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Do You Know If What You Believe Is Really True?

John grew up in a Christian home, not missing more than three Sundays in 15 years. His Sunday School attendance pin glistens with 7 bars hanging below the original round anchor piece, designating his presence virtually every Sunday from Kindergarten through 8th grade. I know, because I was jealous and felt unjustly (un)recognized: I had similar attendance and a similar pin, but had only three bars hanging on mine. I had started in another church, which awarded the round pin in third grade. It took me a while to overcome the mental battle that he wasn't necessarily more spiritual than I, even though he (and his mother) bragged about his beautiful pin, and he wore it proudly each and every Sunday. I still cross paths with John once in a while, and sadly, I'm not sure if all the verses he learned, the songs sung, and the sermons heard, have deeply touched John to help him know exactly what he believes and why he believes it. "Because that's what Mom and Dad taught me," he might say. While this is wonderful, and I hope my children would say the same, I have learned that our faith and worldview need to go deeper than what we have been taught.

To fully impact our lives, to the point of moving us to act upon our faith, I believe we need to have a basis for truth as a foundation for "what Mom and Dad taught," or for whatever it is that we claim that we believe. For John, and others like him, I wish to challenge considering the basis for truth, helping to reveal the foundation for he believes. I chose to do this with a song,

for which I have written words and music, and recorded. My song title is based on Del Tackett's question, "Do you really believe that what you believe is really real?" (Tackett).

John is like many Baby Boomers, who grew up for want of nothing. As Steve Gillon describes Baby Boomers, "the flood of babies made America of the 1950's a child-centered nation, where parents, teachers, and marketers labored to satisfy their every need and desire" (19). Being a "Shadow Boomer"¹ myself, I can relate to John, admitting that I was rather coddled in my early years. Then my faith was challenged (and deepened) during my college years at a state university, and Christian author/speaker Josh McDowell helped establish the importance of apologetics in my growing faith. He spoke at our campus, and his 1977 and 1979 books, More Than a Carpenter and Evidence That Demands a Verdict, helped affirm in me that the Christian principles and beliefs passed on to me from my parents were worth believing, and worth sharing with the searching world around me. During his own search for truth, Josh McDowell was challenged in to make:

a rigorous, intellectual examination of the claims of Jesus Christ—that he is God's Son; that he inhabited a human body and lived among real men and women; that he died on the cross for the sins of humanity; that he was buried and was resurrected three days later; and that he is still alive and can change a person's life even today (McDowell, 5).

For McDowell, this examination transformed his life. Ravi Zacharias says, "the question of truth has to emerge; everything else hangs on it" (Zacharias).

My friend, John, is vulnerable to being pulled from the beliefs in which he was raised. John perhaps even memorized portions of Luther's Catechism, where Luther wrote, "The world, the flesh, and the devil are enemies who seek to destroy our faith and to rob us of our salvation. We should constantly pray for strength to resist these enemies, [Matt. 26:41+, Rev. 2:10] and

¹ Gillon used the term, "Shadow Boomer" for those born between 1958 and 1964.

should obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit” (Luther, Chapter XX, 3rd Article). Add to this the cultural susceptibilities of his generation, for "almost from the time they were conceived, Boomers were dissected, analyzed, and pitched to by modern marketers, who reinforced a sense of generational distinctiveness” (Gillon, Introduction). So within this spiritual and cultural context, John and his Boomer peers need to be encouraged to put down deep roots, knowing not only God’s Word, but having the foundation of knowing that it is trustworthy (Psalm 19:7). An understanding of apologetics builds the believer’s trust in the Lord, and “blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit” (The NIV Study Bible Jeremiah 17:8).

Rev. Todd Wilken of Issues, Etc., compiled an analysis of the Baby Boomers and their worldview. Wilken quotes Ralph Whitehead Jr., “The Baby Boom was a self-absorbed generation, a generation that defined itself not through sacrifice as its parents had, but through indulgence” (Wilken). But what do the Boomers believe?

