



THE BEREA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Teach the Church

“Preaching and teaching in the church should concentrate on great (but presently neglected) Christian truths of divine authority, God’s holiness and law, our sinfulness, the fear of God, the eternal realities of hell and heaven, Christ’s supremacy and lordship, godly repentance and responsibilities of Christian character and community in a compromised world. Public communication must also target apologetics and ethics in order to reverse truth decay in the pews. Pollster George Barna and others have shown that the beliefs of many so-called evangelicals are unbiblical or even antibiblical and that biblical illiteracy is shamefully common.” ~ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 269

Deep People

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for *deep* people.” ~ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (Harper, 1988), 1; in Scot McKnight, *1 Peter*, The NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan, 1996), 119

An Apologetic for Fundamentals

David Anguish

See “Teach the Church” (at left) as a preface to the following.

Whether to provide reminders for mature disciples or to ensure that younger and newer members hear them, we need to periodically and intentionally teach—not just mention or affirm—fundamental truths that undergird the faith.

A review of fundamentals is necessary, first, because the basic teachings constitute the requisite foundation necessary for developing mature faith. Consider Deuteronomy 6. As Moses reviewed the Law for the second-generation Israelites about to enter Canaan, he told them to be careful to do the LORD’S deeds and commands. They were also to “teach them diligently” (v. 7) at home and elsewhere, from the time they got up until they went to bed. They were to display them prominently so neither they nor their children would forget. They were also to show them in a way that would prompt their children to inquire about them—questions they were to be prepared to answer (vv. 20-25; cf. 1 Pet 3.15).

If we assume “everyone knows” the fundamentals, we will one day awaken to the same realization Israel had to face, that those who should know them well do not know them at all (Hos 4.1-14). We will have failed our children and those we influenced to accept the good news. But we will also have failed ourselves. Yes, we need to move beyond “the basic principles of the oracles of God” (Heb 5.12). But we make a grave mistake if we constantly move on to the “solid food . . . for the mature” (v 14) without periodically making sure the need for teaching fundamentals has been met (v. 12).

Our interest is not in basics for basics’ sake, however. The principal aim is not to encourage memory of a list of teachings to be recited on cue—however useful that is in the process—but to help one another understand what we believe and why. We aim to equip for the work of ministry (Eph 4.11-12). Fundamentals are vital to that end, just as laying a solid foundation is a prerequisite for a sturdy house. Disciples who

To Make Society Just

“When Christians seek to usher in the kingdom of God through law, they are denying Christianity’s teachings, not promoting them. Nowhere in the biblical account of Jesus’ life and ministry do we find a scintilla of evidence that the right legal code can create a just society. Jesus repeatedly criticized the legal excesses of his era, and he himself was, as we have seen, wrongly put to death by two seemingly enlightened systems of justice.” ~ David Skeel, *True Paradox: How Christianity Makes Sense of Our Complex World* (IVP Books, 2014), 135

Preaching for a Response

“The apostolic kerygma demanded a response. This was not something shallow or emotional, but touched the conscience, illuminated the understanding, brought the will into submission, and transformed the subsequent life. It was nothing less than a new birth.” ~ Michael Green, “Methods and Strategy in the Evangelism of the Early Church,” *Focus on Evangelism: Readings for Thinking It Through*, ed. George Hunter (Discipleship Resources, 1978), 32-33

More than a Feeling

“In the Bible, the heart is not only what you think and feel; it is the thinking-feeling unit of the whole person. The Hebrew idea of the heart is different from the sentimental way the word is used today. The heart is thinking as much as feeling; it is your attitude, and so what you ‘have a heart for’ is what you desire, what you truly want.” ~ Josh Moody, *Journey to Joy: The Psalms of Ascent* (Crossway, 2013), 137

would maturely live the principles God has revealed must understand the teaching that constitutes the infrastructure.

Second, if we do not reinforce fundamentals, we will either do basic things for poor reasons or cease to do them at all. And since nature is not all that abhors a vacuum, if we do not teach them, something else will fill the void. It is tempting to think that a misunderstanding here and there is not greatly important. In truth, if left uncorrected and allowed to coalesce into a web of beliefs, a wrong view here, another there, and another over there will eventually see us relying less on the divine teaching and more on human traditions, either those of long standing or recent replacements of them. Put another way, we must use Scripture to check our bearings to keep from binding and and loosing where God has not (Matt 16.19).

This challenge and how to respond to it is itself part of Scripture’s emphasis. Think of the number of times Paul reminded his readers of something they should have known, asking them, “do you not know ...?” (e.g., Rom 6.3, 16; 1 Cor 3.16; 5.6; 6.9, 15, 16, 19). Think, too, of the times he expressed dismay that some were turning to “a different gospel” or “different teaching” (cf. Gal 1.6-7; 1 Tim 1.3; 6.3). We should learn from the fact that his response to any deviation was to call his readers back to the basics he had previously taught.

We should also consider the significance of the fact that, though his call for a return sometimes took the form of a summary, at other times he elaborated. Often, in the interest of getting to our next subject—and because we live in such a hurried world anyway—we feel pressured to simplify. There’s a place for summaries, but there is a difference between simplify and simplistic. The latter doesn’t enlighten; it distorts.

We should also recall that some subjects are really understood only when we explain the complexities. That shouldn’t surprise us for, as Paul reminded the Corinthians, we are studying and responding to a revelation that reveals God’s mind; the difference between “natural” and “spiritual” people is at root a matter of what those in the respective groups understand or fail to understand (1 Cor 2.6-16).

What was true then remains so now: those who would know God must be taught. Doctrine matters.

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