

GUEST EDITORIALS: This month we offer editorial by two preachers who approach the same problem from different angles. My own comments follow these two articles. C.D.

A GRAVE PROBLEM

Glen Adams, Editor of "The Communicator"

In the annals of history a universally used principle has caused the downfall of many a nation. It is: "Divide and Conquer." By dividing, weakness is introduced and the demise follows.

This principle has been, and is being used in Christianity. Let us call it by the name, "generalization." It considers Christ and the Christian doctrines in a general way without coming to grips specifically with either so that both are entirely nebulous. Christ is a generalized term used to provide the nucleus for a group participation. Doctrine becomes a generalized term for the panel of debated ideas peculiar to the clergy.

Some religious people, aware that this is true, attempt to swing to Christ totally as a person and minimize any need for doctrine. In the process of doing so the divide and conquer principle is activated and Christ becomes a mystical idol, followed only as the object of an imaginative feeling. Certain religious bodies emphasize strongly the "Personal Christ" over against those who hold to "Church doctrine."

But the problem of generalization remains, and even is amplified, because the swing to the "Personal Christ" is an attempt to idolize Christ apart from the only media by which Christ is and can be known: the doctrines that center in Christ and reveal His very life and personality. One cannot know Christ as a "Personal Savior" until he knows the functions of the process of saving men. This involves the problem of man, the mercy, grace, and love of Christ evidenced in the crucifixion, and the purpose for which the redemption is operative.

The truth I am trying to set forth is that Christ and true doctrine are absolutely inseparable, and you cannot have one without the other. The wages of sin is death. The incarnate Christ met that death penalty for me by dying on the hill of Golgotha. This was God in flesh offering to meet His own justice by mercifully and lovingly becoming my stand-in for judgment. All this was because He wanted me to be resurrected from death to live forever in His Sovereignty; and demonstrated it in His own resurrection as the first-born from the dead.

Now nothing has been said in the past paragraph but doctrine and yet one can see that not one single thought of that paragraph has any meaning apart from the Person of Christ. Christ and doctrine are one, just as a man is known only by what he says, does, and thinks. He has no personality apart from these factors.

Christ said as much simply and persuasively in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth and the life."

Vital Christianity is not a generalization. It specifically reveals Christ in the fullness of His being in and through specific truths that involved Him in His advent, action and departure from the world.

For anyone to be "personal" to you, he has to be known. He can only be known by your involvement in the thought and action of his life. So it is with Christ and you.

Christ is truth. To know truth, which is the panoply of facts in the scheme of redemption, is to know Christ personally. There is not other way.

How Much Do We Have to Know?

Alvin Reed, Editor of "The Christian Courier"

The above question comes to our attention from time to time when individuals are considering their need for salvation.

Some will decline the invitation to be saved, offering as a reason: "I don't understand enough." Occasionally when a young person indicates his desire to become a Christian nature church workers are prompted to ask: "Does he or she know what they are doing?" At other times an adult — parent or friend — may stand in the way of a youth wanting to become a Christian because he, the adult, is not convinced that the youth knows what it is all about.

We will be quick to agree that because of the urging and pleading of an adult some children have been baptized without having much, if any, idea what baptism has to do with their sins, or how the death of Jesus fits into the picture. Some preachers and teachers have been guilty of stressing two things, the terribleness of hell and the importance of baptism, until a prospective young convert has little understanding of the fact of sin, the wages of sin, the reason Jesus died, and the greatness of God's love, grace and eternal life. In this case he is converted only to the fact that he is scared of hell and that baptism is the answer to it all.

The other extreme is seen when an overprotective adult does not want the subject of salvation even mentioned to their teenage child, with the excuse that they don't want him rushed into anything, and the he wants the youth to be sure he knows what he is doing. Occasionally this can be traced back to a parent's lack of concern for spiritual things. If the son or daughter were to give his life to God, to become a sincere dedicated Christian, it would be a denunciation of the parent's lack of concern.

Now of course both of these extremes are wrong, and if anyone is to be genuinely saved there must of necessity be a middle position.

Let us note the case of the conversation of the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts, Chapter 2. Here in 16 verses is recorded the sermon that God gave to the Apostle Peter to preach. At the conclusion 3,000 people were saved and added to the church.

An examination of this sermon reveals that these people knew about Jesus. They knew that "Jesus Christ was a man approved of God in the midst of you" — Jesus Christ, "crucified and slain," — Jesus Christ, exalted at the "right hand of God" and now "both Lord and Christ" — "This Jesus did God raise up" (from the dead).

We also see that they knew something about themselves: "...you by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay" — "this Jesus whom you crucified." They knew that they were guilty and condemned sinners before God. Verse 37 gives clear evidence that they knew these things: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?"

Please not that they had to know the above cited things before they were told what to do, and having this knowledge, they now needed to know more. God then directed Peter to command them: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (vs. 38).

Observe here that it was essential that they know certain facts before they were told to be baptized into Christ. We are in error, then, if we would tell a baby, a youth or even an adult to be baptized, until he first of all knows that he is guilty of sin, lost and unsaved; and that Jesus died on the cross to pay the wages of our sin — the second death in Hell — so that we might not have to suffer the punishment for our own guilt.

We would also be in error to insist that a person must have a complete understanding of all the details of such things as the history of the Jews, the unfolding of prophecy, or church organization before he could be baptized into Christ for the remission of his sins.

Of course everyone who is a born-again child of God will be eager and alert to continually learn more about Jesus and about the plan, the purpose, and the will of God, day by day throughout his Christian life.

The tragedy is not that a person fails to understand all things when he is saved, but that he may refuse to learn anything more. Of these people Hebrews 5:12 says: “For by reason of the time you ought to be teachers, you have need again that some one teach you the rudiment of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food.”

You don’t have to know everything, but you must have a desire to learn of God’s will.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Indeed, you don’t have to know everything in order to be a Christian. If one had to fully understand all the Bible reveals in order to be saved, then we fear that we all would perish. But we DO have to know something, and that something is not for us to decide; that is, it is not up to each individual to decide just what portion of truth he will believe as the foundation of salvation.

Although approaching the subject from different directions, both of the articles above focus on the same central core of truth which is essential to Christian faith: That Christ met the just penalty for sin by his own death, thus freeing man from such ultimate end so that he might be resurrected from the dead to immortality.

Also we note two other things from the above articles.

First, that a generalization of Christian doctrine does not help to unite believers, but rather to divide them. The greater the ignorance and more nebulous the faith, then the weaker the bond of unity that exists. It is truth that sets us free, and truth that draws us together in Christ. The more generalized the truth, the weaker the fellowship and foundation for unity. This remains a fact, in spite of the great effort of many to bring about a “unity in Christ” without believing anything in particular about Him.

Second, that one is to brought to the point of baptism only upon the basis of faith in the Gospel. A great amount of indifference and lukewarmness in churches today exists simply because a great amount of people have come into the church without a basic understanding and belief in the doctrine of the Gospel.

Many people treat “doctrine” as if it were a filthy word. Yet there can be no faith without teaching (doctrine) and faith based on false doctrine is false faith.

Yours for “sound doctrine.” C.D.

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