

# The BEACON

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## FAILURE TO GET BACK TO BASICS

When fundamentals are neglected, it is impossible to "go on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1), and it becomes necessary to teach again "the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:12). There can be no "work of faith" (1 Thes. 1:3), unless faith is first established. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6). It is from the body of truth ("the faith," Jude 3) that personal faith is derived. That is the gist of Paul's statement in the signature passage of Romans when he said, "For therein (in the gospel of vs. 16) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith" (vs. 17). When basic truths of the gospel are being neglected, then the faith of Christians is weak and congregations made up of such weak people become weak as well.

### 1. Ignorance of the Scriptures:

Through Hosea God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). When we do not know the will of God on the very basic truths of the gospel, we are exposed to all forms of error and danger. Many congregations are filled with

people who do not know the basic difference between the law of Moses and the gospel of

Christ. They cannot "rightly divide the word of truth." Lack of knowledge on the purpose of baptism has caused some to fail to distinguish between denominational error and practice on the subject and what the Bible teaches. There are many who could not tell a friend or neighbor why instrumental music in worship is wrong. They really do not know.

It was ignorance of the truth on the nature, work, and organization of the church that laid the groundwork for the institutional division. Some preachers thought they could just "preach the principles" without making specific application and all would be well. They were wrong. One older preacher told me several years ago, "Some of us preached the principles and lost the churches where we worked." Ignorance of the Scriptures is equally deadly when it comes to the nature of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit and His role in the Godhead, the function and duration of miracles, and a host of other issues. Indeed, ignorance is the seed-bed out of

which the weeds of error grow. The remedy? "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2).

### 2. Toleration of Weak Teaching and Preaching:

It would severely shock some congregations to hear plain, old-fashioned gospel preaching with full exposition of text and context, backed up by other passages which relate to the same subject. We used to call that "book, chapter and verse" preaching. What some are hearing is entertaining speakers who can move an audience from laughter to tears with their stories. They have learned the techniques of Lucado, Shelly, McArthur, Swindoll and others of like ilk. But the writings of Cogdill, Wallace, Whiteside, Brents, and McGarvey are anathema to them, not to mention their lack of familiarity with what Paul, Peter, James, John, and even our Lord said. They have been drawing from the wrong wells. The result? Congregations fed on such a diet come to like the taste of the new wine and do not want to hear basic and fundamental teaching of the pure Word of God. They develop "itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:4,5) and seek trained "scratchers" to satisfy their itch. Some elders, with more concern for not rocking the boat than for "sound speech that cannot be condemned" (Titus 2:1,7,8), have sought out men to fill the pulpit who can present a positive message in an entertaining manner. Never mind how much worldliness is in the church, how many

adulterous marriages are being tolerated,

how many young people are drinking, dancing and being promiscuous, how many members visit gambling boats, casinos or buy lottery tickets, or how much immodesty is being allowed.

3. The Spiritual State of Such Churches: Churches fed on the kind of diet we have just described become not only weak in teaching, but in practice as well. Subtle shifts are made in the work being done and even in the worship being offered. The worship must be well manicured, short, and to-the-point. Sermons must fit this format. If the sermon runs a little longer than usual, or there is a baptism which delays getting to Sunday afternoon plans, then that becomes a matter of complaint. It never seems to occur to some that some subjects and some circumstances warrant a longer time. Some churches have so limited the time for Bible classes that there is inadequate opportunity for fair treatment of passages and for any productive time for discussion and class participation. May I ask, what is the hurry?

Weak, untaught congregations attract worldly-minded and weak people who want to salve their consciences with the veneer of religious interest, while not being challenged to change attitudes and practices in their lives. Moral weakness follows in the wake of doctrinal softness. If the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God, then what it says on whatever subject is the final word on that subject. Paul said, "let us walk by the same rule" (Phil. 3:16). But, where basics are neglected, you can expect

to find materialism, a desire to find a respectable niche among the denominations, a tolerant spirit toward moral looseness, and an absolute, unbending aversion to anything controversial. Calling error by its name, or identifying by name those who are in the forefront of promoting error, must never be allowed. Never mind the fact that the prophets of old, Jesus, and the apostles did exactly than, when the occasion required it.

