

MOVING TO THE CORE

Part 2

As I noted last week, I am in a new series of messages on the core. The core is the central or innermost part of something. It is the essence of an object. An apple has a core, the earth has a core, and a golf ball has a core. In a similar vein, the church of Jesus Christ also has a core. Last Sunday I talked to you about the CORE VALUES of the church. I listed ten. This week, I want to talk to you about the CORE BELIEFS of the church.

How would you fare, don't worry, I am not going to have you do this, but again, how would you fare if I were to have you turn and face another individual and have you list for him or her your personal core beliefs?

- Could you do it?
- Would you be confident that your beliefs would match those of the church?
- Could you defend your beliefs?
- Could you support them with Scriptures?
- Could those who are most closely related to you likewise tell of your core beliefs with certainty?
- Does your life testify of your faith in your core beliefs?

Your answers say much – positive or negative -- about your commitment to Christ and His Church.

Every so often someone challenges me with the statement, “preacher, It doesn't really matter what you believe, just as long as you believe something.”

People who believe that error are:

- people who are wishy-washy in their faith.
- They do not have any core values.
- They are anybody's dog who will hunt with them.

They would probably hold to the idea that:

- It doesn't matter what you drink, just as long as you drink something.
- It doesn't matter what you eat, just as long as you eat something.
- It doesn't matter what you spend your money on, just as long as you spend your money.
- It doesn't matter who your daughter dates, just as long as she dates someone.

Silly, right? And yet, none of these matters are nearly as important as spiritual belief. One's eternal soul hinges on that.

My core beliefs act as a compass. They help direct me through perilous waters. Tell me:

1. Can God's grace save anyone?
2. Is abortion right or wrong?
3. Is God good? Just?
4. What about evolution?
5. Why does God allow evil and suffering in the world?
6. Is it wrong to gamble?
7. Is Jesus the one and only way to heaven?
8. What about drinking alcoholic beverages? Taking drugs?
9. Is the Koran or the Book of Mormon one and the same with the Bible?
10. Are there other gods equal to our God?

Some people would find some of those questions rather difficult, and yet, an established system of beliefs will help settle such matters once and for all.

- Questions of conscience,
- Questions of theology,
- Questions of religion and more should be covered by one's core beliefs.

A MOMENT AGO I BROUGHT UP THE ISSUE OF OTHER GODS. It is not at all uncommon for someone to ask me, "But pastor, aren't we all serving the same god?" My answer is, I seriously doubt it. My core beliefs tell me that there is but one God and one God alone.

Deuteronomy 6:4 confirms, "**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.**"

Ephesians 4:6 tells us that there is "**one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**"

Then, 1 Timothy 2:5 adds, "**For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus....**" How many Gods? One.

- THE GREEKS, on the other hand, believed in many gods: they were polytheistic. It is impossible to say how many Greek gods there were. We do know, though, there were hundreds.
- Perhaps you have heard of SHINTOISM. This a religion practiced in Japan. The word Shinto means "The Way of the Gods." Some estimate that the Shinto religion has as many as eight million gods.
- That number, though, is small compared to THE HINDU FAITH. It is said that it has upwards of three hundred and thirty-three million gods.

Are we all serving the same God? I don't think so!

I like to think that I know my way around. As such, I hate to ask directions. I believe that if I travel far enough, I will eventually run into a road that I recognize. It only takes a little faith and a little patience. Nevertheless, I have to admit, once or twice in my life, that theory has failed me. I do believe that I could have driven half-way around the world and never found the right road. My good intensions, my stubborn faith, were not enough to get me on the right path. I needed someone who knew the way to help me out.

Once again, people believe that it doesn't really matter what they believe, just as long as they believe something. However, Proverbs 14:12 states, "**There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.**" A wrong road will never take you to the right destination.

Then too, it is popular today to put down doctrine; to say that One's doctrine is not important. In fact, over the past number of years the issue of doctrine has been downplayed until it has almost become a religious dirty word.

- Doctrine classes are looked upon with disfavor.
- Doctrines are seen as being intolerant and exclusionary.
- It is often said that they are manmade and lack anointing.
- That they generally flow out of the out Roman Catholic Church. (It seems as if the number one all-time Protestant cop-out is to blame nearly everything on the church of Rome.)

Nevertheless, the word doctrine simply means the beliefs or teachings of the church. I love

doctrine. I love the doctrines of New Life Assembly of God. They are important to me.

