

First Things First (Man)

David Halbrook

All learning requires us to learn “first things first,” even math and baseball. Here are some “first things” about man.

God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:27) Man did not evolve from, nor is he a descendent of, any animal. Man was created in God’s image. Something cannot come from nothing, and life does not come from non-life---it is sad that many brilliant scientists ignore these *first things*. Being in God’s image today, we inherit no sinful nature.

Man must understand God’s words (Gen. 1:28; 2:16-17) Adam and Eve understood what God expected of them without a human creed, catechism, or council. Today God has spoken through Christ in Scripture (Heb. 1:1). We can, and must, understand what He has said there (Eph. 3:3-4; 5:17). How? Begin with the basics---learn *first things first*.

Man must worship God (John 4:23) Jesus said that God is seeking true worship from man, so we must comply. Since we benefit by giving God what He expects, we should trust and obey Him. Learn God’s plan for true worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; 14:15; 16:1-2; Matt. 15:8-9; Heb.10:24-25).

Send us your comments or questions.

Editor’s Note: The problem of religious division is obvious and overwhelming. Even we may be tempted to think that the mess of most modern religions is too big to clean up. Yes some things are hard to understand but surely the “first things” are not extremely complicated (except when complicated by man’s error). Begin to teach others by starting with “first things” of Scripture.

Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

Pray for: Ed & Janice White, The Ledgerwoods, Novela Puckett, Noleka Hopper, Samuel Southall, others with ongoing trials, new Christians among us, and Ben Calderon (who, with our help, works among Spanish-speaking people in Conway).

Join us each Sunday at 10AM (classes), 10:45AM, & 5PM and Wednesday at 7PM.

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

church of Christ--Quail Valley

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The Limitations Of Matthew 18:15-17 (Bobby Graham)

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou has gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (KJV)

In these verses some think they find the one procedure that must be used in every instance of sin committed by a brother in the Lord. Such a misunderstanding is based on the failure to realize that the Lord built some limitations into this passage, thus making this procedure relevant to personal offenses committed against an individual. It is also based on the failure to realize that the Lord established other procedures for other kinds of situations of sin, as we shall presently notice. Look at the following limitations:

1. Brother: This procedure is applicable to situations involving a brother in Christ, not a person in the world.
2. Sin: The matters to which the Lord’s plan apply are matters of sin. It is not just a matter of hurt feelings or differing judgment that is under consideration here.
3. Against you: Personal offense (sin) is what Jesus was pinpointing in this passage. It is not sin committed in the presence of others (public sin) or sin committed against the church in general. We can learn from other passages that this procedure outlined by the Lord was not used in other kinds of situations of sin.

In Acts 5:1-11 the apostles did not employ this plan in the case of Ananias and Sapphira’s lying. In Gal. 2:11, Paul did not follow this procedure in the case of Peter’s hypocrisy. In 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:17; 3 John 9; Rev. 2:14-15 and other passages the Lord’s apostles did not first go to the people indicted by them as

teaching falsely or trying to “run the local church.” In these instances, public attention was called to various sins and the sinners were named. It becomes obvious that the plan outlined by Christ in Matt. 18 was neither designed for all sins nor employed in all cases of sin.

It is far better to study passages carefully, noting their features and limitations, before stretching them to fit what they were never meant to fit. A more complete knowledge of the Scriptures will help one to avoid hastily drawn or poorly based conclusions. (<http://susquehannachurchofchrist.org/>)

What Did We Really Say? (John R. Gibson)

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” Luke 17:3, 4

“And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’” Luke 15:21

These passages, along with many others, show that we must be willing to admit it when we have wronged someone and then humbly ask their forgiveness. The late John Clark often said that ten of the most important words in a marriage were, “I have sinned. I am sorry. Will you forgive me?” And while these can be critical to the happiness of a marriage, we must be willing to use these same words (or similar ones) in all our relationships.

However, doesn’t our stubborn pride sometimes prevent us from doing this? While we may occasionally dig our heels in and refuse to admit to any wrong, there are other times when we can’t completely avoid an acknowledgement of wrong, yet still manage to avoid an honest confession. Consider what we may be saying when we utter the following words.

“If I have offended or hurt anyone, I’m sorry.” When we say this, are we admitting we have done something wrong though we may not know what specific individuals were hurt by our actions, or could we be failing to accept responsibility with the word *if*? Could we, in fact, not be subtly suggesting that if others had the kind of love described in 1 Cor. 13:4-7 as suffering long, not being provoked, believing the best of others, etc., then they would not have been offended? Have we shifted the responsibility from ourselves to others?

Similarly, if I say, “I’m sorry I hurt your feelings,” am I sorry for my actions or implying that you are too sensitive? In reality, do the recipients of such words not often find themselves on the defensive and reacting as though they must apologize

and dismiss our hurtful actions with words like, “That’s okay; it was really nothing,” when it really was something?

Then there are those times when we admit that we said or did something we shouldn’t have, but then seek to mitigate it by our circumstances of life. “I’ve been under so much pressure at work...things have been rough at home...I’ve been in a lot of pain lately because of my back, etc.” Life can certainly be tough, but the difficulties of life can never justify or lessen the magnitude of our wrongdoing. Joseph was sold as a slave, falsely accused of wrongdoing, and forgotten by the cupbearer, but we never see him giving in to sin. The devil sought to tempt Jesus after forty days of fasting, but He didn’t allow hunger or exhaustion to cause him to sin. When we have done wrong, let’s not blame those things we cannot control, but accept responsibility for the one person whose actions we can control.

Finally, we may make a direct attack on the person we have wronged with words such as, “I’m sorry I lost my temper with you, but I get so upset when people question my motives, ask too many questions, etc.” While there will be times when people do things that upset us, tempt us, provoke us, etc., and the Bible teaches that they will be held accountable for the stumbling block they cast before us (Matt. 18:6, 7), does anyone actually have the ability to make me sin? Instead of sinning in response to someone’s wrong, can I not heed such admonitions as those of Matt. 5:44 to “love [my] enemies, bless those who curse [me], do good to those who hate [me], and pray for those who spitefully use [me] and persecute [me]?” The confessions of David recorded in 2 Sam. 12:13 and Psa. 51 are noteworthy for what they do not contain; viz. any attempts to blame Bathsheba, the servants who brought her to him, or Joab and his cold-blooded killing of Uriah. David did not try to suggest that if Uriah had been a better husband, then perhaps this affair would have never taken place. No, instead of blaming others, David, with a broken and contrite heart (Psa. 51:17) acknowledged his guilt and took responsibility for his actions.

It may well be that I will need to go to my brother and talk to him about his sinful, provocative actions (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1, 2), but not until I have acknowledged my own sin and have done so without attempting in any way to shift the responsibility for my actions to someone else.

May God help us all learn to say with the younger son, “I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.” Then we can rejoice in promises such as those of 1 John 1:8, 9. *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse*

us from all unrighteousness.” Unless noted, all quotations from the New King James Version, copyright 1994 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.