

*5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

Earlier this week, with the passing of Billy Graham I couldn't help but reflect my thoughts on Jesus parables in Matthew 13.

And by that I mean the confusion of the church of Jesus Christ in Satan's world. The wheat and the tares growing together.

The wheat are the true faithful believers and the tares are the weeds who grow in the same field and are so close in appearance as to make it impossible for the farmer to remove them lest he pull up the good wheat at the same time with them.

In the parable the slaves of the master didn't discover the tares until the wheat had grown to a height that it had formed its clusters of grain. The tares though similar in appearance have no fruit. No grain.

In the parable of the dragnet, the net gathers every kind of fish, both useful and not useful together. Then they are separated later.

In my tribe, my particular brand of reformed evangelicalism, Billy Graham took some criticism. He was controversial.

In many ways he was the father of American Evangelicalism that we know today. Before I was born, in 1949, the crusade in Los Angeles became bigger than anything any other evangelist had ever done before.

Billy Graham was obviously going to be someone important.

He had a magnetic personality, he was tall and easy to listen to, easy to look at, stylish. He had a beautiful wife and his family would be a model for anyone. And William Randolph Hearst told his editors world wide to '*puff Graham.*' The wind seemed to be at his back. It was somewhat of a phenomenon.

He was instrumental in founding the defining evangelical magazine, Christianity Today. But in the mid 1950's when he took his crusade model to London the controversy of the Billy Graham method was noted by none other than Martin Lloyd-Jones, the great expositor of the Westminster Chapel in London.

Lloyd Jones had been battling for the Bible with mainline denominations that were abandoning the veracity and authority of this book wholesale.

But Billy Graham threw out the welcome mat to everybody. He included on his platform people who did not believe the Bible was God breathed, did not believe the words of this book are the final authority over men. Men who were so apostate that the minimum truths necessary for salvation were gone.

We have that confusion today. Where is the division and who do I fellowship with? Who do I separate from? Billy Graham explained that he simply wanted as many people as possible to hear the gospel. He lowered the common denominator to let anyone in who would listen. He opened the doors up very broad.

He was that dragnet that just gathered in anything the net would hold. Let the angels sort it out later.

I confess that this confusion of seeds growing in good soil surrounded by seeds that are choked by weeds and seeds that pop up and never bear fruit because of rocky soil all growing for a time together is something I think about a lot.

Who are the real christians? Who are the false? Why do so many people come and stay just a short time and then we never see them again?

Who do we join with in fellowship and where do we draw those lines of demarcation. And that gets confused too because in different battles we might have false religions standing along side us fighting a common enemy.

We're seeing those possibilities more and more as secularism draws their battle lines in the sand. I can be co-belligerents with non-believers who have some crossover in our values. When it comes to secularism, anyone who is not my enemy; is my friend. That's a different scope.

This tension and confusion has been part of the church since Jesus left for heaven and the disciples began preaching. The church is an amalgamation of wheat and tares, good fish and worthless fish, people who will be in the Kingdom and people who won't. All in the same tent we call the church.

And Jesus says, within this confusion there will be false teachers who will come dressed as good shepherds but are ravenous wolves.

Paul told the elders at Ephesus; Acts 20:28 *“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and **from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 “Therefore be on the alert,***

Ephesus, where Paul spent 3 years teaching the full council of God. He left Timothy there to be their shepherd. John the apostle taught them, all of the greatest teachers of the church were centered in Ephesus, and yet, the final result was something akin to our modern fundamentalism where the line of division with the world is so tight that Jesus wrote them a letter.

*1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:*

*The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:*

*2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. 4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

I'm obviously off on a tangent, but you folks have given me full reign, so bear with me and think about how all of this is pertinent and meaningful to Peter's words in 2 Peter chapter 1. I promise, I'm not just ranting.

In the 1890's when England and America were at the forefront of the industrial age that brought modernism, learned men of the church began to question this book.

They said, you can't expect a modern enlightened sophisticated man sitting under an electric light bulb to believe a bunch of myths and fairy tales. This age of modernity has not only enlightened him it's become obvious that our religious book was written by folks who did not have the enlightenment we do now.

