Essentials for Our Millennium (3)

(by Carl McMurray)

We are a strange people I believe. Most of us generally like the kind of music that was popular when we came to adulthood. We continue to prefer that for most of our lives and have difficulty understanding how others can appreciate types of music that are so different. We are stuck in a time warp. Many of us think that children ought to be raised like we were raised, while at the same time knowing that we would never allow our children or grandchildren to “run the streets” all day until dark without checking in at home... the way *we* did when growing up.

Sometimes we are like that with the gospel also. We wonder why people don’t just hear and obey the way we did when we first came to the truth. Why don’t gospel meetings have many baptisms like they did in the “good old days?” The truth is that here also we are in a time warp. The world has changed just like it has always changed. The generation that lives here now is not the same people that were here decades ago and their experiences are not the same. Thus their responses are not going to be the same. That’s the reasoning behind this series of articles.

What kind of world do we live in? A “niche” world, a computerized world, and even more! The first two parts of this series dealt with those things, but we also live in a “complex” world. Shade tree mechanics are becoming fewer and fewer in this age of microchip-run automobiles. Just building a tool shed can become a nightmare of permits, zoning, and inspections. One friend told of his long distance provider that gave him great rates but demanded that he dial 36 numbers for a long distance call by the time he dialed code numbers, pin numbers, access numbers and the number itself. I can see why you’d save money on long distance bills - you’d refrain from the trouble of calling.

Religion has not escaped increasing complexity. As denominational churches have added doctrines and rules, their creed books have grown thicker with the changes. Their membership classes have gotten longer and their explanation for erroneous doctrines has become more lengthy as they try to make unbiblical teaching sound biblical.

Of course the natural answer to this all is that people are looking for simplicity. We all have enough headaches and stress without love and faith becoming one also. And frankly, most people in our culture are just not motivated enough to go to the trouble to endure much difficulty for spirituality, a subject they know very little about anyway.

This ought to be our forte’. We have the easiest truth to understand of any group claiming to believe the Bible. We don’t have to explain “salvation by faith alone” when James teaches faith and works go together. We don’t have to explain away baptism while the Scriptures teach the necessity of it. All we have to do is learn our Bibles and point folks to the Scriptures. Although many have made it their hobby, we don’t have to be learning about and attacking other churches all the time. All we have to know and teach is the truth. Just point people to where they can read it for themselves. And we have the confidence that our God knows and has presented us with the best path to salvation that will work in every age and every culture. What a blessing we’ve been given.

Local families of God’s people are autonomous. There are no unseen and far off representatives, law making councils, or headquarters to answer to. When a guest stops by and checks out one of our congregations - what he sees is what he gets. Got a question? There’s a shepherd standing nearby and the buck stops there in every congregation.

How about discipline problems? They’re all handled within the walls and judgment of the local church. That’s the scriptural pattern - no outside interference. Suggestions for outreach? Each congregation determines what is most expedient and effective for their own area and abilities. Is this a simple arrangement or what?

In a complex world, the simple, yet effective nature of New Testament Christianity ought to be attractive. All we do is follow the pattern. We approach and serve our God the way the New Testament Christians did. Simple. It’s up to us to get the message out, however. Unfortunately in many places fussing, fighting, and self-serving has made obedience to the gospel appear more difficult than it really is. We must present the message of Christ in unity, joy, and peace. With a smile let’s put the message of peace out there for the world to see. They’re looking for simplicity and the simple gospel of our Lord is what all men need.

Essentials for Our Millennium **(4)**

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In this series of articles we are considering the kind of world that we live in today and I am operating on the premise that although human nature changes very little, the environment that shapes our attitudes and responses has changed a great deal. We are no longer living in our grandparents’ world. We may not even be living in the world our parents grew up in. How shall we communicate with the 21st century unbeliever then? Well, that is part of the point of this installment in this series.

You see, we live in an informed world. Without even thinking about it, I have access to the weather reports in N. Alabama where my parents are along with the latest report from Chicago where my daughter lives and Smyrna, TN, where my son and his wife live. Depending on what home page you mark in your PC or which “widget” your Mac has on its desktop, they can be listed alongside the Anderson weather and over the top ten movies playing as soon as you turn your computer on. This is in addition to the top local headlines, stock market figures, international news, etc.

We have instant access to more worldwide information than we can effectively process. The result is that we know more and care less about events than any people in history!

Another effect of the above technology is that people have developed a desire for current knowledge. We want to know what’s happening now, not yesterday. We want live pictures of hostage situations in our own towns and bombs falling on the other side of the world. What does this mean to the church and how will it impact our presentation of the gospel?

Mainly, it means that we must be “informed” also. We must know more about the music people are listening to, the books they are reading, and the latest fake doctrine blowing across the land. How else can we be “all things to all men?” It also means that we must be aware of new communication tools and methods that people are using and becoming accustomed to. The days of knocking doors and offering to show a filmstrip consisting of slides and a cassette are gone. These things have been replaced with computers, media-projectors, DVDs and downloadable MP3 recordings.

We can cry about expenses and what worked in the fifties all we want, but if we are going to present the gospel to an informed world we are going to have to be informed ourselves.