



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

“Things We Should Believe”

Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 1 Peter 4:11; Mark 7:1-13

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Introduction

1. On the one hand, many have never read it; in other circles, it's been thoroughly dissected and digested. Many have been stirred by its propositions and energized by its vision. That it was published 200 years ago and yet remains available for purchase says that those who have been so stirred and energized have had good reason for their feelings.
2. I speak of Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address (1809). After an introduction that calls for professing Christians to settle what were often harsh differences, Campbell presents thirteen propositions that elaborate on his proposed solution. The first declares his breathtaking vision.

That the church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else as none else can be truly and properly called christians.¹

3. Such a call for unity was not unknown in the early 19th century, but it was not as common as it has become in the two centuries since. But, it is not so much Campbell's call for unity as his method for realizing it that has caused his writing to remain relevant. Proposition 3 states the principle:

That in order to this, nothing ought to be inculcated upon christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion; but what is expressly taught, and enjoined upon them, in the word of God. Nor ought any thing be admitted, as of divine obligation, in their church constitution and managements, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles upon the New Testament church; either in express terms, or by approved precedent.

4. Campbell wrote as one completely committed to serving and preaching Christ and his gospel. His writing reflects careful study of the Scriptures, but more importantly, a commitment to God's word as the ultimate authority for all of life's issues. In that commitment, he stood solidly within

¹ Statements from Campbell are as they appear at <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/tcampbell/da/DA-1ST.HTM>. See also the volume combining the *Declaration and Address* with Barton W. Stone's *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (St. Louis, Mission Messenger: 1975) [2nd printing], with a brief introduction by Frederick D. Kershner. The propositions begin on page 44.

the God-ordained tradition that begins in Scripture itself. Today, we will reflect on that teaching and chart a course for ongoing study of things we should believe.

Body

I. Growth will never occur without the word.

A. Both testaments emphasize that God's word is the final authority for life.

1. Moses' final exhortation to the Israelites reflects this emphasis (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 12:32).
2. Because the word was the ultimate authority, it was the standard to which appeal was made when there was some dispute or behavior that did not live up to God's glory.
 - a) Paul's solution to the problem of false teachers was to exhort Timothy to "preach the word ... with complete patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).
 - b) When the Galatians were faced with some who would bind the law of Moses where Christ had not bound it, Paul warned them in the strongest terms to stay with the gospel, the word he had preached (Galatians 1:6-9).

B. But it was not just to warn people against false ways that the writers stressed the importance of the word; they saw it as necessary for Christian growth.

1. The priority after Pentecost was to instill ongoing devotion (*προσκαρτεροῦντες*, *proskarterountes*, present participle) to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).
2. The solution to doctrinal and behavioral problems in the Ephesian church was for Timothy to keep teaching the word (1 Timothy 4:6; cf. 2 Timothy 2:15).
3. As Peter wrote to encourage persecuted believers in Asia Minor, he included the teaching of the word among the things that were vital to their existence (1 Peter 4:8-11).

C. The New Testament writers imitated their Old Testament ancestors, emphasizing that if God's people are to remain strong and fulfill their mission, we must be committed to teaching the word.

1. Paul stressed this in his last recorded letter (2 Timothy 2:2).
2. Moses spelled out the method for doing it as part of his last exhortation (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

D. Their emphasis underscores the reality that Christianity is a taught faith. Unless we teach what we believe, we cannot expect others to believe in Christ, live for Christ, or grow in Christ.

II. "Things we should believe."

A. But what shall we teach?

1. Paul's approach was to "declar[e] ... the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).
2. Hebrews calls believers to mature faith that moves beyond the elementary teaching of Christ for the sake of maturity, righteousness, and moral discernment (Hebrews 5:11-6:2).

B. It is important to notice something vital in what these writers say.

1. In Hebrews, it is clear that he called on his readers to move on because he was convinced that they should have been well versed in the fundamentals (5:12).
2. As other writers also show, there are times when we need to teach and/or reinforce basic teachings for the good of the church and its mission (cf. Luke 1:4; Acts 2:42).
 - a) Without teaching, we will not understand the faith well enough to live and share it (cf. Colossians 1:9-10; Hebrews 5:11).

- b) Without teaching, we cannot expect to see the faith we love passed on to our children and grandchildren, or to the world at large; they cannot be liberated unless they know the truth which frees (John 8:32).
- 3. The principle at work is the same one we saw in Deuteronomy 6:6-9.
- 4. So, we want to spend some time reviewing some fundamentals.
- C. But let us beware of a potential pitfall.
 - 1. Jesus' confrontation with some Pharisees in Mark 7:1-13 illustrates the danger.
 - a) A synagogue series on "things we believe" might have included instructions about setting aside funds as "given to God" ("Corban" - v. 11) that were not to be used for anything else.
 - b) In fact, this was merely a human tradition; it was probably a wise tradition, but it was being abused to circumvent one of the Ten Commandments (vv 12-13).
 - 2. To be taught properly, what they needed was not a series on "things we believe," but one on "things we should believe."
- D. Our task: to examine the Scriptures in the setting of our culture and opportunities in order to see what they teach concerning the things that are necessary for strengthening and sharing our faith.
 - 1. Things such as:
 - a) Calling people to the undenominational practice we see in the New Testament.
 - b) Why we believe in God and what we might say to those who don't.
 - c) Why we think Jesus is unique, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).
 - d) Understanding how to be saved, what it means to be his body, how to properly approach God in worship, and how to navigate a morally confusing world.
 - 2. Some matters will receive more attention than others; none will be exhaustive.
 - 3. All should help us understand, reassure us, and equip us for better service and influence.

Conclusion

- 1. At the end of his study of the practical meaning of the undenominational faith called for by Thomas Campbell and others, Monroe Hawley cites Deuteronomy 6:6-7 and reminds us of the importance of that principle in any age: "Continual teaching is necessary to instill any principle, and if an older generation is unable to grasp this vital truth, we still have a responsibility to teach the young people who will be the leaders of tomorrow."²
- 2. Hawley's point is that no matter what, we must keep teaching. That's how God has always reached people. It's how he will reach people today.
- 3. My commitment is to that teaching, both its content and practice. I hope you'll continue to be committed to it, too, in your study, your invitations to others, and in your response to the opportunities they present. If you'd like to know more, let us know today. If you know the basics and are ready to come to Jesus, we want to help you now.

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² Monroe E. Hawley, *Redigging the Wells: Seeking Undenominational Christianity*, p. 216.