self-centered and evil. And all men and women, without exception, have that same inherent inclination within them.
6. But God, being pure and holy and righteous cannot abide alongside the presence of sin. And His perfect “justice” requires that He deal with sin in a just and righteous way, punishing it and removing it from His presence, which in the simplest of terms and with no other provisions being made would require that all mankind be relegated to separation in a faraway place, a place that has no fellowship with God, a place that God has appropriately named “hell”, a place not only of eternal separation from God, but also of unbelievably painful suffering. And all men and women do justly deserve to go there.
7. But God, being also the very essence of “love” has devised an alternative plan, a plan that if men and women would only accept it, they would find redemption from their sins, and peace for their troubled souls. And they would be able to live their eternity in another place, a place that is forever in the presence of God, a place that He has appropriately named “heaven”, a place with “mansions of glory” and eternal peace.
8. But such an alternative plan would require something on the part man, a necessity that we would humbly recognize our lost and sinful condition, a condition from which we know that we cannot redeem ourselves, and we would know that it is through God and God alone that we can enter into His plan of redemption.

9. And so, in His great mercy and grace, God sent His One and Only Son to come to earth and to provide the means of redemption that we so desperately need. And while His plan does not make much sense to many of the billions of people in this lost and dying world, it would be though the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, God's blessed and only begotten Son that our sins would be taken from us and we would be permitted to enter into everlasting life in the kingdom of God, forever united with Him and forever living in His blessed presence.

Folks, that is God's plan and it is a perfect one. It is "truth"! It has no "cleverly devised myths" intertwined within it. It is simple and straightforward and you and I need to remind ourselves of its blessed provisions each and every day.

Now, before we end these thoughts for today, may I ask you and me to make a close personal examination of our own hearts, and of our own personal beliefs about God. Are we satisfied with these basic elemental truths about God that I have just given to us, or do we find ourselves wanting to intermingle in some "cleverly devised myths" to make our religion a little more appealing to us?

May I both caution and also encourage each of us, that our God is perfect just the way that He is. He is perfectly complete without our having to add anything into his personality or into His being.

And may we have only one response to Him. May we love the Lord our God with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind and all of our strength. Praise be to God!