

Essentials And Incidentals

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A cause of religious confusion is the failure to properly distinguish between things essential and things incidental. Such problems existed among brethren in the first century. Paul wrote, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). To bind circumcision of the flesh was to make the incidental essential, and to loose what God commanded was to render the essential incidental.

1) *The Assembling Place.*

The negative command, “Not forsaking the assembling...” (Heb. 10:25) enjoins upon us the positive duty of assembling. The command to assemble necessitates an assembling place. The Lord has not specified at what place the church comes together. We could meet, as the early disciples, in “an upper room” (Acts 1:13), in a “temple” (Acts 2:46), in a “house” (Acts 12:12), “by a river side” (Acts 16:13), or in a “synagogue” somewhere (Acts 18:4).

2) *The Lord’s Supper*

Observance. The observance of the Lord’s supper is a matter of divine deliverance (1 Cor. 11:23). The people — “brethren” (1 Cor.

11:2); the place — “in the church” (1 Cor. 11:18); the day — “the first day of the week” (Acts 20:7); the elements — “bread” and “the cup” (1 Cor. 11:23-25); the purpose — “in remembrance of me [Christ]” or to “shew the Lord’s death” (1 Cor. 11:24-26); and the manner — “discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:29), have all been precisely formulated or restricted by the Lord, and are therefore essentials. The time of day, on the either hand, is incidental. We could “break bread” anytime within the 24-hour period that makes up the first day of the week. How the bread and the cup, the fruit of the vine (Mt. 26:29), are divided or distributed among brethren is also incidental, for the Lord gave no other commandment than, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves” (Lk. 22:17).

3) **Immersion In Water.** The Lord mandated immersion of the whole person in water as an act essential to salvation (Mk. 16:16; Acts 8:36-39). The word “water” has no modifier (it does, however, have many ‘dehumidifiers’ as many have tried to suck this element of obedience right out of the Bible!) Thus, the kind of water is incidental. It could be soft water or hard water, running water or a

pool of water, fresh water or salt water.

4) *The Collection Of Money.*

The execution of the work of the church requires the expenditure of money. The same Scripture which authorizes the spending of money also authorizes the collecting of money. We have New Testament precedent as to *how* money is collected in Acts 4:34-35: Disciples freely and sacrificially gave of their own accord. The New Testament order as to *when* money is collected is given in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2: Upon the first day of the week. This teaching, being the sum of all the New Testament says as to the time for a collection by the church, is exclusive. The scope of that for which money is collected is equal to the dimensions of the New Testament. Any program of work that exceeds the range of Scripture is too large to be Scriptural. Thus, how, when and for what purpose money is collected by the church are explicitly set forth; hence, essentials. The definite time of day when the money is collected, 9 a.m. or 9 p.m., and whether they money is contributed by cash or check in a plate or basket, are not bound; hence, incidentals.

5) **Music In Worship.** The kind of music to be used in New

Testament worship is not a matter of human speculation, but divine specification. The Hebrew writer quoted Psalm 22:22, "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12). The only kind of music connected with the praise of God, in the New Testament, is singing. The only passage that mentions singing with anything is 1 Corinthians 14:15 — "with the spirit, and with the understanding." The New Testament is as silent about singing with mechanical accompaniment as it is about praying with mechanical accompaniment! This also sets the boundary line of vocal music. Singing is in line. The arrangement of vocal sounds possessing a degree of melody, that are unfruitful to understanding, and do not meet the requirement of the Lord to teach and admonish (Col. 3:16); such as, humming, whistling and mimicking sounds of mechanical instruments, are outside the line. We are as limited to singing, in music, as we are to unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, in the Lord's supper. The number and arrangement of songs, however, and the use of a song

leader, a pitch pipe and song books are all incidentals.

6) **Gospel Teaching.** The Lord limited that which is taught in His name to "repentance and remission of sins" (Lk. 24:47), "the gospel" (Mk. 16:15), and "whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). Specific arrangements and methods of communicating the gospel message (such as sermons, Bible classes, printed materials, audio-visual aids, radio, television, internet) have not been bound, but are governed by principles of expediency (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23).

7) **Relieving The Destitute.** Those for whom the church is to care has been plainly circumscribed on the pages of divine inspiration to include certain "poor saints" (Rom. 15:26). The individual Christian has charge in this capacity that exceeds that of the local church. The Lord commanded, "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed" (1 Tim. 5:16). Who is assisted by whom is a thing essential, but the details necessary to carry out the work

(such as the place, the provisions, and the personnel), are matters incidental.

8) **Support Of Gospel Preaching.** As temple ministers lived of the temple, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:13-14). Anything ordained by the Lord is essential. Individuals, as well, have responsibility to provide for those who labor in the word (1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 11:8; Gal. 6:6). The example of the fellowship of the Philippians with Paul sets the precedent as to how the local church is to support gospel preaching (Phil. 4:15-16). The support was sent directly from the church to the preacher. That the preaching of the gospel is supported, and how it is supported, are essential. The particular provisions of the support are left to the judgment of brethren, to be determined through consideration of just standards.

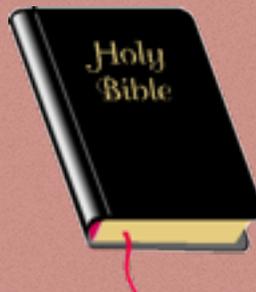
Where the Lord has incidentalized, we must not essentialize; and where the Lord has essentialized, we must not incidentalize (one binds where God has not bound, and the other looses where God has bound).

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