

MEMORIZING TRUTH

II PETER 1:12-15

SINCE THE BIGGEST THREAT TO US AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A CHURCH IS FALSE TEACHING, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE HAVE A FIRM HOLD ON THE TRUTH.

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MEMORIZING TRUTH

II PETER 1:12-15

This morning's text is a paragraph in which Peter transitions from describing some of the basic truths about Christianity to arguing against false teaching in the rest of the letter. Bad theology, false teaching, and a naïve understanding of Christianity can derail not only individuals, but also whole churches.

In this one small paragraph he repeats the words and concepts of memory and remembering over and over again. It seems that Peter is saying that the best defense is a good offense. When the treasury department trains their agents to detect counterfeit money, they expose them to real authentic money over and over again. The agents become so familiar with the look and feel of genuine bills, that they can detect a counterfeit right away.

For us as believers, the best way we can identify false expressions of Christianity is to be so familiar with authentic expressions of Christianity, that we will not be fooled or confused by counterfeit expressions. It is important for us to know and live authentic Christianity in our day because there is a lot of false teaching and doctrine coming to us daily under the guise of spirituality and love. Peter wanted to make sure that his congregations were not fooled. He encourages them to memorize the truth.

That can become a problem for us who don't have great memories. Most of you who know me personally know that I am scared to death each week I come up here to preach. I am so frightened, that I type out and read the sermon. Let me give you an example of how nervous I am each week.

I have a lot of friends who are great preachers and I'm always ready to learn some techniques. One week I went to see one of my friends preach. At one point in the sermon, in a very dramatic voice he said, "Some of the best years of my life were spent in the arms of another man's wife." The congregation gasped. They were on the edge of their seats. After a very dramatic pause he said, "It was my Rose, my

mother.” I was really impressed.

I decided I would try it. During one of my sermons, I noticed everybody tuning out; one of my deacons had fallen asleep in the back row. Very dramatically I said, “Some of the best years of my life were spent in the arms of another man’s wife.” Needless to say, everybody woke up. Even the sleeping deacon was startled and sat up. I paused, and then I went blank. Starting to sweat now, getting nervous with the silence, in a panicked voice I said, “And for the life of me, I can’t remember her name.”

We must develop our memories and immerse ourselves in Christian truth both in forming habits in Christian thinking and Christian behaving.

The easiest way to get off track as a Christian is to believe false teaching and then base our lives on it. There is a lot of garbage out there trying to pass itself off as authentic Christianity. There is a lot of garbage out there trying to pass itself off as genuine spirituality. The Apostle Peter’s congregations were inundated with the same problem of determining what was genuine Christianity and what was counterfeit. The main idea of this morning’s text is this. **SINCE THE BIGGEST THREAT TO US AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A CHURCH IS FALSE TEACHING, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE HAVE A FIRM HOLD ON THE TRUTH.**

I. MEMORIZE THE BASICS

Forming the Habits of Right Thinking and Right Behaving Help Us to Immediately Identify False Teaching.

In other words if we are going to remain healthy as individuals and as a church, we must know the truth and live our lives according to it. In verse 12 we are instructed to memorize the basics. **FORMING THE HABITS OF RIGHT THINKING AND RIGHT BEHAVING HELP US TO IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHING.**

A. THESE THINGS

Peter starts out this verse, “So I will always remind you of these things.” The “so” in this sentence has the idea of *therefore*. In other words, he is saying something like, “Based on what I have said in the beginning of this letter, I will continually remind you of these things.” I think “these things” are describing what he is about to say.

Let’s just sum up some of the truths that he laid out in verses 1-11.

He said that God loves us. Because He loves us, God has given us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads us to the knowledge of God and enables us to live holy lives

based on the knowledge of God.

Further, our lives are designed to be lived in cooperation with God's work. God predestines us to accomplish great things. We are to cooperate through obedience, submission, and action. God predestines us. We are to exercise our free will. The place where this comes out most clearly is where we manifest the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. God has given us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. If we are authentic Christians, then we have these qualities already. They are gifts from God the Holy Spirit. It is our responsibility to exercise our free will by acknowledging these gifts, owning these gifts, and exercising them. We are in a partnership with the God.

B. HABITUAL THINKING

One of the responsibilities we have is to develop good habits. We must develop habitual thinking that focuses intently on the truths of Scripture. Peter said that his intent was to constantly remind them of the truth, even though they already knew it. To be sure, we need to grow in our faith intellectually. We must grow in our faith experientially. However, we must do this keeping the basics of the faith in mind. In other words, let's start with what most Christians agree are the fundamentals of authentic Christianity. If you will, follow along as I read The Nicene Creed.

