

Teaching the Old Lessons

By Mark W. White

Every once in a while, some well-meaning but misguided brother will chide us for teaching the old lessons. He will say, “You are answering questions which no one is asking any longer.” By this he means to squelch our teaching on the first principles of Gospel obedience and salvation by grace through faith; the nature, organization, and work of the church; Biblical morality; and the need for scriptural authority.

Of course, we understand that some people aren’t asking questions like, “What must I do to be saved?” as people did in Bible days (Acts 16:30). However, not everyone raised such an important question back then, either. Just because men ask the wrong questions, or they don’t ask any question at all does not mean that we must alter our teaching to accommodate the “felt needs” of the people of our time.

Haven’t people always clamored for something new, novel, different, and more exciting? Of course, we have. We do like to hear new things, even strange things. A skilled teacher of God’s word will be careful to “clothe old truths in new robes”, just as a good cook will find new and interesting ways to prepare and serve potatoes. Yet, the truth is still the truth. Its nature and essence never changes. We might present it differently or we might approach the teaching of truth by some new methods, but in the end the old truths will be clearly stated.

Older, more mature Christians must learn to be patient as the old lessons are taught again and again. There is always a new generation coming on, or a new convert here and there who needs the lessons we think we know all too well. If we insist on teaching something novel and exciting, what will happen to the people who are yet untaught? Do they not now need the same lessons today’s mature Christians needed when they were novices? Judges 2:10 states of Israel, following the days of Joshua, “All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.” Even Jeremiah encouraged the people of his day to ask for the “old paths” (6:16). However, most of the people to whom Jeremiah recommended this course rejected it and as a result, ended up in a seventy-year captivity among the Babylonians. Jeremiah preached that the “good way” was to be found in the “old paths”.

It is no compliment to us when many of our young people in some churches have not even been given the opportunity of hearing the old lessons. It isn’t that they reject the teaching, they’ve just never been exposed to it! Elders and preachers who have served up the novel and new while neglecting the tried and true will pay for their negligence, to be sure. Besides, if someone is preaching something new and novel, shouldn’t that be examined closely to see whether it is indeed, truth? (Acts 17:11)

We must not grow weary of the old truths which distinguish the people of God. Spiritual ignorance will be the cause of our destruction both now and eternally. If we neglect the old lessons, the church which results will lose its distinctiveness and the identity which God has given it.

— Mark W. White