

Mixing Essentials
Romans 5:1-8
October 21, 2018 LUMC

Theme: Essentials of faith and essentials of response

It's called "perseveration" and it's a dysfunction of the brain that causes people to persist in a particular task even in an illogical manner that might lead to injury or death. It is probably what happened to Manfred Von Richthofen as he pursued a British pilot far beyond safe limits and right into the sights of British guns. The Red Baron and his red Fokker triplane were shredded as he flew right into the shooting gallery. So focused on his next kill, he became fixated and unaware of his surroundings.

Fixation is a problem in combat for soldiers, for police officers in pursuit of the bad guys, for car drivers and especially motorcycle riders who fixate on a spot on the road or what a car is doing, and they'll drive right into it instead of avoiding it. Where you look is where you go. And, it's a problem for Christians.

Since Acts chapter 2, we've been fighting over things in church, some silly, some serious and it often ends up with someone leaving the church or a church split. Here are a few examples that actually ended up with multiple members leaving their church;¹

- **A Fight over whether or not to build a children's playground or to use the land for a cemetery** (*I'm dying to know the resolution of this one.*).
- **A church argument and vote to decide if a clock in the worship center should be removed** (*I think this one is a timely argument.*).
- **A petition to have all church staff clean shaven** (*No church planters are allowed.*).
- **A dispute in the church because the Lord's Supper had cran/grape juice instead of grape juice** (*Of course it should be grape juice. It's right there in Hezekiah 4:11.*).
- **One church moved to a stronger blend of coffee following complaints that Sunday morning fellowship was a little weak. Members left the church** (*Perhaps they started a new church: The Right Blend Fellowship.*).
- **In one church, members left the church because one member hid the vacuum cleaner from them. It resulted in a major fight and split** (*Thus the Second Electrolux Church was born.*).
- **A church member was chastised because she brought vanilla syrup to the coffee server. It looked too much like liquor.** (*Beth Moore confessed she was*

¹ Thom Ranier, church consultant. Retrieved 10/20/2018, <https://thomrainer.com/2015/11/twenty-five-silly-things-church-members-fight-over/>

the culprit who brought the syrup. Don't you know, Beth, we Methodists cannot have vanilla syrup at anytime? Chocolate is fine though.)

- ***dispute over whether the church should allow people to wear black t-shirts, since black is the color of the devil (Are you sure he's not red? That's what I've heard.)***

A friend was visiting another Methodist church here in the valley and just before the service began a woman walked up to him and said, in a not-so-kind-voice, "You're sitting in my spot!" then with a huff, she said, "Never mind!" and stormed back out the door – true story.

I love the book of Romans, but the first couple chapters are pretty tough. Paul sets out to convince you that you belong in a rubbish heap. You are worthless. You are hopeless. Except. Except, he writes, "**How can we who died to sin go on living in it. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore....just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of God the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life.**" And with Chapter six, Paul reminds you that you are not hopeless, you are of great worth, and you belong in the palace because you are God's adopted daughter or son; princesses and princes of the King of Glory! This culminates in the Romans 8 Ross quoted last week, chapter 8, that great Himalaya of the Bible; "**Therefore there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus!**" Do you believe it?

What are the essentials? What is truly important for you to know and believe? How can you be certain? I try to maintain attitude of reception; I may be wrong about a great many things, but I am certain of a few; truths I hold to be directly from God and indisputable declarations of God's great love.

1. God's nature is love and is evidenced by his faithfulness throughout the Bible and throughout my life. (1 John 4:8, 16; Romans 5:8)
2. Jesus is God's own son, his very nature and character made flesh so that we might, infinitesimal way, understand and respond to God's love.
3. Jesus lived a life of demonstration, mentoring, and example for each of us to follow. We are to follow Jesus as Disciples.
4. Jesus died on the cross; a living sacrifice once and for all, the curtain separating human and God removed forever.
5. Jesus walked out of the tomb. Death a poor challenge to the creator. Easter is real proclaiming that death is but a stepping stone in our journey toward a life with God and in his presence for all of eternity.

6. Jesus said, “Believe in me and you shall have eternal life.” Belief is your part; God’s grace does the work. (John 3:15, 5:24)
7. The Holy Spirit empowers you to live beyond your potential. The comforter, healer, strength, and third portion of God’s nature is a reality today. Believe it and release him to work. (John 16:7)

Friends, God always meant for this to be simple. We have complicated it in our human belief that, “It just can’t be that easy.”

Belief initiates God’s justification for you through Jesus Christ, the washing of your sin out of your life and baptism is the mark of that work and the welcome for you into the family. Holy Communion is the renewing work of his act of greatest love on the cross for you. Belief in all this is essential, it is what connects us to the first believers from Adam and Eve through Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Esther, David, Ruth, Salome, Mary, Phoebe (carrier of the letter of Romans), right up to you and me.

Belief triggers God’s work of salvation and initiates a new work for you are a **“New Creation in Christ Jesus”** (2 Corinthians 5:17) and that is the work of our sanctification; our becoming more and more holy, more like Jesus each day. I’m working on it, so are you. This is our response to God’s gift of love and grace poured out for you and through you.

It’s not always easy to respond to God because we are fixated on the things of this world. We’re fixated on the things that make us different; our skin, language, ethnic origin, marriage, singleness, whether we worship with hymns or with rock and roll, where we sit, whether we dunk or sprinkle, or what color the carpet is. We fixate and think this is essential and, “By God, if I don’t get my way, I’m leaving.”

When has running ever resolved the problem? The problem is, when we become fixated on the non-essentials, we lose sight of God. We’re looking in a mirror and worshipping what we see. Rather, we worship and glorify God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not the music, not the beautiful sanctuary, certainly not the preacher.

Let’s stop mixing the essentials. Let’s remain focused on Jesus and if we can do that we’ll never get lost, never lose heart, never lead someone astray. When we respond in that way other things begin to come together, and it becomes a “way of life.” From Adam and Eve, God has asked us, and trusted us, to be stewards over his creation. Created and creative God is freedom giving so it is up to us to respond loving like Jesus.

You are stewards of all that God has created and placed into your control; Your time, your money, your labors, and your faith. Barna Research notes that generosity is infectious and spreads throughout your life. While they measure giving to charity they

say that people who are generous give in other areas. I believe there is a theological reason for this. When you give of anything, time, money, energy, resources, you receive God's blessing. It is a positive spiritual gift tangibly received in emotions of satisfaction and gratitude for doing what "is right" and feelings of joy welling out of that satisfaction. Barna writes, "**The more you care, the more you care.**" Once people give, they are motivated to give again and give more.

Our annual financial stewardship for Lakeview begins now as I ask you to take stock – an inventory of your life and how you are living with Jesus. This might be a season of gratitude and rejoicing in how God is leading and how you are following. You may discover places where you have become distracted by non-essentials and this could be a time to re-focus, renew, recommit to Jesus. If each of us do this, we won't have to worry about our budget and this church will be even more amazing next year with new people and new ministry. Spend some time with your loved ones, with close friends and take a spiritual inventory. Where are your strengths and where do you need to grow? Do this and one of the side effects is you won't be as angry at political extremes, or ideas contrary to yours and you won't be angry when someone tries to make a non-essential essential because your priorities will be in order and you'll be secure in your journey of faith.

Where you look is where you go. Stewardship, a way of life because you are focused on the essentials and you won't stop worshipping Jesus. You won't mix your essentials because you're already looking at Jesus. Are you ready to take on this kind of stewardship? Then, let's do this thing.