- Matthew 7:28 (*King James Version*), tells us, “**And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at HIS doctrine....**” Jesus had a doctrine.
- John 7:16 adds, “**Jesus answered them, and said, MY doctrine is not mine, but HIS THAT SENT ME.**” God Almighty obviously had a doctrine too.
- Acts 2:42 notes that the church “**continued steadfastly in THE APOSTLES' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.**” Here we see that the apostles had a doctrine as well.
- 1 Timothy 4:16 therefore warns us, “**Watch YOUR LIFE AND DOCTRINE closely. Persevere in them, because IF YOU DO, you will SAVE both yourself and your hearers.**”

Let me challenge you here concerning some matters of doctrine. Can you tell me five of the key doctrines of this church? Earlier I asked about your core beliefs, now I am after the core beliefs of the church.

Let me share with you some of the basic ones:

1. We believe that the Bible is inspired, it is our all-sufficient rule for faith and practice.
2. We believe in the One True God.
3. We believe in the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. We believe in the fall of Man in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit.
5. We believe in the Salvation of humankind through the death of Jesus on the Cross.
6. We believe in the Ordinances of the Church – Communion and Water Baptism.
7. We believe in the Baptism in the Holy Ghost.
8. We believe in Divine Healing through believing prayer.
9. We believe in the Blessed Hope – the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.
10. We believe that Jesus will return after the Great Tribulation to rule and reign on this earth for 1,000 years.
11. We believe in the Final Judgment.
12. We believe in a New Heaven and the New Earth.

I admit that these 12 points do not cover all truth, however, they do provide a basis of belief under which we can unite and fellowship. These truths are also seen as being essential to a full-gospel ministry. Were you able to name five?

Having said that, let me share with you something that troubles me greatly. Seventy-eight per-cent of those caught up in cults today previously attended Christian churches. Nearly 8 in 10 of those who are Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and members of The Way at one time or another were Baptists, Methodists, Nazarenes, Non-denominational, Presbyterians, or members of the Assemblies of God.

Think about it. These people forsook the fundamental truths of Christianity to believe that:

- Lucifer and Jesus are brothers,
- That Jesus was married and had several wives,
- Jesus is a created being, and as such is a lesser god,
- Protestant preachers are of the antichrist,
- We will have spirit-wives in heaven, and that
- Jesus was not physically resurrected from the grave on the third day.

These are statements of heresy, and yet many have forsaken the truths of the Gospel and followed these teachings into error.

What makes this doubly tragic is, these people took their children with them. Their children will be raised in a cult without hope, without Christ!

Young people, let me ask you. How important are the core beliefs of the church to you?

- Could you date or marry someone who was a non-Pentecostal?
- Are your beliefs strong enough that they could withstand the ridicule of a pagan professor at some secular university?
- Are your beliefs yours or your parents? The pastors?
- Are your beliefs such that due to them you would say no, when you ought to say no, and yes when you ought to say yes?
- How many of the core doctrines did you know a moment ago?

I WANT TO NOW SHARE WITH YOU TWO VERY IMPORTANT PASSAGES ON DOCTRINE:

1. 2 Timothy 4:3 testifies that **“the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”**

Paul was prophesying that false teaching was to spread. That the days were coming when many people would fall away from the church due to false doctrine.

We know from church history that this is exactly what happened to the Seven Churches of Asia spoken of in the first three chapters of Revelation. There were seven literal churches, and out of the seven only one remained faithful to the preaching of the Word—the Church of Philadelphia. The other six turned away from the faith.

Why? What caused them to fall away? What caused so many people and churches to turn away from the truth? Paul gives the answer here in 2 Timothy 4:3. People would not accept sound doctrine. The word “sound” is key here. It means “wholesome and healthy doctrine and teaching”. The only doctrine and teaching that is sound is that of God’s Word.

They turned away from truth to doctrines and teachers that tickled their **“itching ears.”**

- People do not want to hear about sin anymore, so they turn away....
- People do not want to hear about sacrifice anymore, so they turn away....
- People do not want to hear about hell anymore, so they turn away....
- People do not want to hear about commitment anymore, so they turn away....
- People do not want to here about service anymore, so they turn away....

The point is this: people turn away from sound doctrine because they do not want to hear true doctrine. They either do not agree with it, or else they do not want to be reminded or to think about it.

The passage literally says that people will be dominated **“by their own lusts”** They will be living lives, in other words, that seek the gratification of the flesh through:

- sex and immorality,
- recognition and honor,
- power and authority,

- status and position,
- fun and pleasure,
- money and possessions, and
- good works and benevolence

Such lusts and cravings will so dominate people's lives that they will seek ministers and teachers who encourage these pursuits. If they do not encourage them, they will at least remain silent about them.

