

Right Now Counts Forever by RC Sproul

“Never preach above an eighth-grade level to a college educated congregation...” These words are still echoing in my ears and stabbing me in the soul. They were uttered by my Professor of Homiletics in seminary. He was trying to teach us how to be “successful” preachers. He went on to explain that people may have college degrees in their fields of specialty but in matters of religion and theology the majority of them have no better than a Sunday School understanding. The way to success is to “keep it simple.”

The way to success is to “keep it simple.” Something deep within me reacted to this “advice.” I refused to accept it then. I refuse to accept it now. The advice carries within it a double insult. The first insult is to God’s people. To assume that adults cannot grasp the things of God beyond an eighth-grade level is to slander both their intelligence and maturity.

The second insult is far greater. It is an insult to the majesty of God and to the work of God the Holy Spirit in revealing the deep things of God for us. We will spend thousands of dollars to educate ourselves and acquire importance of knowledge to enhance our careers. We understand the importance of knowledge in many areas of life. Our public education system does not terminate at eighth grade. We would be ill-equipped for the conversations we have in our businesses if our knowledge of the English language reached only to the eighth-grade level.

What are the standard clichés that abound in the Christian community? Have you heard them? “We must have a childlike faith.” “I don’t need to know any theology, I just need to know Jesus.” “Christianity is simple: ‘Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’”

It is easy for us to confuse a childlike faith with a childish faith. We are to have the kind of implicit trust in God that a child has in its parents. But we are called to fullness of maturity in terms of our understanding God. The apostle Paul put it this way: “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.” (I Cor. 14:20)

To say we don’t need to know theology, only Jesus, raises the immediate question, “Who is Jesus?” As soon as we begin to answer that question we are instantly involved in theology. As Christians we simply cannot avoid theology. We aren’t all expected to be theologians in a technical or academic sense, but we are theologians with a small “t”. The question is not will we be theologians but will we be good theologians or poor theologians?

“Jesus loves me this I know...” There is no more basic truth to Christianity than that. As an adult I still love to sing the song. But I also like to sing “Holy, Holy, Holy,” “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” and “Immortal, Invisible, Only Wise God.”

Christianity has simplicity, but it is not simplistic. The depths and riches of God are profound enough to keep us busily engaged in earnest pursuit of the knowledge of God for the rest of our lives. Its basic truths are easy enough for a child to grasp, but its deeper truths require disciplined study.

There is the famous story of the meeting of the theologians and the astronomer. The astronomer said to the theologian: “I don’t understand why you theologians fuss so much about predestination and supralapsarianism, about communicable and incommunicable attributes of God, of imputed or infused grace and the like; to me

Christianity is simple; it like the Golden Rule, ‘Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.’” The theologian replied, “I think I see what you mean. I get lost in all your talk about exploding novae, expanding universes, theories of entropy and astronomical perturbations. For me astronomy is simple: It’s Twinkle, twinkle little star...”

Last week a woman said to me, “I was a Christian for eleven years before I found out who God was. It was after viewing your video series on the ‘Holiness of God’ that I first understood the majesty of God.” She went on to say, “I suddenly felt cheap about having a bumper sticker on my car saying, ‘Honk if you love Jesus.’ It seemed to make God seem so small.” As delighted as I was that the woman had moved to a deeper understanding of God, I tried to reassure her about her bumper sticker. She was trying to do something ‘visible’ to indicate her commitment to Christ. We all start our Christian walk as babes and don’t always know the best way to articulate our faith. This woman wanted to go deeper.

To be satisfied with a simple faith that is maintained on a milk diet stunts your growth as a Christian. The problem is as old as the church itself. On occasion the apostles had to admonish their spiritual children on this point. We read: “Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity...” (Heb. 6:1). Again: “...Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine...” (Eph. 4:13-14)

God wants you to be a spiritual giant. There are different ways to define the word ‘giant’. We would describe a giant as “a grotesque creature who is a freak of nature.” We could define a giant as “a mythical character who is featured in fairy tales like ‘Jack and the Beanstalk.’” But God does not want you to be a grotesque freak or a mythical person who says Fee Fi Fo Fum... A spiritual giant is a different kind of giant. In this sense a giant is simply a *normal person who never quits growing*.

Christian education is an educational process that has no graduation date until we die. We may complete special or particular courses of study, but we pursue our knowledge of God as long as we live. Christian education involves a lifelong pursuit of God Himself.

The Bible speaks of seeking God. Again and again we hear the words, “Seek and ye shall find.” But in almost every case where the Bible speaks of seeking after God it is speaking to and about believers. Jonathan Edwards said, “The seeking of God is the main business of my life.”

It was to believers Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.” To seek after God is to have an unquenchable thirst to know Him deeply.

Lifelong Christian education is what we pastors are striving for. We want to help you to grow into giants. We want to help you learn as much as you can about the things of God. We want to make the “Seminary” available to the layman. We want to provide you with tools of knowledge of the Bible, of theology, of church history, practical aids to personal growth, to the whole gamut of Christian education.

We want you to be knowledgeable and articulate Christians, not so that you can win arguments or boast of your brilliance, but so that you can have the food you need to be a giant for God.