Simple fishermen and sheep herders who didn't know any better wrote this stuff with all of it's miracles and myths that parallel the greek influence on them.

Modernity brought with it sophistication and a new higher criticism. With the industrial age and modernity, learned men put themselves in authority over the book. Instead of the book having authority over them. And they set about to de-mythologise the bible.

Get rid of the miracles. Get rid of the virgin birth. Get rid of the resurrection. Get rid of everything supernatural. Anything that transcends learning and science cannot be believed by modern people

who are enlightened. It has to go.

And a great shift took place in all of the main line denominations. No longer is every word in the book the inspired word of God. Men, enlightened men have authority over the book to decide which parts are inspired and which parts aren't.

I try to avoid the word liberalism applied to christianity because it gets confused with political liberalism. Those are 2 different things. For our purposes politics and religion are distinctly separate. Christian liberals are the denominations that deny this book is literally true and every word of it has authority over humans.

Christian conservatives are those who say the book is not only inspired, it has plenary inspiration, that means the very words are God breathed, and every word of this book has authority of Heaven over the men of this world.

By the 1920's, the battle lines were drawn within the broad tree of christendom. Higher criticism, modernism, enlightenment, brought all of the old main line denominations to a place where the schools that were training the preachers all taught that men have authority over the book. The schools taught that it's full of errors. It isn't inspired. It's just a book that occasionally is inspirational about some things.

That brings me to my heritage. Within that mess there were christians who held to the verbal plenary inspiration of scripture and fought hard against the liberalism. Those folks got branded with a name that now carries with it a certain amount of derision. The fundamentalists.

Like Ephesus, fundamentalism always teetered on the same tightrope of being so strict as to be loveless. It's seems a tightrope walk to me. Fall off one side into liberalism. Fall off the other side into losing your first love, like Ephesus did.

Billy Graham set a low bar of separation in order to get as many people into the tent as possible. On his platform with him were men who if questioned would be distinctly separated from basic essential truths

necessary for salvation. He was inclusive of apostate denominations and also Rome.

In 1963 he asked one of the heroes of my tribe to head up what he was calling a world congress on evangelism. That was Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones.

And in a 3 hour meeting between the two great men, Lloyd-Jones told him he could not associate with such a work as long as the confusion of apostate liberal denominations and Roman Catholics who deny essential fundamental salvation truths of faith alone in Christ alone by authority of the Bible alone shared the platform with him. He would not associate.

The other thing Lloyd Jones claimed was that Grahams invitation system was a source of mass delusion and harm to the churches. He could not be a part of that. And so after 3 hours, the two great men went their separate ways.

Some of you may have never heard Lloyd-Jones name before. All of you have heard of Billy Graham. If forced to choose, I would line up behind Lloyd Jones. No one's forcing me to make that choice.

Billy Graham was in the news this week. We remember that he was a class act. His organization for over 60 years never had a scandal. Billy Grahams rule was the same one that Mike Pence is spoken of in derision for in our times. He never had an audience with a member of the other sex, alone.

He presented a marginally thin gospel to millions of people. Hundreds of thousands streamed down the aisles in his stirring emotional invitations. I believe thousands were in fact saved.

What does any of this have to do with 2 Peter 1:5 - 11. I believe the things we've discussed have everything to do with this passage. Where is the separation between the wheat and the tares. Who are the real believers?

We need to know. It's imperative to know the truths that will protect the flock from false teachers. It's imperative for the health of the church of God to be able to spot who is true and who is false.

Jesus said, Oh, this is easy. You know them by their fruits.

But in modern evangelicalism, we get confused because we are pragmatic. We've changed you'll know them by their fruits, to you'll know them by the results they get.

Christian rock concerts, christian head bangers, christian rap singers. They all get results. Christian miracle workers and christian word of faith people who name and claim, who promise to make you rich in this life if you'll only prove your faith by sending money to them for gas for their corporate jets. Christian churches and mega churches who look more worldly than the world itself . . get results. Feel good gets results.

Christian magazines are full of the latest christian schemes to get results. All of that is pragmatism. Preaching and teaching the Bible does not work. It doesn't get results. In fact it empty's the place.

