

Teaching the Old Lessons

Every once in a while, some well-meaning but misguided brother will chide us for teaching the old lessons. He will say, "You are answering questions which no one is asking any longer." By this, he means to squelch our teaching on the first principles of Gospel obedience and salvation by grace through faith; the nature, organization, and work of the church; Biblical morality; and the need for scriptural authority.

Of course, we understand that some people aren't asking questions like, "What must I do to be saved?" as people did in Bible days (Acts 16:30). However, not everyone raised such an important question back then, either. Just because men ask the wrong questions, or they don't ask any questions at all, does not mean that we must alter our teaching to accommodate the "felt needs" of the people of our time.

Haven't people always clamored for something new, novel, different, and more exciting? Of course, we have. We do like to hear new things, even strange things. A skilled teacher of God's word will be careful to "clothe old truths in new robes," just as a good cook will find new and interesting ways to prepare and serve potatoes. Yet, the truth is still the truth. Its nature and essence never changes. We might present it differently, or we might approach the teaching of truth by some new methods, but in the end, the old truths will be clearly stated.

Older, more mature Christians must learn to be patient as the old lessons are taught again and again. There is always a new generation coming on or a new convert here and there who needs the lessons we think we know all too well. If we insist on teaching something novel and exciting, what will happen to the people who are yet untaught? Do they not now need the same lessons today's mature Christians needed when they were novices? Judges 2:10 states of Israel, following the days of Joshua, "All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel." Even Jeremiah encouraged the people of his day to ask for the "old paths" (6:16). However, most of the people to whom Jeremiah recommended this course rejected it and, as a result, ended up in a seventy-year captivity among the Babylonians. Jeremiah preached that the "good way" was to be found in the "old paths."

It is no compliment to us when many of our young people in some churches have not even been given the opportunity of hearing the old lessons. It isn't that they reject the teaching, they've just never been exposed to it! Elders and preachers who have served up the novel and new while neglecting the tried and true will pay for their negligence, to be sure. Besides, if someone is preaching something new and novel, shouldn't that be examined closely to see whether it is indeed, truth? (Acts 17:11)

We must not grow weary of the old truths which distinguish the people of God. Spiritual ignorance will be the cause of our destruction both now and eternally. If we neglect the old lessons, the church which results, will lose its distinctiveness and the identity which God has given it.

- by Mark White

It Takes Courage . . .

- *To refrain from gossip when others about you delight in it.
- *To stand up for an absent person who is being abused.
- *To live honestly within your means and not dishonestly on the means of others.
- *To be a real man, a true woman, by holding fast to your Christian ideals when it causes you to be looked upon as strange and peculiar.
- *To be talked about, and yet remain silent when a word would justify you in the eyes of others, but which you cannot speak without injury to another.
- *To refuse to do a thing which is wrong, though others do it.
- *To live always according to your convictions. To live always according to the Bible.

Public Prayers

Prayer is frequently referred to as 'talking to God.' The very nature of the act makes it a very personal thing. It is something that every Christian should engage in several times throughout each day.

But there is also such a thing as 'public prayer.' We have reference to prayers that are made when we assemble together with other saints. Several passages in the book of Acts show that it was a common practice among first century Christians to join together in prayer (1:24; 4:31; 12:12; 20:36; 21:5). In these 'public prayers' it is obviously necessary for one to 'lead' or direct the thoughts of the entire congregation.

Here are some suggestions for the one who is leading in public prayer:

- It is especially important to speak so everyone can hear you. How can you 'lead' others if they cannot hear what you are saying?
- Someone has offered this good hint: speak so that a person in the farthest corner of the building could hear you - then everyone else will, too.
- Be sure that your prayers are directed to God the Father through Jesus (Col. 3:17).
- Public prayers do not necessarily have to be long. The model prayer, often called the Lord's Prayer, has only 65 words (Matt 6:9-13).
- Remember the warning about praying to be "seen of men" (Matt. 6:5).

For others in the assembly:

- Remember that this is not a passive activity. While one is 'leading' in the prayer, you should also be actively praying to the Father.
- After the prayer has concluded, it is entirely appropriate and scriptural for the other men to add their "Amen" (1 Cor. 14:16). Doing so indicates agreement with that which has been prayed. We very much encourage this Biblical practice!

- by **Greg Gwin**