

## Introduction

Christians often have strong convictions about what they believe and can, at times, fail to distinguish between matters which are fundamental and those which are secondary. There are some who understand why they believe certain truths and others have simply accepted them as truth. When the apostle wrote the Roman epistle after presenting the gospel in various levels, he begins with the truth of consecration (Rom. ch. 12) which is followed in with the truth of subjugation (Rom. ch. 13), followed by the subject of toleration (Rom. ch.14-15:7). It is on this matter where strife can arise in how the individual responds to those who understand things differently from one's own personal perspective. There is not a suggestion throughout the scriptures which gives anyone the right to belittle others by thinking them to be less spiritual because they see things differently. In that ancient day the local church was composed of Jews and Gentiles, consequently there were vast differences in their perspectives on a number of things. The Gentile believed the believer could eat pork whereas the Jew was strongly opposed to such a thing. The Jew believed the christian ought to keep the Feast days of Leviticus 23 while the Gentiles saw them as unnecessary. Was one right and the other wrong? Were both wrong in attitudes? It is to be observed that no one believer, or group of believers, have all the truth, neither do they have precedent over the others in the truth. Nevertheless, there are certain things which are doctrinal imperatives, truths on which Christianity is solidly based.

## Fundamental Truths

A fundamental truth is a foundational Biblical doctrine concerning which there is absolutely no room for variance or discord, truths such as:

- a) The verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures.
- b) The Trinity, existing eternally in three distinct persons each with their own work.
- c) The unquestioning truth of the deity and humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- d) His vicarious death, propitiatory work at Calvary.
- e) His burial, resurrection, ascension to heaven, and glorification.
- f) That salvation is by grace through faith without works, neither for it nor for its maintenance.
- g) The coming of the Lord.
- h) Either Heaven or Hell for every individual throughout eternity.

There are also teachings which are Biblical, but are not fundamental. They also are of great importance, and perhaps some more than others depending on one's viewpoint. It is a dreadful tragedy when saints try to legislate that which they deem is spirituality when failing to outlive the absolutes of the fundamentals. The Lord corrected the Pharisees when he said: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23). How careful we ought to be that Pharisicalness is not a characteristic of our attitudes and behavior.

## Doctrines and Practices Which are Important (Secondary Issues) But Not Fundamental

Believers do not all see things from the same perspective and therefore, whenever we are in contact with a believer having an understanding of a non-fundamental truth which we don't agree with, they must be treated with grace. Not only is there the possibility that we could be wrong in our understanding, but the Holy Spirit also informs us: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" (Rom. 14:4), and, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). We are ever to remember:

- a) "None of us liveth unto himself and no man dies to himself, for whether we live or die, we die unto the Lord, and whether we live or die, we are the Lords" (Rom. 14:8)
- b) "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Rom. 14:13)
- c) "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification" (Rom. 15:2)

- d) "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:5-7).

It is irrelevant how accepted the teaching is due to age, or it is a "what we believe" issue, there must be room for people of different nationalities and cultures to understand things in a different way from how we do. For instance, when ministering to the saints in another part of the world, I discovered they sang all the hymns at the beginning of the remembrance meeting which was followed by a time when there were no hymns sung. It is simply worship and praise to the Lord after which was the partaking of the Lord's supper. Can we say they are wrong because they don't have a "hymn, prayer, hymn, prayer"? Again, when in the islands of Tonga in the South Pacific remembering the Lord, when they were about to partake of the emblems, many of them got down on their knees. Since this was something I had never seen before I asked about it. One of the elders told me, "When we go to meet our king or queen and are presented before them, then we get down on our knees to them. Ought we not to get down on our knees when taking from the Lord, that which symbolizes His body and blood?" Who is going to tell them it is wrong? These are things in which there must be freedom for Christian liberty, and at times freedom for the saints to develop at their own pace.

Returning to Romans 14, there is taught very plainly that among the saints there are those who are weak and those who are strong. Interestingly, those who are weak must have rules and regulations by which they adhere to, in which they think it shows a level of spirituality. Paul makes it very plain that one must not despise the other.

### The Distinction Between Conviction and Convenience

This is relevant at the minute for there is a Christian bakery in Northern Ireland who has been asked to make a cake with a "gay" inscription. They refused because it goes against their Christian principles and that which they understand the scriptures teach. If this was a matter of convenience then they would forgo their thoughts and make the cake, but they are not! The gay backed association, is bringing them to court being accused of discrimination. Is this a matter of convenience or conviction? Conviction makes one stand firm for what they believe, whereas convenience will do that which is easier. With that in mind, we will consider this subject in two parts.

Part one will be dealing with:

- a) The outline of prophecy
- b) Cremation or burial
- c) "Thou" versus "you"
- d) Biblical versions
- e) Is there a distinction in days, i.e between Sunday and Monday?

Part two will deal with some of the practices and teachings which must be determined by the church leaders. Under no conditions must there be a coup against those who are in leadership, for they are responsible for the spiritual tone and development of the gathering. Such practices or teachings are:

- a) Divorce and remarriage
- b) Covered and uncovered heads, when and how
- c) The ministry of women
- d) The sign gifts
- e) Wine or grape juice
- f) Leavened or unleavened bread at the Lord's Supper
- g) One cup or individual cups
- h) Times and order of meetings, i.e. should the Lord's supper be on Sunday morning or can it be held in the evening or afternoon?
- i) Arminianism or Calvinism?

## The Outline of Prophecy

Many saints of God who are excellent Bible teachers hold totally different opinions relative to prophecy. There are those who believe the church will go through the tribulation, and others believe the rapture occurs before the tribulation. Furthermore, there are those who are pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation, and then those who are pre-millennial, post-millennial and a-millennial! What conflict has raged over this and each can show verses which apparently supports their line of understanding. Ultimately, only time will tell which had the right understanding of the subject.

