

KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE**2 Peter 2****(Read 2 Peter 2)**

INTRO: I remember a Paul Harvey story quite a number of years ago, as computers were coming into common usage and printers, which had only recently been dot matrix, were now delivering high quality color images. It was a story about how teenagers were making money on computers. Not in repairing them, or helping old people to use them. No, they were actually making money . . . on computers . . . they were making almost perfect counterfeit bills, 10s 20s and 50s, on their printers. This got so bad that the treasury department had gone to great measures using special paper and embedded chips and colors to prevent counterfeiting.

This is the second to last message in our Little Letters, BIG MESSAGE series. Our second message way back on April 30 of last year was from the little letter entitled Jude. Much of what Jude wrote, is very similar to what we have here in the second chapter of Peter. I'm not sure who used the other as a source, but they are only doing what preachers have been doing ever since – getting great material from other preachers. On Monday, I had lunch with my friend John Swope who is the interim pastor at Five Stones and he told me about the message he had preached the day before. I said, I need to talk about that at ABC, send me your outline which he gladly did. When Matt Lewis was still at New Vision BIC in Wisconsin, he led the Great Lakes Conference pastors at our retreat in the most powerful communion service I have ever experienced. I asked him for the outline of it, because I wanted to do it at ABC. Several years later, Rob Douglass and I used that service for our ABC Maundy Thursday Service. Other pastors have made the same request of me and I've gladly passed on my materials. You see, preachers, with the Holy Spirit's direction, know when they need to pass on the powerful work of another pastor. That is what Peter and Jude have done here.

That also means I'm not going to duplicate what I said in my talk on Jude last Spring – which, by the way, you can find online on our website. What I will do today is talk about how, in this day of conflicting messages that scream for our attention, we need to know what we believe. It's essential.

Back to my opening illustration of counterfeiting. You've no doubt heard that Treasury Agents are trained to determine what a counterfeit bill is and what a real bill is. They don't do this by studying fake bills, they do it by knowing the real thing. You see, there are any number of counterfeits, each with their own imperfections, and to try to memorize all the ways a fake bank note can be wrong would be absurd. But to know what the real thing looks like, that's much less complex. That's why it's important to know what you believe. If you know what to believe and why you believe, when a counterfeit comes along you'll notice the difference. We don't have to fall for everything thing that comes along, but we do need to know what we believe and why. So . . .

What does the real thing look like?

- What does your faith look like? Is it real or is it a fake. Do you know? How do you know? Too many of us spend too little time reading the directions. In the past year Kathy and I have gotten into birdwatching. This has always been an interest in my family. When we were kids, my brothers and my one brother in law would take trips to the Jersey shore for the Spring migrations. They still take trips, but now they travel to the Gulf Coast of Texas and Mexico and even to New Zealand for birding. Kathy and I now realize the fascination they have. We also realize how little we know of how many birds there are. So we've been buying books and studying what we see out at the feeders. While in comparison to what my brother Steve can tell you, it's not much, we still know a lot more about birds than we did.
- That's the way our faith is. We don't know what the real thing is until we study the Book, and then pray about what we've read. Pray that the Spirit will open up all the identifiers for you, and as you do, more and more you'll know what you believe.
- You see. . .

We need to know what to believe so that we can stand firm

- Peter tells us in verse 5 that in the midst of a degenerate and infinitely sinful society, Noah remained faithful. From what we can tell, prior to the flood rain had not fallen on creation. The earth was watered from within. So when Noah was building a big boat to ride a big storm that would come with lots of rain, everyone laughed and said, "Yeah right! What's rain?" Noah said, "You'll find out." And kept building and stood by God's promises.

- You see, Peter is pretty tough here. He says that there are false prophets out there just looking for people who are not on firm footing. They know how to make them fall. I witnessed this the other day. My sister told me about a preacher she had seen on YouTube who, with great smoothness and confidence was making a case for a position that is contrary to what the Bible clearly teaches. I looked it up. He was slick. He was leading his people astray, and he did it, by taking what the Bible says and twisting it to make it fit the convenient mold of a sinful society. I was furious. Such irresponsibility. I saw him doing what Peter describes in verse 1 as *destructive heresies*. But instead of getting mad, I need to pray for that man and that congregation and make sure that I prayerfully seek the truth and present it to those in my charge.
- And the truth is, its dangerous out there! That's what Peter is saying. When I was at Navajo Mission we often visited the sandstone butte that was about 8 miles away. We called it Huerfano and the Navajo call it Dzilth-na-o-dith-hle – the mountain that never turns. My cousins from California came to visit and we got the bright idea to climb down over the face of the nearly 800 foot high rock. As we did we discovered how fragile sandstone is. There were many times that I would grab onto a ledge only to have it crumble as I put my weight on it. It was scary and it was dangerous. Obviously I survived, but those who are not firm in their faith are in an equally precarious situation. If you don't know what you believe you might latch onto something that will crumble into dust right when you're trying to put your weight on it. It's dangerous to not know what you believe. We are in danger of falling for the destructive heresies of a deceptive society.
- Peter also points out . . .

