



THE ESSENTIALS

Sometimes I like to watch “The Essentials” on TCM (Turner Classic Movies). Host Robert Osborne selects a movie from the past and carries on a conversation with a guest as to why the movie was selected for the viewers. Osborne contends that for a movie to be a classic it must contain “The Essentials.” These essentials would include everything from the plot to the lighting, from the directing to the acting, from the musical score to the cinematography. Life, especially the Christian life, also has “The Essentials.” We are devoting this issue of *One Body* to “The Essentials.”

Life itself, whether plant life, marine life, or human life, is governed by “The Essentials.” We must have clean air to breathe, nourishing food to eat, and pure water to drink. Clothing and shelter are also necessary to life. None of us could survive a day in the frigid reaches of Antarctica without the latter. A tall ship must have wind to sail; an automobile must have ignition and gasoline to be driven; a jet plane must have thrust to take off. I recently underwent surgery to remove a tumor (it proved to be benign) and I was glad for anesthesia before surgery and morphine after surgery. They sure seemed essential to me!

I believe in the essentials. I guess you could say I am all for “essentialism” (but not existentialism). I am an “essentialist” (but hopefully not a legalist). Common sense tells us that something that is “essential” is absolutely necessary, indispensable, an imperative. Filet mignon is not essential to life but some solid food is. A designer home and designer clothing are not necessary to life, but some form of clothing and shelter is. Not everything in life is necessary to living, but some things are. Reducing life to “The Essentials” can simplify life and even improve our living. I once saw a bumper sticker that read, “Live simply so others can simply live.” Those seven words have altered my own lifestyle.

The word “essential” or “essentials” does not appear in the Bible, but the principle is there. Jesus used words like “must” and “ought” and “unless” and “except” to underscore the essentiality of being born again (John 3:5), placing faith in Christ (John 8:24), and repentance from sin (Luke 13:3, 5). He declared that He was the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one could come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Some call that intolerant; I call it indispensable. The writer of Hebrews stressed that “without faith it is impossible

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to please God” (Heb 11:6). God told Adam and Eve “you must not eat from the tree,” but out of the shadows slithered the serpent, daring to cast doubt on God’s clear directive. The fall of man and a cursed earth were the sad results of the first couple disregarding the essentials. They chose to believe a devil’s lie rather than the truth of God.

The New Testament is filled with imperative declarations and necessary demands that include words like “must” and “ought” and “unless” and “except.” The apostles spoke by the authority of Christ. On the day the church was born, the Day of Pentecost, Peter and the other apostles were asked by their convicted audience, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Speaking for all of the apostles, Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37, 38 NIV). About 3,000 people accepted this message, were baptized, and were added to the church that same day. These “first responders” seemed to have no problem in understanding and responding to “The Essentials.” I wonder why so many people do today? If it was essential that Jesus die and shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28), why should it be considered a thing incredible for sinners to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins as that newborn nucleus did 2,000 years ago?

“In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, charity.” To this writer, “The Essentials” are those things that are essential to everlasting life. None of us could be saved were it not for God’s redemptive love and amazing grace as demonstrated in giving His Only Begotten Son to die on the cross for our sins. Everything that God did for us in Christ could be said to be falling under the divine umbrella of grace; everything that we do to receive this wonderful gift could be said to be falling under the divine umbrella of faith, for whatever is not of faith is sin. In simple, childlike faith we put our trust in Christ, boldly confess our faith in Him, unreservedly turn from our sins, gladly are buried with Him in baptism and, empowered by and filled with the Holy Spirit, rise to walk in newness of life. In all things we must manifest charity for “without love we are nothing.”

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