## Cremation or Burial

This is an issue which about fifty years ago would scarcely even be considered in the western world. At that time the general view was that to be cremated was a denial of the resurrection, or an attempt to prevent the resurrection, and it was totally against the scripture to do so, and indeed was a sin. In consulting the scriptures there will be the discovery that there is no specific scripture saying a believer must be buried, neither is there one saying it is a sin to be cremated! Saul was cremated (1 Sam. 31:12) and on the other hand Ahab, who was a wicked king, burnt his son as an offering (2 Kgs. 21:6). There are countries where one cannot be buried and if cremation is a sin, what of the saints who live in such places, or those who were burnt at the stake? However, in the scriptures, the norm for the believer is burial. Abraham buried Sarah (Gen. 23:19); Joseph was buried (Josh. 24:32); Stephen was buried (Acts 8:2); and the Lord was buried (Jn. 19:40). So the biblical norm is burial but it is never a commandment. Another saint may or may not have the same convictions as I do, it is a personal decision and I cannot tell a person they must be buried, neither can I ridicule a person who wants to be buried saying that they are not caring about the environment. Getting buried is one thing, but to be placed in a concrete box which will take many years to disintegrate is not good for the environment. If I want to be buried is it conviction which must be carried out irrespective of others, or is it convenience because of price and other considerations. God lets the individual have their own convictions and to Him they are answerable.

## “Thou” versus “you”

The first observation is, neither Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic have special pronouns when speaking to God. There is no such a thing as a “prayer language” or “prayer voice” in the scriptures, but we each have our preferences. The question is, when I speak to God as “Thou” does it show respect, and if speaking to Him as “you” does that show lack of respect? It is a decision I make depending on my background and determination of what is becoming when meeting the Lord. When an individual uses either term is it due to cultural background or the accepted way of praying when in certain situations? In other words, is this terminology convenience or conviction? To this must be added the words “Thou” and “you” as there are also the words “Thy” and “Thine”.

I repeat, there is no Biblical precedence for restricting a certain language to God. Being brought up in the North of Ireland, I acknowledge that I prefer “Thou” when communing with Father, yet speaking in Old English is not something that I can claim as Biblical. I cannot claim that it is more reverent to speak to God as “Thou” but this is not correct Biblically for the word “Thou” is used by the Lord when speaking to:

- a) Judas (Lk. 22:48)
- b) The leper (Matt. 8:3)
- c) Even to Satan (Matt. 4:7)
- d) The angel used it when speaking to Joseph (Matt. 1:21) and even of a place (Matt. 2:6).

The fact is that “Thou” and “You” and “ye” were common terms in Biblical times with “You” being used 2100 times, “thou” being used 2895 times and “ye” being used 2857 times. Again I say, I might feel that it is more reverent to speak to God as “Thou” and “Ye”, but is that from personal convenience, cultural background, or personal conviction?

### Biblical Versions

This can be a delicate topic for some argue that the KJV is the only correct English translation treating it as inspired, and others accept almost anything which has the title “bible”. The fact is, only the original writings were inspired and there is no such a thing as an inspired translation in English, French, or any language. My KJV, RSV, Youngs Literal, and Darby are translations which, to the best of the translators ability, are as close as possible to the originals. It is said by some that they only accept the 1611 KJV. This is error on two counts:

- a) No one today has an original 1611 translation. In my collection of books I have a KJV from 1776 and it has the apocrypha in it!
- b) Apart from the Roman Catholic, no translation has these books in it, so if I want to profess to only use the 1611 then I will have to get a Bible with the apocrypha in it.

There is no Bible that is infallible and a perfect translation of the original because it is impossible to perfectly translate one language to another. For instance, the KJV is beautiful to read. It is exceedingly accurate but the English language cannot translate the multi names of God, etc. I use it and love it, but there are some other translations which in places are more accurate. The KJV speaks of the Lord as a “thing” (Lk. 1:35). Is the Lord Jesus a thing? Is the Holy Spirit a person? Then why is He referred to as “itself” (Rom. 8:16)? The question then is, “Do I hold to the KJV out of conviction of its purity and exactness, or convenience? If another translation was presented more precise to the original in fine tuning words and expressions, would I change? Do I keep to the KJV out of convenience as I know where passages are in it, or out of conviction that it is the closest to the ancient text?

### Is There a Distinction In Days, i.e Between Sunday and Monday?

This is a delicate matter for there was a time when everything was closed on Sunday. The world has changed and today there are many saints who have no option but to work on Sunday, and at times it means being unable to remember the Lord. There are also emergency situations when a person could be on call and emergencies do not always happen on Monday to Saturday.

However, that which I am speaking of is, “Are there things which we could do throughout the week but are left to the one day of the week ideally set aside for the Lord”? I have my convictions. I would not feel free to wash my car on Sunday, or go out grocery shopping on Sunday because I got sort-of-tied-up during the week. Yet, I can feel free to go to a restaurant and buy a meal? Is that consistent? Is there a difference between going to a ball game on Sunday rather than going on Friday or Saturday? Paul writes under inspiration: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5).

### Summary

The truth is, I, Rowan Jennings, have a hard job keeping myself straight without trying to modify others to my thinking. The corner boards of the Tabernacle were there for a reason. One reason being, all the other boards to be in harmony with each other had to line up with the corner boards. No other board could determine which one was right or wrong, that was the work of the corner board. Our responsibility is to align ourselves with the Lord and when the mind of Christ is in us, many of the non-foundational issues will melt away in Christian love and forbearing. I close this with the words of Paul:

**“With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love”**  
(Eph. 4:2)

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.**  
**John 16:13**

Rowan Jennings, Abbotsford, British Columbia