

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Out of the mouth of babes?” Certainly you have. It comes from the simple truth that sometimes it takes a child to reveal lasting wisdom. It seems foolish but it isn’t!

For example:

- Patrick, age 10, said, “Never trust a dog to watch your food.”
- Michael, 14, said, “When your dad is mad and asks you, “Do I look stupid?” don’t answer him.”
- Michael, wise man that he was also said, “Never tell your mom her diet’s not working.”
- Randy, 9 years of age said, “Stay away from prunes.” One wonders how he discovered that bit of wisdom.
- Kyoyo, age 9, said, “Never hold a dust buster and a cat at the same time.”
- Naomi, 15 said, “If you want a kitten, start out by asking for a horse.”
- Lauren, age 9 said, “Felt markers are not good to use as lipstick.”
- Joel, 10 years old, said, “Don’t pick on your sister when she’s holding a baseball bat.” and
- Eileen, age 8 said, “Never try to baptize a cat.”

Truth has fallen on hard times in the church world. Part of this is generational and is perhaps best illustrated by the former pastor of Mars Hill church. Rob and Kristen Bell in an interview several years ago revealed their un-comfortableness with truth. According to the article the Bells,

“found themselves increasingly uncomfortable with church. “Life in the church had become so small,” Kristen says. “It had worked for me for a long time. Then it stopped working.” The Bells started questioning their assumptions about the Bible itself – “discovering the Bible as a human product,” as Rob puts it, rather than the product of divine fiat. “The Bible is still in the center for us,” Rob says, “but it’s a different kind of center. We want to embrace mystery, rather than conquer it.” “I grew up thinking that we’ve figured out the Bible,” Kristen says, “that we knew what it means. Now I have no idea what most of it means.”

Brian McLaren is a writer who has left his own brand of disrespect for the truth in the hearts of his most ardent supporters. He is dead set against a systematic theology and implies strongly that truth is ever changing. His idea that the Christian message should be kept pliable and ambiguous seems especially attractive to young adults who are in tune with the culture and in love with the spirit of the age. Generally they can’t stand the thought of authoritative Biblical truth applied with precision as a corrective to worldly lifestyles, unholy minds, and ungodly behavior. And the poison of this perspective is being increasingly injected into the evangelical church body.

Every Christian will know and love the truth. A genuine love for truth will be built into our saving faith. Nothing in all the world is more important or more valuable than the truth. History is filled with accounts of people who chose to accept torture or death rather than deny the truth. It was considered heroic in previous generations to give your life for what you believed in.

Much of the visible church at least in America seems to think Christians are supposed to be at play rather than war. The idea of actually fighting for doctrinal truth is the furthest thing from most church-goers minds.

Many contemporary Christians are determined to get the world to like them. They are obsessed with making the church “cool” to unbelievers and can’t be bothered with questions about doctrine and/or truth.

According to the scripture, the age old conflict over the truth is a form of spiritual warfare. (Ephesians 6:12) And one of our enemy’s favorite tactics is to disguise themselves as angels of light and infiltrate the community of believers.

Don’t take this message lightly. I don’t think in most cases that people set out to be false teachers but Satan has been effective for centuries at sidetracking people into false teaching. We are to be vigilant about our faith.

Last week we talked about knowing the people that we take our spiritual guidance from. IF you remember we talked about three things we need to know and be aware of regarding our teachers.

We looked at the fact that you need to know the person

What do they say?

What do they see?

What do they seek?

Video: In October one of the most absurd and damaging “reality” shows will launch. Take a look at this clip and see false preachers in the flesh. I hope you recognize evil when you see it. I also hope you know how much damage this does to the credibility of authentic Christianity. It makes me want to throw up.

Peter then gives us an example of all three of these things in the form of an illustration from the Old Testament.

A Biblical example of all three:

¹⁵ They have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam son of Beor,^[1] who loved to earn money by doing wrong. ¹⁶ But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice. 2 Peter 2:15-16 NLT

More than about any other person in Israel’s history Balaam set his voice, eyes and heart on a God-forsaken way. When a foreign king offered him money to preach against God’s people he eventually caved in. Most of you may not know it but he also promoted a sort of revolution (sexual) when Moses was trying to shepherd the people of Israel on the plains. (Numbers 31:16) Balaam promoted sexual union with outside neighboring nations which clearly defied God’s law.

