

Preaching First Principles Is Still Important

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Introduction

The implication of the title of this article is that some no longer believe “first principles” need to or even should be preached. Evidence that this is so abounds in our congregations. It can be seen both in what is preached from our pulpits and taught in our Bible classes regularly, as well as in topics for Gospel meetings. Often our pulpits today are characterized by subjects that relate more to the flesh than to the spirit of man. Time was when Gospel meeting themes such as “The One Church,” “The Way that is Right and Cannot be Wrong,” “The Place of Baptism in God’s Plan,” “The Kingdom that Cannot be Shaken,” “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth,” and similar ones were the norm. Now one is more likely to see such topics as “Discovering Successful Living,” “How to Feel Good About Yourself,” “Winning Over Worry,” et al. The “Gospel meeting” that at one time almost always concentrated on “first principles” has been replaced in many congregations entirely by “seminars,” “retreats,” “workshops,” and “rallies” of one sort or another many of which are only incidentally (if at all) related to Biblical themes.

Local pulpits in many congregations have forsaken fundamental Biblical sermons and have replaced them with polite, non-offensive, pep-rally-type speeches. The yard stick of many a local preacher for his sermons nowadays seems to be, “What can I say in 15 or 20 minutes that will massage the egos of those who hear, and what will entertain and please them all? More and more, preachers are going for months at a time without even telling sinners in the assembly what they must do to be saved at the conclusion of a sermon to say nothing of neglecting to preach any full-length sermons on the topic. The same sad trend (i.e. away from fundamental Bible preaching) can also be seen on many of our college lectureships. The kind of speakers being invited for some of them are invited specifically because they are **not** concerned about first principles or real Bible preaching, I opine. Most assuredly, there is a considerably strong

element in the church that no longer sees the need for the preaching of “first principles.”

First Principles are Important on “General Principles”

In the very nature of the case, any group is headed for failure if it forgets the fundamental principles and practices upon which it exists. Regardless of how many super stars a football team may have, if it neglects the “first principles” of blocking, tackling, catching the ball, and such like, it will fail. It matters not how much “charisma” and enthusiasm a businessman may have, if he ignores such “first principles” as inventory, accounts receivable, profit margin, and customer service, he will likely go bankrupt. Likewise, any church of the Lord is doomed for failure if it long neglects “first principles.” Oh, it may be rapidly swelling in numbers by those attracted to secular “success-oriented” “preachers” and “programs.” But it will also be drifting from its Scriptural moorings into an indistinctive ecumenism eventually having its candlestick removed (Rev. 2:5). How can a church remain committed to the Truth on baptism, worship, church organization the oneness of Christ’s church and moral issues, if it does not hear them regularly emphasized in the pulpit, classroom, and church bulletin? How can a church remain faithful while, in place of sound “first principles,” it is fed a steady diet of “smooth sayings” from the pulpit and sin is tolerated? Such is the sad plight of hundreds of our congregations!

It is true that Paul urged us to press on beyond “first principles” (Heb, 6:1). However, let us never think that he was encouraging us to forget or ignore them. The “rudiments” or “first principles” are necessary before one can even be a babe in Christ (5:12). Therefore, there is no way that one can be full-grown in Christ without a sound foundation in the “first principles.” The church will fail where it really counts (in the Lord’s assessment) if we neglect the “first principles.”

First Principles are Important because Men Forget

Although the brethren to whom Peter wrote knew the fundamental principles about which he wrote them, he did not hesitate to remind them of these things once more (2 Pet. 1:12-15). Paul knew that men sometimes forget some of the most important, even

the simplest, principles of Scripture, (1 The 3:4; 2 The. 2:5; Gal 5:21; et al). The three great laws of teaching and learning are still repetition, repetition, repetition! Even those who have been Christians for many years can forget if their memories are not periodically refreshed. This “forgetting factor,” common to all men, is reason enough by itself to be diligent in preaching the “first principles.”

First Principles are Important Because of Our Children

Our public education system has failed to really educate our children of the past two generations. Although other factors are involved, it has been repeatedly shown that a major factor in this tragedy has been the adoption of experimental methods and peripheral subjects to the neglect of the most basic courses and methods of instruction. The same tragedy has occurred in the church of God to some degree. In the church, we now have at least two generations of children who have attained adulthood without the benefit of a strong background of “first principles” knowledge. While some of these were growing up, they did not hear much preaching on the fundamental, distinctive themes of the Gospel as previous generations did. Consequently, they have attained adulthood without the knowledge or appreciation of such Biblical essentials. It is from such ungrounded brethren that many of the “progressive,” liberal, and loose trends are coming in the local churches. Some of these are now deacons but some are also elders and preachers. Not hearing “first principles” when they were growing up, they are unfamiliar with them now and will not long tolerate one who emphasizes them.

How true it is that the church is always only one generation away from apostasy. All we have to do to let the church once more lose its identity is to allow one generation of our children to grow up without understanding the “first principles” of New Testament, undenominational Christianity. Our children need to hear the old themes emphasized (and the authority of God’s Word behind them) again and again.

First Principles are Important Because they are God-given

That Baptism is for remission of sins and is therefore a condition of salvation is God’s Law, not man’s opinion. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). That baptism is an act of immersion and cannot be accomplished by any other action is from Heaven, not from

men (Rom. 6:4). That the law of Moses ended with Christ's crucifixion and men since that time have not been under it is God's declaration, not man's (Col 2:14).

Conclusion

Many other sound reasons for preaching the "first principles" exist (e.g., because they keep the church distinctive, because the inspired preachers of the first century preached them, because the world needs to hear them, et.al.). The church and the world desperately need to hear book, chapter and verse preaching of "first principles. Without such preaching, both we and they will be lost!

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