

Bite-size theology

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Introduction

A pastor in the USA once complained that many Christian writers seem unable to put the cookies where the people can reach them. He went on to say that, in his opinion, they forget that they are supposed to be feeding sheep and not giraffe! Many a young believer who has struggled through a book on doctrine would sympathize with that.

I hope that the ‘cookies’ in this book will be easily accessible to all believers, and that the truths they convey will feed their minds with the riches of God’s grace and nourish their hearts with a greater knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 ABC

The writer of the book to the Hebrews was disturbed and disappointed that his readers had not yet grasped the elementary truths of the faith (Hebrews 5:11–14). Spiritual milk was all they were capable of digesting; they could not cope with solid food. I wonder what he would have thought of many Christians at the beginning of the twenty-first century who are almost totally doctrinally illiterate.

Being slow to learn is not a matter of lack of intelligence but of lack of spiritual hunger and desire. Neither is it always a matter of lack of opportunity to receive teaching. From Hebrews 5 it appears that both spiritual milk and meat were available but they were content to stay on the milk. Their immaturity had nothing to do with how long they had been saved but it was a result of unbelief and not using the opportunities God had placed before them. They had been taught the elementary truths of the faith but they had either not understood these (Hebrews 5:11) or they had forgotten them (2 Peter 1:9), so they needed this teaching to be given to them all over again.

Without the basic building blocks, without the ABC, it is impossible to make any progress. If William Shakespeare had not learned and mastered the ABC of the English language he could never have written his masterpieces. Of course Shakespeare had other literary gifts and talents, but without the ABC he could never have written anything. In the same way, the ABC of the faith has to be mastered if Christians are to grow spiritually. We will not mature merely by reading the spiritual experiences of others, important though these are. Doctrine is simply a word to describe what the Bible teaches and no believer should be afraid to grapple with it.

The place of preaching

Christians are often put off doctrine by the sort of preaching they hear.

The heavy, boring and dry teaching that goes half a metre above the heads of its hearers is deadly. It may be biblically orthodox but it simply never reaches the people. It is presented in a manner that never seems to take in mind its hearers. The preacher may be having a fine time but he is not in the pulpit for that. His business ought to be to glorify God, to edify the minds and to warm the hearts of the people before him. Doctrinal preaching, because of the subjects it is dealing with, ought to be thrilling to hear and should excite the hearts and minds of God's people. There is no greater inducement to want to understand the doctrines of the faith, than to hear preaching of these truths that is both warm and passionate.