Sometime back, a television commercial showed a husband and his wife in the living room while their supper was cooking in the kitchen. The "meal," whatever it was, was all in a plastic bag, boiling in a pot on the stove. The message the commercial conveyed was simple: No fuss, no muss, no time, no work, no talent. Cooking made easy: precooked, pre-seasoned, and preserved! Supper without effort!

There is a book on the market today that declares a similar philosophy has made its way into the church. The author notes, in part: "Attempts are being made to wrap the Gospel in an attractive package and advertise it by saying, 'we've taken out all the fuss and all the work. Our brand of Christianity is more fun. It will get you to heaven cheaper. It is easier and it leaves no unpleasant aftertaste. There are no bitter pills to swallow and it is guaranteed to never upset your conscious or your digestive tract.'"

- "No obligation,
- no commitment,
- no responsibility,
- no change of lifestyle,
- no discipline,
- no repentance,
- and no growth.

Religion made CHEAP AND EASY!"

The Spring 1983 issue of *Leadership* carried a cartoon of the so-called "Lite Church." The cartoon advertises,

- 24% fewer commitments,
- home of the 7.5% tithe,
- 15-minute sermons,
- 45-minute worship services.
- We have only 8 commandments---your choice.
- We use just 3 spiritual laws and have an 800-year millennium.
- Everything you've wanted in a church... and less!"

Several years ago a church in Greenwich, New Jersey decided to try something novel. A newspaper report stated, "The church's minister is trying a new way to draw people into the fold: an express 22-minute service that he says provides all the spirituality" of the regular liturgy "in half the time." The shortened version "eliminates sermons and sacraments." This true version of the "Lite" church "includes a greeting, apology for sins, prayer and an interpretation of the weekly Bible reading."

May I remind you of an account found in 2 Samuel 24? Israel was reeling from a plague that had been brought on by King David's disobedience before the Lord. Thousands had died. At this point David decides to offer a sacrifice unto God in hopes of stopping the judgment. He happens on a small piece of land which was perfect for the altar and sacrifice. As he

approached the owner about a price, the fellow refused the money saying that he would be happy to give the partial to the king. Let me pick up the account now at verse 24: **“But the king replied..., ‘No, I insist on paying you for it. I WILL NOT SACRIFICE TO THE LORD MY GOD BURNT OFFERINGS THAT COST ME NOTHING.’”**

David certainly did not buy into the “Lite” religion mentality here. He was more than willing to pay.

I want to tell you something very important. A salvation that...

- Requires nothing,
- Says nothing,
- Believes nothing,
- Knows nothing,
- Loves nothing,
- Costs nothing,

IS WORTH NOTHING.

As I attempt to move each of you to the core, I am issuing a “wake up” call to the church. Danger is lurking in the shadows. Jesus is not calling us to pick up a ball of light, fluffy cotton. No, He is calling us to bear a cross. To get involved. To study to show ourselves approved unto God. To know Him and His Holy Word!

2. The second passage that I want to address is found in Ephesians 4:14. It says, **“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”**

- *The Living Bible*, **“Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different, or has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth.”**
- *The Contemporary English Version*, **“We must stop acting like children. We must not let deceitful people trick us by their false teachings, which are like winds that toss us around from place to place.”**
- **“... tossed to and fro, and blown round by every shifting current of teaching.”**
- **“driven before the wind of each new doctrine.”**
- **“Whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching.”**
- **“Driven by every windy thing that is taught.”**

The Greek word that the apostle uses here for CHILDREN means: "An infant, a little child, a minor, one not of age. One untaught and unskilled." The term does NOT mean "young converts" but rather "Christians who have not attained to a mature Christian experience."