“I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made;

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;

He suffered and was buried, and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;

And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead;

Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one catholic and apostolic church; I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

In whatever we pursue in the way of science, philosophy, theology, or any other endeavor, we must submit to the basic truths of Christianity. We must develop our thinking based on the plain simple truths of the Bible. Like the hymnologist, Catherine Hankey says, "I Love to Tell the Story." We must submit to these truths and conform our thoughts and behaviors to them. Right thinking is developed as we allow the Scripture to inform our minds.

C. HABITUAL BEHAVING

But right thinking is not enough. We need to develop the habit of right behaving. In other words we must develop the habit of learning, absorbing, and acknowledging the truths of the Bible. Then we must practice making habits of behaving according to these truths.

Holy living is a lot like sports. There is a thing in sports called muscle memory. For example, in golf, professionals practice the same swing, over and over and over again. Their muscles are trained to make that same swing without even thinking. For those of us hack golfers, our muscles have memorized all of our bad swing habits.

Many of us, because we have been living worldly lives, have developed defective living habits. We have come to accept science, philosophy, conventional wisdom and technology as our guides, instead of the truths of Scripture and holy living. Science claims to be true. But if one were to examine what science thought was true 100 years ago and compare it to the science of today we could easily see how wrong science was and how transitory its truths are. Even today, you can pick up one medical journal that has done a study on a particular topic and formulated scientific conclusions. You can then go and pick up another journal that has done the same study and come up with scientific conclusions that contradict the other study. Science is not as “true” as it claims to be. But the Word of God is eternal. God never changes. Neither does His Word. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Think about the promises of technology. In the 1960’s scientist promised us that technology would make life easier, shorten our workweeks, increase our productivity and salaries, and give us more free time to enjoy life. What we have seen is longer weeks and we have become slaves to technologies. Much of science and technology has alienated us from the life God designed for human beings.

Science, philosophy, Oprah, Tom, Madonna, or anything else in popular culture should not determine how we should act or what we should pursue. The Bible tells us what God’s will is. We must develop ways of behaving that bring our wills in line with God’s will. The formula the Bible gives us over and over again is this. Right thinking + right behavior = peaceful and joyful feelings.

II. MEMORIZING BALANCE

Knowing Who We Are And Where We're Headed Will Also Help Us to Immediately Identify False Teaching.

We must be firmly established in right thinking and right behaving. In other words **FORMING THE HABITS OF RIGHT THINKING AND RIGHT BEHAVING HELP US TO IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHING.** The first step is to let the Bible determine for us what is truth and the Bible is to determine what right thinking for us is. As we learn to intentionally conform our behavior to right thinking, we will develop the habit of holy living. There is no other way to be in a right relationship with God. We do that by memorizing balance in living described in verses 13-14. **KNOWING WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED WILL ALSO HELP US TO IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHING.**

A. WHOLLY ALERT

The first step in holy living is to be wholly alert. Peter says that he wants to refresh our memories in the first phrase of verse 13. Other translations replace the word *refresh* with to stir up. Here is what is interesting about the word in Greek. It has to do with waking someone up. If you ever tried to wake up teenagers, you know that you have to go in their room, and shake them around. That's the idea here. Peter wants to wake up, stir up, refresh, and bring back to their memories.

Here is why I say that choice of words is interesting for Peter. On the critical night, the one he failed miserably during, the one in which he ended up denying Jesus as his Lord, he fell asleep while Jesus was praying. Jesus had to wake him up three times. Peter wasn't ready to face the critical test that night not only because he physically fell asleep, but also because he forgot all that Jesus told him.

Look, Satan lulls us to sleep. When things are going relatively smoothly in our lives, we tend to let down our spiritual guards. The problem is that when Satan attacks, Peter has already told us that he pounces like a lion. He catches us off guard, he roars, and then he attacks. If we are not constantly on guard, if we are not constantly and intentionally focused on God, we become easy prey. When Satan roars, we are paralyzed.

If you're addicted to pornography, you will be easy prey for Satan if you find yourself in the adult section of a video store. If you are alert and refuse to even be in a video store, you will not be such easy prey. If you are an alcoholic, and find yourself in a bar, you will be easy prey. If you refuse to go anywhere that alcohol is served, it will be much more difficult for Satan to tempt you. If you are a young person, in the back seat of a car with your blouse and pants unbuttoned, you will be pretty easy prey for Satan. To live holy lives we must be alert and awake at all times. We must be focused on God's truth and we must intentionally put ourselves in positions to succeed at conforming our behaviors to it. We must intentionally stay away from situations in which we can be tempted by Satan.

