

The Fundamentals

It's impossible to accomplish some things in life until we have mastered the fundamentals. Any sports coach will tell you that a great team has to first be grounded in the fundamentals. Teachers will tell you the same thing about successful students – and the same thing is true about Christians. The fundamentals – the “first principles” – are not always the most enjoyable part, but they are the most essential part of what we need to learn. If we don't, we may very well be characterized by these words – “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14).

May we be well-grounded in the fundamentals so we can grow up to enjoy the “solid food” found in God's word.

- by Allen Smith

The Joneses' Church

Keeping up with the Joneses is an old way of describing people who think they must have everything their neighbors have. Not wanting to be outdone, folks buy new houses, cars, clothes, sports equipment, electronic gizmos, and more. In some cases the old things really are worn out or obsolete; in others, we simply do not want to be (or appear to be) outdated.

There is often a problem, however: the Joneses may make more money than we do. To solve that, we convince ourselves that these wants are needs and outcome the credit cards. (Are the Joneses' finances in any better shape?) And there is another problem: the Joneses don't ever quit buying. We are always aiming at a moving target. The process never ends.

Did you know that the Joneses go to church? Yes, they do. And would you be surprised to learn that church has it all, too?

Denominational churches have long known about the Joneses' church. When it started having pot-lucks, others quickly followed. It then built a multi-purpose facility in which to have them. So did others. The Joneses' church then turned to musical programs, plays, sports teams, day care, schools, exercise classes, camps, retreats, recreational outings and more. They were determined to be the biggest. But so were others. They not only kept up with the Joneses' church, they tried to outdo them. Now, anything goes. Nothing seems too far-fetched; some church somewhere has it.

Lost in all this scramble for image, size, and novelty is the simple New Testament pattern for local churches. Also lost is God's approval. Merely attaching His name to a thing does not make it right (Matthew 7:21-23).

Conservatives preach against the Joneses' church's innovations, yet some of us look wishfully at their swelling numbers and begin to dabble. A few of our “gospel meetings” are looking a lot like youth rallies or marriage seminars. Sermon content is shifting away from salvation and doctrinal themes. In some places VBS is getting increasingly playful and dramatic. So are some preachers.

There is no virtue in getting stuck in a rut. The framework of what God authorizes certainly allows for some variety in approach. But the Joneses' church will always have more to appeal to the worldly minded. Salvation is what the Lord's church is all about (Ephesians 5:23).

- by Frank Himmel

Did Paul Write Hebrews?

The author of the book of Hebrews chose not to identify himself. From the second century until the Protestant Reformation the overwhelming consensus of opinion was that Paul was its author. However, Martin Luther tentatively concluded that Apollos wrote Hebrews, and since then scholars have increasingly agreed with his assessment. References to chains, Timothy, and

prison seem to point to the apostle Paul (10:34; 13:23). But scholars appeal to the elegant, polished Greek of Hebrews in contrast with the rough Greek of letters known to be written by Paul as evidence that Apollos, the evangelist known for being "eloquent" and "mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24), penned Hebrews. Bottom line, we must accept the fact that the author chose to be anonymous.

- by Keith Sharp

Working with Elders

Hebrews 13:17 says: *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."* When the writer mentions those *"that have the rule over you,"* it is a clear reference to the elders. 1 Timothy 5:17 speaks of *"elders that rule well."* Now, what are we to do in respect to the elders? ***"Obey them ... and submit yourselves."***

In what areas should we obey and submit to the elders? In matters of faith and doctrine? Absolutely not - at least not if they teach or instruct us in anything that is different from the word of God (Galatians 1:8,9). We should always *"obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29). And so, our submission in matters of faith and doctrine is to the Lord, and not to any man (2 John 9-11).

It seems then that the only area where the elders have decision making power - to which we must submit - is in matters of judgment. In the work of any local congregation there will be many judgments to make about our collective work. Where? When? Who? And to some extent, How? These are all questions that must be decided. Now, the elders ought not to attempt to be "lords over God's heritage" (1 Peter 5:3). We would hope that they are constantly seeking the input of every faithful member as such decisions are made. But when the final judgment is made - whether it was in agreement with our own personal judgment or not - we have a command: ***"Obey them ... and submit yourselves."***

The next time you are tempted to question some decision of the elders, or to argue for your own point-of-view, think again about the instruction of Hebrews 13:17. If it is a matter of faith or doctrine, then be ready to stand firmly for what is right. But if it is an area of judgment, give in quickly to the decision that has been made, humbly submitting yourself.

- by Greg Gwin