

The Purpose And Effectiveness Of A Memorial

Before Moses' death the tribes of Gad, Rueben, and half of Manasseh asked for permission to remain East of the Jordan River. They saw the land was good and wanted to live there. God granted them permission to do so but reminded them of their responsibility to fight beside the rest of Israel as they conquered Canaan, Numbers 32.

After Moses' death, Joshua and all the tribes came to the Jordan River. God separated the waters so the people walked through on dry ground. Afterward he commanded one man from each tribe to take one stone from the Jordan and keep it with them. Eventually the twelve stones were set up at Gilgal, Joshua 4.20. The purpose of the stones is stated in verse 7, "And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever." Those of that generation would not need such a memorial but eventually those present that day would die. Their children and grandchildren would quickly forget if they were not taught about this event. The stones were intended to give each generation an opportunity to teach the next generation. "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stone?' then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land'; for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever." (Joshua 4.21-24)

The effectiveness of this "memorial" depended on the parents teaching their children its significance. The stones by themselves could not teach anyone.

In the New Testament we have the memorial of the Lord's Supper each week. Usually words are said to remind us why we partake of the fruit of the vine and unleavened bread. Those implements by themselves cannot teach anyone, only when taught do they take on their intended significance.

This thought came to me, what do our children and grandchildren think about the things we do or do not do?

For instance, will they understand why we sing without instrumental music? Will they believe it is simply a matter of judgment or opinion? Or, will they understand the Scriptural way to sing praises in worship to God is with our voices and hearts, Colossians 3.16; Ephesians 5.19? We may know the answer to the above questions but our children and grandchildren will not if we do not teach them.

Will they know why we observe the Lord's Supper each and every Sunday? Or, will they believe this is a "church of Christ tradition." Our religious neighbors offer the Lord's Supper on a monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, or some other time period. They think we are demeaning the Supper by having it every Sunday. Will our children or grandchildren believe the same thing? They will if we do not explain to them that the disciples came together on the first day of the week at Troas, Acts 20.7. Jesus commands us to observe the Lords Supper, 1 Corinthians 11.24-26, and Acts 20.7 gives us the only approved apostolic example of when to partake. The question may come up why we do this every first day? The answer is because the Bible teaches this principle. The Jews under the Law of Moses were to keep the Sabbath Day. Which Sabbath Day were they to treat as Holy? Each and every Sabbath day was holy; God did not have to specify each Sabbath. This is what is called a necessary inference. One could not argue that they could break the Sabbath day because God did not say keep every Sabbath day.

Each week has a first day, we observe the Lord's Supper on first day of every week because that is our approved example and necessary inference in the Bible.

Will our children and grandchildren know why we do not have a kitchen in the building and do not come together to eat a common meal? Will they think it is because we are too cheap to purchase a refrigerator and a stove? Or, perhaps they will think we just don't like eating with each other. It is our task to explain that the "church", the saints came together to worship God. They had houses to eat in, 1 Corinthians 11.22. We read of the church coming together to teach, sing, pray, give as they have prospered, and observing the Lord's Supper. We do not read of the "church" consisting of playing games, eating cake and ice cream.

I could mention many more things but I think you get the idea. The things we were taught must be taught to the next generation. If we take it for granted that our children know these things, we will be sadly disappointed. - - Dennis Tucker