B. HOLY GROUND

Next we must remind ourselves who we are. Our bodies are holy ground. Here again I must remind us that even though Peter is using common spiritual language, he is going to argue against the popular religious concepts of his time. Plato, as well as a good deal of religions at the time, believed that the body was bad and the soul was good. The best thing that could happen was for someone to die and have the soul released from its bodily prison. But first Peter uses another word that Hebrews and informed Christians would recognize. He says, "As long as I live in this tent." The phrase "of this body" is not found in the Greek. Keep this in mind.

The Hebrew Scriptures had already been translated into Greek and widely distributed. This word *tent* is the word for tabernacle. During Israel's journeys through the wilderness, they had a tent in which God chose to live. When God's Holy Spirit filled the tabernacle, His presence was so great and overwhelming, no one could go in. When we gave our lives to Jesus, He sent His Divine Power, the Holy Spirit to come and take up residence in our bodies. So not only do our souls reside in our bodies, God's Holy Spirit lives in them. Our bodies become tabernacles, tents for God to live in. God created us as body/soul beings. Even though our bodies have become corrupted through sin and will return to dust, we will receive resurrection bodies that will be reunited with our souls to live in eternity. Even though this form of our bodies is only temporary, we will be bodily beings in Heaven.

So unlike the Greeks and unlike some of the false teaching that crept into Peter's churches, our bodies are holy. It matters a great deal what we do with them since God lives in them. Our bodies were not created for sexual immorality. Our bodies were not created to do harm to others. Our bodies were created to worship God and do good to others. Our bodies at present, are holy ground in which our souls and God the Holy Spirit reside.

C. HOLY DESTINATION

But that is not the end. Our final destination is not this world. Perhaps that's why God is allowing our bodies to first return to dust before we take on our glorified, resurrection bodies. It seems that Peter wants to make sure he reminds them of all the important things they need to remember about authentic Christianity, because he realizes that he doesn't have long before he will be martyred.

First of all, keep in mind that we were created to be eternal beings. God created us body and spirit. His intention was that we should live in that state for eternity. It was only when Adam and Eve sinned that corruption and death invaded our existence. So we will all have to get sick, deteriorate, and die. But the fact is that we are still eternal. We will all live on after death. Those who remain faithful to God will live eternally in Heaven. Those who reject Jesus and the lifestyle He commands us to live will live eternally in hell.

Secondly, Peter realizes that his death is near because Jesus predicted it. Listen what Jesus told Peter.

“I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, *‘Follow me!’*” (John 21:18-19 / NIV).

Peter is probably in his late 60's or early 70's. By looking at the political climate in Rome, and thinking about Jesus' words to him, he has a pretty good idea that his time to die is near.

Here is something I want us to think about. Peter and James were thrown into prison in their younger days for preaching the gospel. The church prayed for both of them. James was executed. Peter miraculously escaped. I'm not sure if Peter had this perspective while he was in jail. But the fact was that he was invincible. No one could kill him because Jesus prophesied that Peter would be martyred when he was old. He was destined to die in Rome, in a way that would glorify God.

Did you ever stop and think about this? We are invincible until we reach the appointed time that God has for us to die. And since I don't want to live one more second that God wants me to live, and I assume that most mature Christians feel the same, worrying about sickness and death are a waste of time. We have destinies to fulfill in Christ Jesus. The only thing we should worry about is developing holy habits for living lives that glorify God. Knowing that we are temples of God's Holy Spirit; knowing that our eternal souls live in our bodies, and knowing that our bodies will be transformed in the resurrection and be reunited with our souls for eternity, we need to remember that it matters how we live. We were created for holiness, not immorality. **KNOWING WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED WILL ALSO HELP US TO IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHING.**

III. MEMORIZING THE BOOK

Having A Deep Understanding Of The Bible Will Also Help Us To Immediately Identify False Teaching.

I don't think what Peter is saying is all that difficult to understand. Since we develop right thinking by reading and studying the Bible, and since we are continually trying to live according to these truths, it follows logically in verse 15 that we should be memorizing the book. **HAVING A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE WILL ALSO HELP US TO IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHING.**

A. FINISHING STRONG

Christianity is not for the weak-willed. Peter wanted to finish strong and we must understand that finishing strong is important for us as well. He starts out verse 15, "And I will make every effort." He has used this word before. It means that he will expend every amount of energy and exert all his will and determination in completing his obligation to Jesus and to the church. It would be easy at this point to just resign himself to the fact that he was about to die. It would be easy for him to feel sorry for himself and say, "I've done my share. I'm just going to relax until I die." But no, Peter wants to make sure that he is using all his strength, energy, and life to serve God and

God's people until the end.