Jesus said, you'll know them by their fruits. But in our modern world we need to redefine fruit. It isn't pragmatism. It isn't all of the stuff I just mentioned. All of the stuff that has crowded into the modern evangelical tent. Results don't necessarily constitute fruit.

What is it then? Peter helps us. Peter says here's a recipe for real christians. This is what to look for. When Jesus said you'll know them by their fruit, these are the things he meant.

- Moral excellence
- knowledge
- self-control
- perseverance
- godliness
- brotherly kindness
- love

More than ever, in 2018, we need to have clear definitions of Peter's recipe of who real christians are, what their fruit is. So, let's look at the words.

Moral excellence. areté (ar-et'-ay) I don't know greek. I say the greek word only to remind you that there is a word in the original that has all the weight of God's very breath. God placed the very words through human authors. In this case Peter.

The words we have in front of us are modern translations of original autographs that were given by inspiration of God. Whatever the word is, and whatever it meant to the original hearer has the same authority over us today as it did to Peter's hearers 1950 years ago.

This word to it's original hearers meant moral excellence as defined by the very attributes of God. Purity. Holiness. Truthfulness. Excellence.

Sometimes the best way to understand a word is to look at it's opposite. In this case, Peter has just told us that because of His magnificent promises, we have been delivered from . . . what?

*4For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.*

arete, moral excellence is defined by this verse. It's the opposite of corruption that is in the world by lust. It is the excellence of those who have become partakers of the divine nature.

True christians are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. We have become partakers of that divine nature. When the Holy Spirit is in control, when we are walking in the Spirit, Paul has a list like Peter's for us.

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no Law....*

All of those things define the divine nature that belongs to born again



believers, and all of those things are the definition of this word Peter uses. arete. Moral excellence. Virtue. The very personality of God. Dwelling in us.

So let's pause and make some application. We'll get down and dirty with current events that have real meaning to our generation. Secularism demands that the church must accept not only marriage between people of the same sex, but also we must be open to confusion of people who are born of one binary gender and claim to be the other. Or both. Or neither.

And the secular world says if we do not accept those folks into our little club, we are being hateful, we are not loving like Jesus taught us, and we are being discriminatory to such an extent that we are breaking the laws of our land and must be punished.

The church has responded. Christencom has responded with mainline apostate denominations who say, yes, you're absolutely right, and we're going to change the way we do business and get in line with you.

Even the pope is trying to walk on both sides of the line. Dogma can't officially recognise you, but come on in, the water's fine.

Last week an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America church in Hoboken NJ. celebrated the fact that their female pastor had become a man.

Their bishop came and they performed a re-naming service where Rose became Peter. Rose Biesen transitioned to Peter Biesen. The visiting bishop said that the congregation should "*Be a beacon of welcome and inclusivity?*"

These are people who by their name are claiming to be evangelical, they're invoking the name of Martin Luther, they are claiming to be a church. What do we do with that? Is Peter helpful?

Maybe. Peter's writing a letter warning about false prophets and he's painting a picture of true christians, true teachers, true leaders to

compare the false to. And Peter says, first thing to look for. Virtue. Moral excellence.

OK, let's have a go at that. Does the Bible have anything to say about sexual purity and marriage and transgenderism? Is it clear at all on these issues, or is there room for fuzzy grayness?

No, it's pretty clear. In the first chapter of the first book, vs. 27 God states; *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.* God instituted marriage between one man and one woman in that same book of Genesis.

I'm not going to wear you out proving every point of my initial questions. Re-read Romans chapter 1. Very clear. In fact Paul agrees with the old testament law when he says; *32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things are worthy of death, they not only continue to do these things, but also approve of those who practice them.*

The Bible is incredibly clear. Crystal clear. So how does a group of people get where these so-called evangelical lutheran folks have gotten to?

Only one possible way. And that is to declare that the Bible is not the inspired words of God, that the Bible is full of errors, that it was written by goat herders who were missing teeth, who didn't have modern science to teach them any better. So they wrote all of that awful stuff, but we know better now.

Pick one. We either get in line behind Peter, or not. There is no middle ground. If we jettison Peter's recipe for real christians, we open the door to anything and everything. Next thing you know you'll be celebrating with me that I've changed my name to Martha.

