

Back to the Basics
1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Let me start out by reminding you of a story which may be particularly appropriate on Superbowl Sunday. The story is told about Bear Bryant, although I haven't been able to verify whether it's true. According to the story, one of his teams played an especially bad game on Saturday. The next Monday at practice, he called the team together in the middle of the practice field and said, "Boys, it's time for us to get back to the basics." Then he said, "This is a football."

Every good coach recognizes the importance of the basics. A winning team is a team is always a fundamentally sound team. By the fundamentals, we mean the very first things you are taught when you learn how to play a sport, or just about anything else you do in life.

The problem is that we tend to take those basic skills for granted. Over time, we tend to forget about them. We want to do things the way we are most comfortable doing them, rather than the ways which work best. Good coaches understand that. That's why they always start out a new season retraining their team in the fundamentals. And, during the season, when they see their players getting sloppy with the basics, they go back over them again.

That's certainly true in our spiritual lives. We grow spiritually by building on the fundamentals, the basics. If our spiritual lives are not fundamentally sound, our lives will not be strong.

That's why we repeat the Apostles' Creed each Sunday. I am sometimes asked why we say the Apostles' Creed each Sunday. "Nobody pays attention to it. We just say the words out of habit. They don't mean anything. Yada, yada, yada."

No, the Apostles' Creed is not just words. It is a summary of the fundamental beliefs of the Christian Church. It is a reminder of who we are. This is what the vast majority of Christians throughout the history of the church have believed.

I know it is fashionable to delete the Apostles' Creed and, in fact, all creeds from worship services. People just want to worship Jesus, without having to think about what we believe. Such worship soon becomes meaningless, sentimental goop, without the power to change lives. It makes as much sense as a school teacher saying, "Let's not worry about repeating the ABC's or counting to ten. Let's just let our students enjoy the experience of learning." They may enjoy the experience of learning, but they won't understand much of it.

John Wesley said, "Let us unite the two so long divided: knowledge and vital piety." Jesus said that God desires those worship must be in spirit and in truth. Worship without spirit becomes dry and dead. Worship without truth becomes meaningless emotions.

A winning team has to play with intensity and emotion. However, if it gets so caught up in emotions that it forgets the fundamentals, it won't be a winning team for long.

Paul understood that. When he looked at the church in Corinth, he saw people who were eager to grow spiritually, but who were not fundamentally sound. Some were doubting the resurrection of the dead. This is a fundamental teaching of the church. Paul pointed out to them that if they reject the resurrection of the dead, the whole gospel comes unraveled. If the dead are not resurrected, Jesus was not resurrected. And if Jesus was not resurrected, why should we call him our Lord and our Savior.

A Christian is someone who affirms that Christ is their Lord and their Savior. Christ is worthy of our complete, unreserved commitment. And we can entrust ourselves completely into his care. We can give Christ this faith and commitment because he is the Son of God. No one else is worthy of this degree of total self-giving. But how do we know that Christ is the Son of God? He was resurrected to eternal life.

So, Paul called the Church of Corinth back to the basics. “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...”

There was a spiritual guru who called on his students to give him their total allegiance. One of those who was there to hear him out of curiosity said to him, “I’ll give my life to you under two conditions: First, you must be willing to be tortured to death for my sake. Second, you must rise from the dead.”

Paul felt that the fundamentals of the faith, the foundation upon which everything else have to be built is the conviction that Christ was crucified and resurrected, and that his death and resurrection save us from death and give us eternal life. He called the church back to the fundamentals of the faith.

That’s what the Apostles’ Creed does for us. You don’t have to believe every word in the Apostles’ Creed to be a Christian or to be a member of the Church. All you have to do is affirm Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior. Beyond that, you are free to believe what you choose to believe.

However, you should know what the traditional beliefs of the Church are. If you choose to believe something different from what the Apostles’ Creed proclaims, you need to be aware that you are disagreeing with what the vast majority of Christians throughout the history of the Church have believed. It may well be true that you are right and all those others are wrong. But you need to think things through pretty thoroughly before you come to that conclusion.

There are other creeds we could recite. However, these other creeds are the fundamental beliefs of certain Christians in certain places at a certain time in history, unlike the Apostles’ Creed, which has been the fundamental beliefs of the great majority of Christians throughout most of the history of the church.

We must not neglect the fundamentals of our faith. As we repeat the Apostles’ Creed week by week, we are reminded of those basics. Everything we say and do in the church should be grounded in those fundamental beliefs.

If we want to build a strong, winning Christian life, we must be careful not to neglect the fundamentals. We have to get back to the basics.

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