Balaam serves as a living example of a false prophet straight out of the pages of the Old Testament. His story is told in Numbers 22 to 24. He tried to resist the power of the money but in the end he was on his way to meet Balak the King of Moab when God put a stop to his foolishness. He didn't ultimately succumb thanks to a talking donkey but he never stopped playing with fire. He championed the cause of the false God Baal by encouraging the men of Israel to take wives from heathen nations. This led to an infestation of Baal worship, which angered God in a mighty way.

He had two characteristics that continue in many false teachers to this day.

Balaam was covetous. He couldn't wait to get his fingers on the gold. Show me the money could have been his favorite phrase.

Balaam taught Israel to sin. He led the people out of the straight and narrow way onto a broad way of accepting sin as a lifestyle. He persuaded them to forget their promises and covenant to God. If you don't think God takes this seriously then listen to this verse found in Numbers 31:8:

⁸ They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword.

Balaam was living in a godless and sensual city that God commanded the Israelites to destroy. While they were at it they dispatched a dried up old godless prophet as well.

So let's once again look at how we can recognize false teaching and false teachers. Last week it was know the person but today we are looking at:

1. Know their performance

The most important takeaway from this point is simply this. Pay attention to who these people really are. Do their life and words match up with the Word of God? Does their lifestyle reflect the teaching of Christ and do they appear to love others with their heart, mind, soul and strength and do they truly love their neighbors as themselves.

All spiritual leaders, teachers and pastors should be evaluated for not just their words but for their performance. During a work review in the business world an employee may say something like, "You know, team, our company promised our clients that this product would be online a month ago. And unless we begin finding ways to narrow the performance gap we are going to be in trouble."

Pastors and leaders should be known not so much for what they promise but for what they deliver. Peter uses some illustrations to describe these false teachers.

¹⁷ These people are as useless as dried-up springs or as mist blown away by the wind. They are doomed to blackest darkness. ¹⁸ They brag about themselves with empty, foolish boasting. With an appeal to twisted sexual desires, they lure back into sin those who have barely escaped from a

lifestyle of deception. ¹⁹ They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you. 2 Peter 2:17-19 NLT

Let's look at the first one:

a. Springs without water/mists driven by storms

Peter knows that the spiritual stakes are high if those responsible for teaching others are not living faithfully for Christ. This is true of professional clergy as well as the person teaching our children or working with our students and teenagers. We must be people who issue the Word of God from a stream of living water that flows from our hearts. Not a polluted stream or a stream that is dirty or lacking in integrity.

Jesus said, "*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'*" John 7:38 NASB

Without the flow of this living water we will be like springs without water or mists driven by storms. We will have no lasting effect. We will not be helping but in fact we have the potential to do more damage than we can imagine.

We have this conversation a lot within different ministries within the church. What qualifications are most important for you to be involved in a ministry? Believe it or not it's not always your education. It's not always about how much you know but more about do you know Jesus and are you following Him with a pure heart.

Mist hints of rain but it brings nothing of lasting value. It is driven away by the wind because it contains no substance.

b. Slaves of this world

False teachers are people who try to preach to others while they themselves are enslaved by some sin. Verse 19 describes it best:

They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you.

I call on us, all of us to fight the good fight for our souls. If you don't think you are in a battle then you are either not a Christian at all or you are woefully and painfully clueless to the life of a Christian. Break free from this world. Break free from the pull and chains of sinfulness. Cast yourself on God not just for mercy but for strength to overcome and for the desire to overcome and please Him.

2. Know the price

It is a healthy reminder for us all. There is a price for hypocrisy. If you and I live a life that is inconsistent with God's Word there is a clear warning here that it matters. It really matters. We find this illustrated by the use of two animals.

a. Dogs and pigs

And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before.²¹ It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life.²² They prove the truth of this proverb: "A dog returns to its vomit."^[g] And another says, "A washed pig returns to the mud."

I don't think I need to talk today about dogs and vomit or pigs and mud. The illustration is very clear. The Word of God through Peter is abundantly clear. If you have been enlightened to the truth of God's Word and you are allowing yourself to get tangled and enslaved by sin again there will be a devastating effect.