So many Christians start out strong and they spend a lot of time learning about God and doing all sorts of religious stuff. Then all of a sudden, they seem to lose interest in serving God and aggressively pursuing Christian growth. Listen, we are never done until we come face to face with Jesus in Heaven. There is still much to accomplish. Peter wanted to finish strong. I'm hoping that's the case with all of us. A whole life lived for Christ is negated if we fail to finish strong. That's just like if we ran a marathon in record time, but stopped at 26 miles. The marathon race is 26.2 miles. If we fail to run the last 2 blocks, and quit, the whole 26 miles meant nothing. We must finish. Just as completing the last 2 blocks in a marathon is required to consider the run a success, so is finishing strong in our Christian lives.

B. PETER HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

I guess you can tell that I'm an Elvis fan by the way I worded Peter's death, "Peter has left the building." Actually, Peter uses Old Testament language. He says that he is making every effort to complete all his work here on Earth before he makes his exodus. The word *departure* is the same word describing the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt. Peter views his death as an exodus from his journeys on this Earth and finally arriving in the Promised Land, Heaven.

I have this memorial plate hanging on the wall of my office. It is a picture of an empty stage with a microphone, guitar, and a stool casting a shadow in the spotlight. The title of the plate is "Elvis has left the building." The very absence in the picture evokes all sorts of thoughts. Elvis should be there, but he's not. All the music and Elvis is present in his absence.

Soon Peter would be absent from his congregations. He could no longer teach them, protect them, and guide them. He wanted them to have something after he made his exodus.

C. A CONSTANT REMINDER

In the Elvis plate, the guitar, stool, and microphone are constant reminders that he was present and his music and memory lives on. Peter wants to leave his congregations a

constant reminder. However, Peter is not so interested in leaving them a constant reminder of him, he is interested in leaving them a constant reminder of his Lord Jesus Christ and all that Jesus commands us to live out. There are a lot of theories as to what Peter leaves behind for them to remember all these things. Obviously, he is leaving behind a tradition of his teachings, he is leaving behind at least two written letters, and many, if not most scholars, believe he is referring to the Gospel of Mark. Most of the early church histories have it that Mark became Peter's disciple.

Mark copied down Peter's sermons and recollections of his life and times with Jesus. If this is the case, then think about this. Even though Peter was facing his own torturous death, finishing the Gospel of Mark, and writing these two letters to the churches where what occupied his mind. He finds himself in a long line of prophets, who even though faced all kinds of sufferings and tragedies in their personal lives, made sure to obey God the Holy Spirit and record all the events that now compose our Bible, both New and Old Testaments. Add to that all the faithful people who down through the centuries risked and gave their lives so we could have the Bible written in our language.

I have a lot of friends who insist on debating which translation is the best. They talk as if the very future of the church depended on it. I always tell people, instead of trying to argue about which translation, or instead of arguing obscure things in theology and philosophy, just obey the plain commands of Scripture. Let me give you an example. People want to argue about when Jesus will return. I will always ask them, "Are you loving your wife as if Jesus were going to return today. Are you obeying God's clear commands like forgiving those who have sinned against you? Are you being kind to your husband? Are you being submissive at work, at home, obeying the law and paying your taxes? Are you giving 10% of your money to God and are you serving in church?"

Peter made sure he finished strong and we have his two letters and the Gospel of Mark. Many people gave their lives so that today we have Bibles to read, study, and memorize. Like I said at the beginning of this sermon, the best way to detect something that's counterfeit is to intimately know the authentic product. If we find ourselves as dedicated to reading, studying, and memorizing our Bibles as were the people who suffered and died to make sure we had them, we would not be thrown off

track or confused by false teaching. **HAVING A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE WILL ALSO HELP US TO IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHING.**

IV. EPILOGUE

The biggest threat to our peace, joy, and contentment as believers is to get confused by false doctrine. There is so much garbage out there trying to pass themselves off as authentic expressions of spirituality. Don't be confused. Don't get ambushed and devoured by Satan. Remember, **SINCE THE BIGGEST THREAT TO US AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A CHURCH IS FALSE TEACHING, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE HAVE A FIRM HOLD ON THE TRUTH.**

In his Letters to Malcom, C.S. Lewis says this as applied to the job of pastors:

“I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was feed my sheep; not try experiments on my rats, or even, teach my performing dogs new tricks.”

I constantly obsess about making sure I give you everything I can before I retire and move on. I feel as if time is continually slipping away. However, I am focused on the task at hand. I am interested in teaching you the truths of Scripture, reminding you who we are in Christ, what our eternal destinies are, and attempting to model holy living for you. I am not interested in trying new experiments or teaching new tricks. I am solely interested in caring for the flock of Jesus.