

The Articles of
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...In Love

We all have people in our lives that love us, whether it be your family or friends, but sometimes we take these things for granted. I have been fortunate to have two older brothers that I call my best friends, not because of blood relation, but because of the reliance that we have on each other to be there for one another in anything. You may tell your parents that you love them, or you may tell your spouse or children that you love them as well. However, when we get down to the base meaning, what does it mean to truly love one another?

Many years ago, Joseph Campbell said, "Love is perfect kindness." Examples in the Bible also give testament to the fact that love is not the warm, fuzzy feeling in the stomach, but rather exhibited by the actions we display. In 1 John 4:10-11, John explains that the love of God was manifested when he sent His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. He then goes on to tell us that we must love each other as well. The context shows that loving requires action. James would also comment on this by saying in James 2, that faith without works is useless. He gives the example that those who say they will help their brother, but in fact do not, have done no good. What does it profit to say that we love our brothers and sisters without showing it any way?

God did not design us to function alone, but gave us others for support. In Luke 10, Jesus instructed 70 people to go out in front and prepare the way for Him to come. He warned them, "Behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3). Nevertheless, He would give them support in the form of companionship. They were sent out in pairs; one there to help the other, so that neither of them got discouraged to the point of failure. "Two are better than one, for they have a good return for their labor. For if either one of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

Whether we realize it or not, we have all been helped at multiple points in our lives. None of us could have attained what we had without the assistance of others, yet pride would tell us otherwise. Nevertheless, it is a temptation for us, as young people, to say that we do not have the resources, time, or ability to help others. "I am too young!" we cry, as if our responsibilities in life start at a certain age. Paul would command a young person in 1 Timothy 4:12, to not let anyone look down on him because of his age, but rather be an example "in love." What are we telling our fellow Christians when we neglect someone in need, simply because we "do not think we can?"

One of the greatest comforts to those older than us is to know that the work will continue even after the warriors of this age have passed. We may get up in public worship assembly and lead songs, teach a bible class, or bring friends to worship services, simultaneously encouraging those that have held the faith for 60+ years. However, let us go the extra step in being the saint that God wants us to be. We may not have money, but we have time. Spending afternoons with an elderly person will brighten their day. Mowing the lawn for someone in the congregation that needs it will gain more honor than a thousand touchdowns.

The book of Philippians has often been labeled as the inspired "thank you note," largely due to Paul's affectionate response to the sacrifices they have made for him when he was in need. In Philippians 4, he calls to mind specifically their concern for him "but had no opportunity to show it." They may not have had an occasion to support him, but nevertheless encouraged him in other ways. May we learn from this example as we seek opportunities to exhort those who sit next to us on the pews.

I count it one of my greatest blessings to be surrounded by so many more brothers and sisters than the ones I have as blood relation. They have also stood with me, provided me with guidance and encouragement, and helped me in more ways than I can count. I say with confidence that the same can be said for every young person that is on this planet. Sometimes it may only take a simple word of kindness, but we must look for ways to encourage others. Life is hard, but going through it alone is even harder.

-January 2008

Power of the Pulpit

Jerry Seinfeld once said, “The number one fear of all people is public speaking; number two is death. Death is number two? This means that if you had to be at a funeral, you would rather be in the casket than doing the Eulogy.” While this statement may be humorous, the reality of the situation is not so funny. Most people, young and old, are very uncomfortable doing anything in front of people. But while one may be able to get through most of school avoiding the spotlight, what happens when those same philosophies and tactics are applied to public worship?

Most men will start taking a “leader role” in public worship in their teenage years, but the services they perform range widely. Some may start with leading the opening or closing prayers then move to song-leading, or vice versa. Still others may never be bold enough to step up and take part at all, leaving the duties to be filled by other people. What does this say about the heart of the individual? It is understandable that some are more naturally inclined to get up in public and may be much more comfortable with it, but does that excuse the others to sit back? Assuming that you are in a position to lead a part in public worship in the first place, there are some things that must be understood when considering these roles.

First and foremost, it must be understood that the worship you will be leading is not about glorifying you, but God. In Acts 12, after Peter was released from prison by an angel, Herod stood up to deliver an address to the people. After his eloquent speech, praises rang out from the audience claiming Herod to be a god rather than a man. Herod reveled in this and, since he did not give glory to God, “immediately an angel of the Lord struck him...And he was eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12:23). It is granted that Herod was not standing in a church building when delivering this address, but the point remains the same: glory belongs to God. We may be the most eloquent, knowledgeable, and captivating presenter on the face of the earth, but unless we understand that God is the focus of our service, not ourselves, it will not be acceptable before Him.

