

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

October 26

2008

Emphasizing Basics

If the Lord's church is to survive and prosper, it must never depart from the basics of the gospel.

A wise and experienced elder once told me, "I've never known a church to grow that didn't emphasize the basics. If a church is struggling, they just need to get back to first principles and preach them like the people have never heard them before." That was good advice.

If Christians do not have a basic understanding of the elementary principles of the gospel, they have no solid foundation on which to build and grow. One of Christ's parables spoke of the need of making certain that we build on the right foundation (see Matt. 7: 24-27). That reminds us of the importance of teaching some of the same lessons over and over again.

There are several reasons for this: First, there are always young people growing up who have heard these lessons from the time of their birth. But, at a very young age, most of these studies do not sink in. At some point (and really, only God knows when it will be), a lesson that young people have heard numerous times finally takes hold and they understand an important truth for the very first time. We should never assume that our young people know and understand Bible subjects just because we know they have heard them before.

Secondly, we can never be sure when a visitor will show up and, perhaps, hear a vital Bible lesson at a crucial time in his life. It may be the first and only time that person will ever have the opportunity to understand an important doctrinal point, which could make the

difference in his eternal destiny. That's also why we should make certain to explain the plan of salvation during a lesson every time. You just don't know who may be listening carefully and seriously considering obedience. He might have listened many times in the past, have done nothing about what he was learning, and still be receptive this time.

Also, we must not assume that our older members (not in age, necessarily, but those who have been around a while) can always remember everything they've ever heard. It might have been a long time since they have studied a particular subject or they might be aware of the truth but not know where the verses are that teach that truth. It is always helpful to be reminded of things we know to be true so that our convictions are deep and not easily shaken. These things help to mature and stabilize us spiritually "*till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive*" (Eph. 4:13,14).

There will be certain subjects that we will never outgrow. We must never be afraid to preach lessons that members have heard many times. When someone has been a Christian for several years, there is almost no way to preach something new to him. As people have said, "If it's new, it isn't true and if it's true, it isn't new."

No matter how much "strong meat" of the word people can handle, those who are the most mature spiritually will never grow tired of hearing these basic principles of truth, because they know how important they are. They love all truth and do not have to be entertained with "some new thing" all the time.

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (Heb. 5:12). If people are not growing spiritually, if the church is struggling with carnality and division, if souls are not being saved, look first at the preaching. Maybe we need to just get back to the basics.

✍ Roger Hillis

"COME AND SEE"

When Philip told Nathanael, *"We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph"* (John 1:45), Nathanael responded by asking, *"Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* Philip's reply to Nathanael's question serves as the title of this article. He did not rebuke him for his question or doubt. He simply said, *"Come and see."* Nathanael did as Philip instructed and when Jesus presented the evidence to him he said, *"Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel"* (John 1:49).

The answer Philip gave to Nathanael's question on this occasion has been God's answer to honest doubt through the years. Be willing to give an honest hearing to the evidence. This was the answer Jesus gave to Thomas when he said, *"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe"* (John 20:25). When Jesus later appeared to Thomas He did not rebuke Thomas for not believing the words of the other apostles, instead He said, *"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing"* (John 20:27). He was calling upon Thomas to examine the evidence, i.e., "Come and see." Upon doing so Thomas was compelled to declare, *"My Lord and my God."* What other conclusion could any honest individual reach?

Today, as we seek to follow and glorify Christ in all we teach and do we encounter those who question and doubt the things we teach. Some who offer these questions and doubts are like the Jews in John 9 who would not believe even though the evidence was presented to them. However, I am convinced that there are still many like Nathanael and Thomas who are honest in their questioning and doubts. To these, we give the same answer as Philip and Jesus, "Come and see." Come and examine the things we teach and practice in the light of God's word. Be like those noble Bereans who *"received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

The Lord does not expect people to blindly follow Him with no basis to their faith. He wants us to have that honest and good heart (Luke 8:15) that will hear the word and bring forth fruit in our lives.

If the Lord expects us to examine the evidence before believing on Him how much more should we expect people to examine what we teach and practice in the light of God's word before they accept it as truth. How willing are you to have what you believe and practice in religion put to the test? How willing are you to respond to the request "Show me that in the Bible." Some seem to think that if something is said often enough and long enough then it must be true. So, we have individuals saying, "One church is as good as another;" "it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere," or "we're all going to the same place (heaven), we are just traveling different roads." I know you have heard these statements (and many others like them) but are they true? The only way to determine whether they are true is to examine them in the light of what the word of God teaches. I am persuaded that such an examination will result in the honest individual concluding that these statements are not true.

Let me close by asking another question? Is it possible for people today to believe, teach and practice the same things believed, taught and practiced by the first century Christians? My answer? "Come and see."

✍ James Hahn



Thanks to Greg Gwin for the wonderful lessons presented during our gospel meeting last week.

Belleville church of Christ

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www.bellevillechurch.net

Schedule of Services

Sun. Bible Study... 9:30 a.m.
Sun. Morning Worship... 10:30 a.m.
Sun. Evening Worship... 5:00 p.m.
Wed. Bible Study... 7:00 p.m.

Elders

Charles Carpenter... (317) 839-3873
James Hahn... (317) 745-1507

Deacons

Leon Nevins... (317) 272-2966
Don Perry... (765) 676-5825
Alvin Stanley... (317) 831-3514

Evangelist

James Hahn... (317) 745-1507