Listen all of this matters. There is truth and we are called to embrace it, live it and walk in it daily.

There is a battle. In doing this study I have been amazed at how many other scriptures support the concept of false teachers and teaching. There is warning after warning about it.

Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to His holy people.⁴ I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

⁵ *So I want to remind you, though you already know these things, that Jesus^[b] first rescued the nation of Israel from Egypt, but later He destroyed those who did not remain faithful.⁶ And I remind you of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged. God has kept them securely chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for the great day of judgment.⁷ And don't forget Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, which were filled with immorality and every kind of sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and serve as a warning of the eternal fire of God's judgment.*

⁸ *In the same way, these people—who claim authority from their dreams—live immoral lives, defy authority, and scoff at supernatural beings.^[c]⁹ But even Michael, one of the mightiest of the angels,^[d] did not dare accuse the devil of blasphemy, but simply said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (This took place when Michael was arguing with the devil about Moses' body.)¹⁰ But these people scoff at things they do not understand. Like unthinking animals, they do whatever their instincts tell them, and so they bring about their own destruction.¹¹ What sorrow awaits them!*

For they follow in the footsteps of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam, they deceive people for money. And like Korah, they perish in their rebellion. Jude 3-11 NLT

I don't have time to get into the conversation today about the challenge to truth during the modern era which came from the notion that science is the only way to determine truth. Now we are in a postmodern era and the culture suggests that if objective truth exists it cannot be known with any degree of certainty. Uncertainty is the new truth. Doubt and skepticism have been canonized as a form of humility. I shudder when I think of how many students come out of Christian colleges and universities and never amount to anything in the kingdom of God because they never come to the truth. They never discover truth.

In 2 Timothy 3:7, the Apostle Paul says, “. . .they are ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

What do you do with this?

Keep your faith: Don't let anybody rob you of your faith in God and in His truth. Hold onto your faith. It is precious and you can live and die by it.

Guard your heart: Do whatever you have to do to guard your heart. Turn off the TV if the messages are anti-god or godliness. (That would account for about 95 percent of everything on TV) You may have to pray for wisdom for God to open your eyes to see it because most people have been digesting filth for so long they no longer recognize it. What are you reading? What words have you put into your heart and mind through a book? And you think that doesn't affect your heart?

Stay close to God: Most of us don't want to stay too close to God because when we do His holiness and His call to us for holiness make us feel badly about our lives. The closer you live to God the less this will happen. The most horrible place to be is to know about God but not really know Him and to spend our short lives living on this planet fulfilling our dreams and wishes and missing out on the plan and purposes of God. Only to wake up one day and realize how foolish we have been and how much we lost out on because we were unwilling to surrender everything to God.

Know the Word of God: Seriously . . . open it up. Read it. Study it. Pray over it. Build it into your life. Read it on your knees. Read it while you are waiting . . . read it alone and read it and share it with others. Consume His Word and be consumed by it. It is the only way to survive the battle that is being waged for your soul.

Read 2 Timothy 3 from the Message Bible

3¹⁻⁵ Don't be naive. There are difficult times ahead. As the end approaches, people are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers, impulsively wild, savage, cynical,

treacherous, ruthless, bloated windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They'll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they're animals. Stay clear of these people.

⁶⁻⁹ These are the kind of people who smooth-talk themselves into the homes of unstable and needy women and take advantage of them; women who, depressed by their sinfulness, take up with every new religious fad that calls itself "truth." They get exploited every time and never really learn.

¹⁰⁻¹³ You've been a good apprentice to me, a part of my teaching, my manner of life, direction, faith, steadiness, love, patience, troubles, sufferings—suffering along with me in all the grief I had to put up with in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. And you also well know that God rescued me! Anyone who wants to live all out for Christ is in for a lot of trouble; there's no getting around it. Unscrupulous con men will continue to exploit the faith. They're as deceived as the people they lead astray. As long as they are out there, things can only get worse.

¹⁴⁻¹⁷ But don't let it faze you. Stick with what you learned and believed, sure of the integrity of your teachers—why, you took in the sacred Scriptures with your mother's milk! There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us. 2 Timothy 3 The Message

Let's us pray. . .