There is a certain amount of intimidation, that comes from years of experience (looking at it from the audience's viewpoint), that is present every time a man steps into the pulpit. Looking at older and wiser men who have grasped its wooden sides and proclaimed messages of sober truth, it is sometimes intimidating to think that you will be sharing that same space, and wondering how you will lead the minds of the church in worship to God. It is important to remember at this point that it is not the eloquence of the words spoken that will pierce the hearts of the people, but the Word itself. “All the kings of the earth will praise you, O Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth” (Psalm 138:4). It’s not *our* words that will be praised, but God’s. There lies at the heart of every great, sound sermon we hear and every great, sound song we sing God’s word, which is given to everyone: young and old, experienced and inexperienced (reference Acts 11:18).

The manner in which we approach God and the worship of Him should be one of reverence and awe. “Praise the Lord...You who stand in the House of the Lord, in the

courts of the House of our God” (Psalm 135:1-2)! Our service to God is, and always should be, done in a manner to magnify and glorify Him - worship that is worthy of His name. And while we must always keep in mind the seriousness of the situation, the last thing we should worry about is how we look in front of the congregation. Keep in mind that everyone sitting in the auditorium remembers what it was like to be 13, constantly repeating yourself with a cracking voice. No one will judge you based on what you do, but rather encourage you with every step you take into the podium. And even if, when you get back to your seat, your friends tease or joke about a mispronounced word or something equally small, know that God is looking down upon you well-pleased, as a person that is making the most of his talents (Matthew 25:14-29).

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Jesters in the Worlds Court

It is both an asset and a curse to generations today that we are more stubborn than others, never wanting to back down from that which we believe. And when it comes to doctrinal issues, this stubbornness comes in handy, as the winds of “spiritualism” are as common as the Marlin’s losing record (Eph. 4:14). The only problem with this mindset occurs when you find yourself believing something wrong, and sticking to your guns no matter how many people tell you otherwise. Negligence to study for oneself and pride in that ignorance is only a formula for those content with mediocrity -- a formula for fools.

In Paul’s defense before the Athenians on Mars Hill (Acts 17), he calls to mind their simple-minded attitude toward the worship of “*deities*,” contrasting it with the existence and worship of the One True God. Then he ends with a call to action for them to repent and turn to Jehovah, adding with it the warning that there will come a time where He will call us all into judgment. But in verse 30, Paul says, “*Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.*” Paul makes a bold stand for the importance of the present, stating that while God used to look past these things, He will not do so now, and it is in the best interest of those listening to heed his words. Given this new information, why would any of them balk at it?

Unfortunately, we can not always be guaranteed that those listening to us will heed the words that we speak either, even if they come straight from God’s Word. For one reason or another, people turn away from the Truth, and time and time again they are warned. “Happiness” with their current situation, “contentment” with their spiritual status, or even “assurance” of good things to come keep souls away from God, and it is our goal to change their minds.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines a “fool” as “one who is deficient in judgment, sense or understanding.” Going a step further, a fool is ultimately someone who denies reality. This reality can come in the form of a denial of facts or consequences, but it is nevertheless someone who lives for the day, without any regard for what will happen to them tomorrow. Psalm 53:1 reads, “*The fool has said in his heart, There is no God.*” If someone can be so bold as to deny the existence of the One who made them, what other things are they willing to deny?

The foolishness of the world is in plain sight, but it is the foolishness of our own lives that we sometimes neglect. Reading the Bible, it is easy to see how things apply to everyone else, *but our own selves*. When we study Galatians 5:17-20, we remember that time a while back that Jordan committed fornication, or how Justin once had an outburst of wrath, but do we think about the lewdness that is in our own lives? Are they not all in the same list? Does Paul not say that ALL who partake in such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God? A fool is someone who looks at lists such as these and denies the facts that are staring them in the face.

The deceiving thing about this great tragedy is twofold. First, it is very appealing to procrastinate and deal with those sins “when the time is right” (think Acts 24:22-27). We can put them off, but it does not mean that it will go away. Just as Jonah was not

able to outrun his problems by boarding a ship to Tarshish, neither can we escape the judgment that faces us all (Romans 14:10-12). Secondly, it is encouraged by the world on an almost daily basis, and as such, many have believed lies. Left alone, one could understand the Bible in its simplicity and come to a knowledge about the Creation from reading the account in Genesis 1 and 2. Now, thousands of people who each log 60 hours a week in a tiny lab with 20 different types of frogs tell you such a thing is simply *illogical*. Is it logical to believe that we all climbed out of the primordial ooze? I tell you brethren, it takes more faith to believe their stance than ours.

Certain events are definite in the lives of many: death and taxes. But another thing that will come to us all is the final judgment of our lives, and anyone that reads the Bible understands this fact. The question remains then, what will you do about the warnings given to you to prepare for such an event? Will we accept the reality of our condition that is right in front of us and change our lives, or do we pretend that such a thing will not exist? Only a fool would choose the latter.

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