Wilken, who admits to being a Baby Boomer himself, contends that the church of the Boomers rejects the authority of the Bible in one of two ways: “they either deny the authority of the Bible outright, as in liberal Churches, or they ‘relativize’ the authority of the Bible, as in much of Protestant Evangelicalism”. Wilken refines this second point, offering that this “relativizing” allows Boomers “to affirm Scripture’s authority in theory while denying it in practice.” Wilken observes Boomers may read their Bibles, but not apply it to their own lives:

When studying the Bible there is a big difference between asking, "what does it mean?" and asking, "what does it mean *to me*?" The former seeks objective truth, the latter seeks subjective, relative truth. The former affirms Scripture’s authority, the latter denies it.

Bible study in the Church of the Boomers is mostly the latter. If the meaning of the Bible is determined by each individual's private interpretation, then the issue of the Bible's objective authority is rendered moot. (Wilken).

Wilken's opinions are affirmed by Richard Croker, in writing The Boomer Century 1946-2006: How America's Most Influential Generation Changed Everything. Croker identifies factors that changed the world of the Boomers, from television, movies, and rock and roll, to entitlement expectations coming with retirement, and the need to maintain our consumptionist lifestyle even if it means going to war to maintain it (Croker).

Identifying key concepts of biblical worldview to address, I believe the foundation of truth is vital. This is not unique to Baby Boomers, going back to even the time of Pontius Pilate in 30 A.D., seeking, "What is truth?" (The NIV Study Bible John 18:28). Pilate found no charge against Jesus, but was not willing to stand firm in his own belief against the Jews intent in their accusations. Like Pilate, many Baby Boomers struggle with defining truth, especially when the definition of truth stands at the expense of one's reputation. "Pilate, unable to stand for truth at the expense of his own reputation, his boundaries in shambles, abandons the Son of God to an awful unlawful death" (Cloud). But as Pilate will be accountable for his choice to redefine truth, Baby Boomers must acknowledge God's truth. This involves acknowledging the reality of sin and death. Wilken says to reach the Boomers,

The Church must denounce the Boomers' attempts at spiritual face-lifts, and religious lipo-suction. The Church must say to the Boomers: *No amount of moral self-improvement will avail before God. The only solution to your sin and death is Jesus Christ's sinless death for you. You cannot forestall your death because you cannot forestall your sin. But Jesus has destroyed both sin and death for you in His death and resurrection for you* (Wilken, emphasis in original).

Boomers have a reputation for needing to be relevant, and many youths worked to transform culture. But the imperative to accommodate culture has brought many Boomers to the

point of being transformed by culture (Wilken). Gordon Pennington concurs, “We are challenged to either confront culture, to abandon it, or to transform it” (Pennington).

I believe that music is an effective way to address Baby Boomers, as “music is the Boomers’ voice...Suckled at the breast of what began as tinpan alley and quickly became the music industry, the Boomers can’t wean themselves (from music)” (Wilken). Beginning with lyrics, I tried to weave a story, with a call to biblical truth. Del Tackett is teacher of The Truth Project, which Focus on the Family has produced recently for this very purpose. Tackett says, “The only long-term solution to this problem is to rebuild those foundations, to build again that comprehensive worldview within God’s people.” By building this foundation, believers develop the ability “to discern and be able to fend off those lies and illusions that bombard them from every quarter of life” (Tackett).

