

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**

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 authorized 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**