We need to know what we believe so we do not bring shame to the faith

- When we don't know what we believe we make God look silly. Peter says that it brings the faith into disrepute (Verse 2). It is amazing how Christians can be made to look like fools for what they believe. It's bad enough when we are seen as fools for the truth. People twist the truth badly enough without us giving them ammunition. So we need to know the truth.
- Remember what Peter said in his first letter? Where he says *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.* 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV) When you know what you believe, you will have an answer for those who would seek to bring the gospel to shame. You see, those who would tear the gospel down are slick and adroit with their message. If we don't know how they are wrong, we may fall for their lies. That would be a shame. That brings shame to the Gospel. Know what the real thing looks like and it won't happen. And if we look silly, at least we are fools for Christ.
- Balaam was a false prophet we read about in Numbers 22-24 and in other parts of the Bible. An evil king named Balaak wanted him to prophesy against the Israelites who were nearby. But try as he might, Balaam could not. On one of his attempts to carry out the lucrative false prophesy, his donkey would not budge a step further because she saw an angel in the road. Balaam began beating the animal until she spoke to him. Yes, a donkey spoke. And she asked why he was beating her. And, if you think that's crazy, he spoke back to her. And then he saw the angel. Balaam saw that sometimes the words of a donkey make more sense than the foolishness of this world. Watch out.
- That's why . . .

We need to know what we believe so that we can avoid that which is counterfeit

- One of the commentators I read on this chapter wrote "*The great security against sin lies in being shocked at it.*" This was true when they wrote it, and it's even more so now. In this mobile, electronic society we have become desensitized to sin. In a discussion with some friends the other day on the subject of pornography, we talked about how what was once shameful has become normalized in a very sick way. People wink at it – even as it is destroying society with its insidious attraction for men and for women. Sin isn't a word in very many vocabularies anymore. It has become so commonplace that even we as Christians are no longer shocked by sin and evil as we might have been before. This has got to change, but how? I believe it will take prayer. We need to pray that God will open our eyes to the pain he feels at the evil that we humans perpetuate. In fact, I think we need to pray that we have the heart of God to even know what he considers sin. Even believers are in a state of confusion right now. Some don't know what sin is and others don't WANT to know what it is.

All this leads us to a sorry state of affairs that makes us look wishy-washy. There's no longer anything that distinguishes us from the world other than the fact that we get up earlier on Sunday mornings – and that's even becoming rare for some. Counterfeit Christianity grieves God and it should grieve us too.

- That's why . . .

We need to know what we believe so as to avoid the consequences of following after a counterfeit

- William Barclay write “*A man becomes really bad when he sets out to make others as bad as himself.*” Misery loves company, that's why others want you to join them in their sin. The problem is, as Paul tells us *the wages of sin is death*. Romans 6:23. And Peter says here that it is even worse for someone who has tasted salvation but has wandered back to wallow in the old life (verses 21-22). It's like me saying that I began walking here this morning but realized when I was halfway here that it was too cold, so I turned around and went home and drove my car here. It's absurd, right? The Psalmist says *Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him*. Psalm 34:8 How then, could anyone go back to the old slop? Peter makes it even more graphic by using the word vomit. And yet some do, those who really don't have firm grasp of what they believe. The way of the world looks better, when what it is, in actuality, is a nauseating mess.
- What awaits people who go back to the vomit aint pretty. Peter predicts *blackest darkness* (v 17) for them. It's the eternal destination of anyone who doesn't know Christ. While the one who has never known Christ doesn't know what they're missing, the one who did know Christ and walked away, will. Hopefully not when it's too late.

Conclusion: So, you can see, it is absolutely essential that we know what we believe. If we don't, we will, at the very least look silly and our faith will look silly. God will also be mocked – at great peril by the way. Also others will not learn the Good News from us. Worst of all, for us anyway, we could just simply lolligag merrily and ignorantly into eternal oblivion. Begin right now. Read the Word. Pray. Study. Ask questions. Until you know just exactly all you need to know – and do you know when that will be? Never. We can never stop learning more of what it is to be a believer. Know what you believe and keep learning. Amen.