Developing the story in the lyrics, I wanted to address contemporary examples of challenges to biblical truth. A soon-to-be-released film, “The Golden Compass,” is blazing its way into theaters, with a message of “dark nihilism with a default pagan cosmology” (Horvath). While some compare “The Golden Compass” to “Chronicles of Narnia,” “Lord of the Rings,” or Harry Potter, the danger of this film is different. The film is based on Philip Pullman’s novel, “His Dark Materials,” which claims to be real, with beliefs (including evolution) presented as scientific. Horvath notes, “there is no line between reality and fantasy here” (Horvath). Pullman pulls no punches, admitting publicly that “I’m trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief” (Stiegemeier, 3). Boomers without a basis for truth in their worldview are highly vulnerable to this message, with the common attitude that “it’s just a movie,” without realizing the doors it attempts to open to unsuspecting hearts, souls, and minds. Even more susceptible are the children of the Boomers, who suffer exposure to “paganism as truth” out of their parents’ naiveté.

Another critic writing about The Golden Compass is Scott Stiegemeier. Writing for Concordia Publishing House, his just-released discussion guide reminds well-grounded believers that Christians should read works by unbelievers. “The scriptures are clear that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but there is a kind of earthly wisdom that is available to all men and women who observe the world God has made” (Stiegemeier, 4). Besides artistic appreciation and possible earthly wisdom, Christians have a “missional imperative” to understand the “aspirations, concerns and presuppositions” of all people (Stiegemeier, 4). But media literacy empowers us to question the background and purpose of the writer. As Stiegemeier cautions, “It is the solemn duty of the church to be vigilant and watchful to combat error, not in order to imprison people’s minds, but so that they might be liberated by truth” ((Stiegemeier, 9). It is this kind of truth liberation I seek, in reaching out to Baby Boomers, like my friend, John, in a world surrounded with attacks on Christian faith. These attacks range from subtle (as depicted in the film, The Golden Compass), to extreme (as Pullman’s His Dark Materials novels express explicit hatred for God) ((Stiegemeier, 9).

So how do we present the message of truth to a culture full of confusing messages? Gordon Pennington encourages Christians to be involved in culture, particularly in the arts, noting the ways arts can “speak to issues of oppression and dehumanization as a prophetic critique and a resource for healing” (Pennington, *Redeeming the Arts*, 31). We need to engage our culture, to bring the embodiment and redemptive presence of Christ to the world. The church should bring the light of God’s love to the hurting, and a contagious joy that draws the yearning.

Harbinson, et al, observes that the presence of the church in the world “is often defined solely by its effort to do evangelism” (Harbinson, et al, 31). Using music and the arts, Christians bring hope, and presenting this in the context of art bears witness to the truth. “(P)eople find

themselves through the artistic legacy of story” (Harbinson, et al, 31). Harbinson, et al, calls on the church to “use media to effectively engage the culture in ways that draw non-believers toward spiritual truth and to proclaim Jesus Christ in culturally relevant ways” (4). My song is for my friend, John, and others like him, who have not yet developed a biblical Worldview. May we each work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2: 12b, NIV), determining what we believe.

Words of original song:

Do you know what you believe in?
Do you know if it's really true?
Many voices call out, this is the way, the truth.
How do you know which voice to believe?

What do you believe? What do you believe?

You've got to know what you believe in,
In a world that's falling apart.
So many voices are calling,
Trying to pull us from the way.
The way of Truth,
The way of Truth is calling.
Follow the Truth today.

The Sunday paper so heavy
Things crying out, "This will bring you joy!"
Pay no interest for two years,
But we mortgage our hearts!
That tomorrow we throw away.

What do you believe? What do you believe?

You've got to know what you believe in,
In a world that's falling apart.
So many voices are calling,
Trying to pull us from the way.
The way of Truth,
The way of Truth is calling.
Follow the Truth today.

Someone holds up a golden compass,
Shiny and bright, but the needle spins.
Where is truth, what is true north?
Who knows the future, what is to come?

What do you believe? What do you believe?

The road is wide, with many leisures
The way of Truth is narrow and hard.
But the Savior walks with us.
Take His hand, He will be our guide.

What do you believe? What do you believe?

You've got to know what you believe in,
In a world that's falling apart.
So many voices are calling,
Trying to pull us from the way.
The way of Truth,
The way of Truth is calling.
Follow the Truth today.

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