#### 4. Evangelism is Hindered:

When the basics of the gospel are neglected, then there is a corresponding hindrance to the saving of souls. Jesus said those who come to Him must first be "taught of God" and must "learn" of Him (Jno. 6:44,45). People

need to learn that the gospel plan of salvation requires hearing the Word, believing in the Son of God, repentance from sin, confession

of faith in Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins. They need to know the difference in Bible baptism and denominational baptism and that Scriptural baptism puts one into Christ (Gal. 3:27). They need to know that Scriptural worship consists of singing (not playing), prayer, teaching, and, on the Lord's day, the observance of the Lord's supper and giving (Acts 2:42; Col. 3:16; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). They need to be well grounded as to the difference between the church Jesus built and those founded by men (Matt. 16:18). As they have time to grow, they

need to learn of the work God gave the church: Preaching the gospel to the lost (1 Tim. 3:15), edifying the saints (Eph. 4:12), and relieving saints in need (1 Tim. 5:16). They need to learn about faithfulness, devotion, relationships in the church and family, corrective church discipline, and moral conduct. There needs to be developed a genuine appreciation for the beauty of truth and the hideousness of error.

When a sinner is well taught the will of God concerning the salvation of his soul, he needs to be invited to obey that truth. He needs to clearly understand what he is being asked to do and why, whether that teaching has been done in a private or public setting! "The Spirit and the bride say, Come, and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

We must not, we dare not, fail to get back to basics. Souls are at stake. ----- Connie W. Adams via. News & Notes, April 20, 2003.

### **LOOK OUT FOR WOLVES!**

Christians live in a dangerous world. It is a world full of evil influences and every disciple of Christ must guard against possible inroads into his thinking by Satan's onslaught. However, such challenges may not be the greatest danger which the saint faces.

The truth of God sets men free, but false doctrine will cause men to be lost (Jno.

8:32). The apostle Peter wrote, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (2 Pet. 2:1,2). Not only do false teachers bring "swift destruction" upon themselves, but they also will contribute to the destruction of others, i.e., those who accept their "destructive heresies."

It is often not too difficult to recognize the false teacher. He is suspect first because of the context of his teaching. He (or she!) is associated with a religious denomination and such denominations are founded upon false doctrine. Second, his teaching may obviously contradict the plain teaching of the New Testament.

The most dangerous false teacher is the one that looks like a sheep! Using the figure of the flock to describe God's people, Jesus characterized the false prophets (or teachers) as "ravenous wolves who appear in sheep's clothing" (Matt. 7:15). The thought is that the false teacher may appear to be a faithful Christian upon cursory examination.

That's what makes him so dangerous. Not just that he teaches doctrine which will condemn, but that he is hard to recognize. Some sheep will be "devoured" by his false



doctrine because they trusted him. He doesn't wear a sign proclaiming himself to be a predator. He secretly brings in destructive heresies, sidling up to sheep after sheep to plant his unscriptural views (2 Pet. 2:1). He often doesn't proclaim his view from the pulpit. Instead he works behind the scenes, questioning sound teaching, always ready to offer a "better view" to those who are made receptive to his deceptive words by flattery (2 Pet. 2:3, 13,14; Rom. 16:18; Jude 16). He doesn't devour a sheep quickly, He distracts a sheep from the Shepherd's voice until that Christian is so enamored with the false doctrine that he doesn't recognize the truth anymore. Eventually that same disciple is advocating the false doctrine, having "discovered" how wrong the doctrine he once accepted is. He has been devoured by the wolf who, by now, is concentrating on his next victim.

It is not the purpose of this article to cause brethren to view each other with suspicion and distrust. We DO need, however, to be able to recognize those false teachers who are dressed in sheep's clothing. Jesus taught that we can recognize them by their fruits (Matt. 7:15-20). The ultimate test for false teachers is the doctrine taught - do the Scriptures support it? (Regardless of who might be doing the teaching or preaching, we need to search the Scriptures daily to see if the things being taught are so, Acts 17:11, JWS) -----Allen Dvorak in News & Notes, Mar. 30, 2003