

Back to Basics

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The coronavirus pandemic has shaken our world. We have struggled to respond to this crisis. Governments, industries, and average citizens have largely been taken by surprise and left scrambling to find solutions to this problem. Words like, “*unprecedented, uncertain, and unknown*” seem to best describe our times.

In the eleventh Psalm, David asked, “*If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?*” (Psa. 11:3). As Christians, we seem to be struggling with how to serve God during this time. This is understandable. For example, Peter wrote two letters to Christians who were being persecuted. Without question, persecution is a test of faith. Peter’s approach to addressing life during such a challenging time is worth noting for our present struggle.

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things (2 Pet. 1:12-15).

When we experience something new and different, we are prone to question and doubt older ways of doing things: our previous beliefs and practices can no longer be applied to our new situation. This was not what Peter thought or instructed during the persecution brethren were enduring.

Likewise, today we may be tempted to think our pre-virus ways of serving God cannot be applied to a post-virus world. Surely, we need a new approach to interpreting the Bible. Surely, we need a new approach to worshipping and laboring as a local church. While some Christians may be thinking like this now, this was not how Peter approached the crisis of his day. Instead, Peter reaffirmed the truth to Christians.

Reaffirming the Truth Today

Perhaps now more than ever before in our lifetimes, we need to have the truth reaffirmed in our hearing. By nature, truth is unchanging and unalterable. The unchanging nature of truth makes truth timeless. Regardless of the era or situation in which we live, the truth remains relevant. Truth produces consistency. These are the qualities that make truth...well, the truth.

In his first letter, Peter described how these Christians had placed their faith and hope in God. They did this by believing that Jesus had risen from the dead. The acceptance of this truth changed their lives. Notice how Peter described the truth they obeyed:

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like

grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:22-25).

The truth of the Gospel purified their souls and gave them new life. The truth was imperishable or eternal. The truth was living and abiding. These descriptions of truth relate to truth's power and unchanging nature.

While it is true that we have never experienced anything quite like this global pandemic in our lifetimes, it is inaccurate to think or say that God's word needs to be reinterpreted in light of our situation. Circumstances do not define the meaning of God's word or create new truth. Therefore, God's word must be understood in its original context and then applied to situations.

The apostle Paul wrote, *"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God"* (Phil. 1:9-11). As our love and knowledge of the truth grow, we become equipped to make accurate discernments regarding what God approves. Before we adopt a belief or initiate a practice, we must first use the truth to evaluate whether or not God approves of a belief or practice.

Regrettably, this is not often how we form beliefs and practices. Instead of going to God's word first, we go to God's word after we form a belief or start a practice. We seek justification for what we have already done. This is the wrong approach in seeking God's approval for anything. Such a backward approach to seeking God's approval invites pride into the evaluation process. Rather than being fair in our evaluation process, pride pressures us into only finding validation for what we have already done. What if what we have done is wrong, but we manage to justify our practice to ourselves? We are in trouble.

At a minimum, wisdom demands we investigate before making decisions. Solomon wrote, *"Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame"* (Prov. 18:12-13). Pride deceives us into thinking we have the answers before we know the questions. Forming a belief and practice before first consulting God's word is always a reckless way to make decisions.

Learning from the Past

Before we reinterpret the Scriptures, let's reaffirm what the Scriptures teach. Before we redefine the local church, let's reaffirm how the Scriptures define the local church. Before we invent new ways of worshipping and doing the work of the Church, let's reaffirm what the Scriptures teach about the worship and work of the Church.

In the 1980s, some Christians promoted a new method of Biblical interpretation. They said that applying the Bible through commands, examples, and inferences was outdated and ill-equipped for our modern time. Brethren promoting this agenda wanted to change how the local

church worshipped by incorporating instrumental music. They wanted to integrate women into leadership positions. They wanted churches to promote social welfare and political causes. Essentially, they wanted the Church to reflect modern society.

Those who advanced this agenda doubted the power and relevance of the truth. They thought the culture was supposed to reshape the truth instead of the truth reshaping the culture. They were misguided and wrong in what they did. Ultimately, this movement led to division and apostasy. Let's learn from this sad history and not repeat these mistakes.

Conclusion

Today, our faith in the power and relevance of the truth is being tested. How will we respond? Will we reinterpret, redefine, and invent? Time will tell. In the meantime, we must take the wise approach of the apostle Peter and reaffirm the truth during this time of crisis.

So, let's get back to basics. Let's get back to the basics of having God's word shape our beliefs and practices. Let's remember the truth we have believed in the past and accurately apply it to our present situation.