

Emphasizing The 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 Matthew 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 unit 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" (Ephesians 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" (Hebrews 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.

- by Roger Hillis

Too Much?

Some brethren said to brother J. D. Tant, who was a widely known gospel preacher in the southwest many years ago, "We would like to have a meeting, but just aren't able." He made them a proposition: "Brethren, every time you buy a sack of tobacco or a plug to chew, put the same amount of money in the treasury and save it for the meeting next year. I will take whatever you save up and be satisfied with it." The brethren were elated and said they would let him know.

They got off, did some figuring, came back and pointedly informed him that they could not possibly do it with a clear conscience, because, "No preacher is worth that kind of money."

- **selected**

Membership in a Local Congregation

Questions about membership in a local congregation often arise - questions like: When? How? Why? We believe that many such questions can be answered by studying the case of Saul (Paul) when he returned to Jerusalem following his conversion:

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus ..." (Acts 9:26-29)

Notice the things we learn from this text:

- The action was immediate. There was no long delay on Saul's part before seeking to identify with God's people in Jerusalem. Oftentimes folks today wait months, even years, before identifying with a local congregation.
- It was Saul who took the initiative in this matter. The KJV says "he assayed to join himself to the disciples". Other versions say "he tried to" or "he was trying to": Clearly, he made the effort. He did not wait for others to approach him.
- The church put him to the test. They needed to know of his conversion and his faithfulness. Evidence was presented to them to verify that Saul was a faithful Christian. They were not obligated to receive him into their fellowship until they were convinced of his proper standing before God. And, too, observe that Saul was not "put off" or turned away by their desire to know these things about his former life.
- As soon as he was a part of that congregation, he got actively involved in the work that was being done.

Surely we can all learn some important lessons from this about membership in a local church. Are you are member of a sound congregation? Are you active and working? If not, why not?

- **by Greg Gwin**