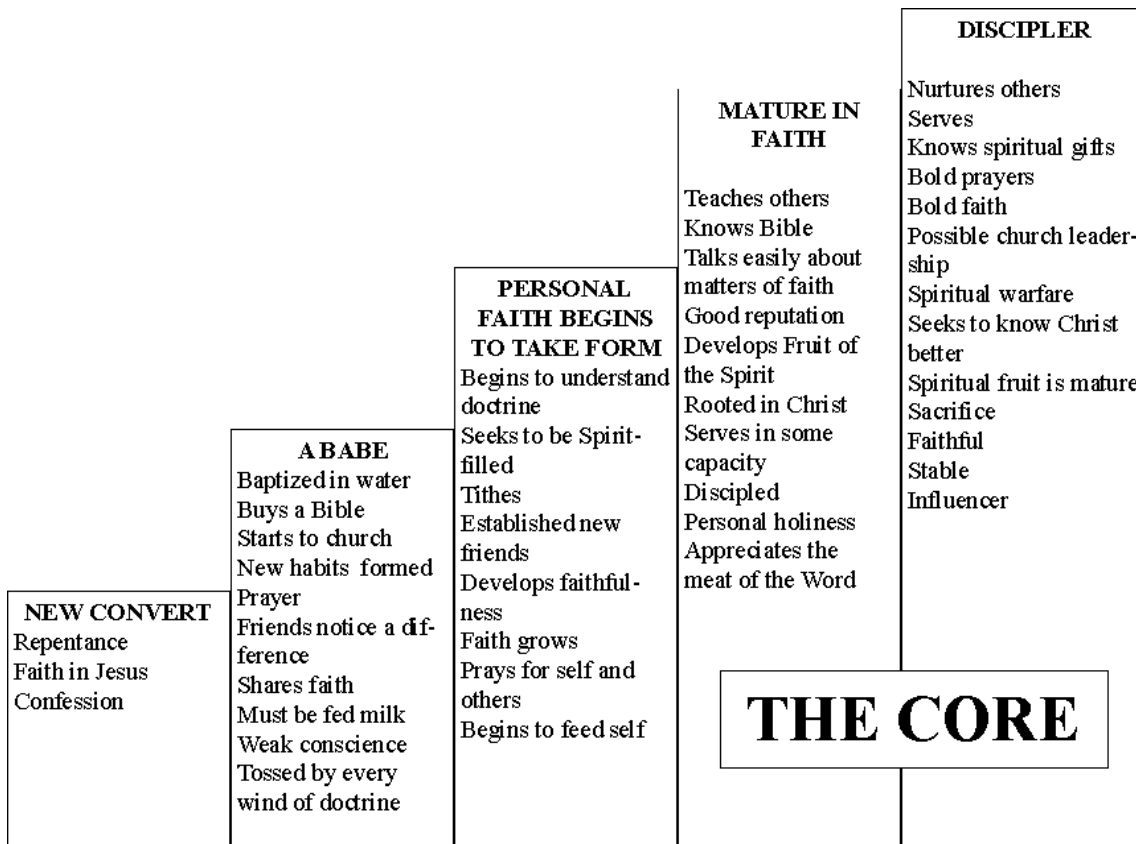
Pastor/teachers are given to us to keep us from staying **“children”** in faith. Otherwise, we may well fall prey to religious hucksters who can load the dice, or who do a bit of spiritual slight of hand. They do this by taking verses out of context and by changing their meaning so as to suit their own evil purposes. In doing this, they seek to appeal to immature Christians who have not grown up spiritually. Such people are at the mercy of false teachers due to their simplicity and inexperience.

- Jesus therefore warned in Matthew 7:15, **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”**

- Acts 20:30 also declares, **“Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.”**
- Romans 16:18 adds, **“By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”**

Notice the word **“naïve”** here. It simply means: “not bad, innocent, harmless, unsuspecting, simple people”. Hey, these aren’t bad folks. They just do not know and due to this lack, they are terribly vulnerable. Is it any wonder that the Bible tells us in Hosea 4:6, **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge....”**

WHILE HERE, I WANT TO SHOW YOU A CHART THAT I HAVE PREPARED FOR THIS MORNING’S MESSAGE. Again, I call it **“MOVING TO THE CORE.”**



As you can see, there is a progression that comes with Christian growth. As we grow in the doctrines and teachings of the Word, we mature in the faith.

Our culture tells us that we are not to talk about matters of religion or politics. Whether or not we talk about religion, we had better know what we believe.

- Know it with both our hearts and our heads.
- Know it with passion.
- Know it as if our very souls could depend on it, for in fact, they do.

IN CLOSING: I am reminded of a parable that I once read: A man had been wandering around lost in a forest for several days. Finally he saw another man approaching him in the distance. The fellow was overcome with relief! "Now I shall surely find my way out of this terrible forest,"

he thought to himself. When they neared each other, he called out to the man, "Brother, will you please tell me the way out of this forest? I have been lost in here for several days and I am unable to find my way out." The other man replied, "Brother, I do not know the way out either, for I too have been wandering around in here for many days. However, I can tell you this, do not go the way that I have gone, for I do know that is not the way out."

Many people on earth are like the fellow in the story. They know that they are terribly lost, and they also know that the way that they have tried, is not the right way. Let's know the way so that we can show the way.

If you want to move to the core, you must know what and why you believe.