If you choose the latter, it's possible to say that moral excellence includes a lady preacher named Rose who is now a man named Peter. You can declare that Peter's word means anything or nothing. Whatever

you decide it means.

You're in authority over the words, the words are not in authority over you.

Or, it could mean that there is a group of people in New Jersey who are following a false prophet into perdition. Their teacher is not morally excellent. Compared to the model of this book, he/she is a false teacher. A false prophet ravaging the sheep.

Next word in Peter's list of descriptors of real christians; Knowledge. gnosis. from the greek root /gin□skō, "experientially know") – functional ("working") knowledge gleaned from first-hand (personal) experience, connecting theory to application; "application-knowledge," gained in or (by) a direct relationship.

Once again we're back to our relationship with the book, right. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

But again we have to make a choice. Because we need to decide where we're going to base our knowledge. What is the gold standard for knowledge? The world is telling us all day long that there is conflict between something called scientific consensus and the Bible.

In other words, if more scientists guess on one side of something that isn't provable than the other side, the one with more votes becomes scientific consensus.

Again, what trumps what? If scientific consensus states that something is true that the Bible says is untrue, where do we ground our knowledge?

Peter says add knowledge to your moral virtue. We believe this book is the proof source for all knowledge. If so-called science is in conflict with this book, the book wins. Period.

If I had a nickel for every time I hear, *Scientists now say; blah blah blah blah*, I could make a house payment. This book says it one time and it's

true because God wrote the book.

Not only that, God says things crystal clear. Evening and morning were one day. Ohh, I wonder if we can get together with science and say, well those were God days which are very different from our days, so it could be trillions of years.

When God takes the time to say, evening and morning were the second day, does it seem like kind of a leap to say it could be a few trillion years?

This book is not only full of knowledge, it's full of knowledge that science cannot find out. Secrets that God in His grace to us, revealed to us that are beyond finding out.

Things like, oh for instance, humans have dignity above animals because God created them in His own image. He breathed the breath of life into them. And He declared that because of that dignity it is not OK to murder.

KNPR has been talking non stop all last week, as much as I could endure, I turned it off many times, but they are fixing the problem of children killing other children by talking about it. How do we fix this? How do we fix it. What do we do. Take the guns away, that'll fix it.

How about beginning by stopping the murder of millions of babies. Why would you expect 19 year olds to hold human life in any regard when thousands of babies are slaughtered.

We slaughter 3000 babies every day in this country and we get upset when a 19 year old kills 7 people. That logic is impossible to reckon. This book provided me with the knowledge to understand the basis of the problem.

Bunch of hypocrites. Slaughter 3000 babies and get all worked up over a 19 year old that slaughters 7 others. Why wouldn't we give him a pass and say he was just performing some late term abortions. That would be more logical.

We systematically destroy the value and the dignity of humans because they are created in God's image, in this land, and we wonder why the shootings keep occurring. Really?

Peter says; Here's how to identify real Christians. They'll be morally excellent along lines defined by this book.

And that virtue will be impossible to define unless we have knowledge of what God said *in* this book. And they will be firm in their resolve that the knowledge *of* this book is the standard given by revelation from God who spoke the worlds into existence.

Christian knowledge, gnosis, knows what this book teaches and measures everything else by that standard. This book is the plumb line. We need to know what it teaches.

Well, we've done it again. I hope you folks aren't running out of patience with me. I'm just finding that these truths of Peter's are too rich to get very far each week.

I wanted to share my heart about how I connect the dots of current events in our world to what an ancient book teaches us. For those of us who believe these words are God's words, the application of current events to what the book says is fresh and relevant.

The world is changing around us. Is it changing for the good, or bad? We believe this book has something relevant to say. About 2018. So this morning was just a very practical journey into how I apply what the book says to what is in the news this week.

Next week I promise to move along. Be patient with me. I don't want 2 Peter to be the death of me. But the relevance of what Peter wrote 1950 years ago is like he wrote this last week.

Meanwhile, think about moral virtue. Think about knowledge. And think about what the world is throwing at us. How do we apply these ancient texts to our modern world?

