

I Believe

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“I believe in God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe an holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

The Apostle’s Creed, most of us commit it to memory in our youth as part of our catechism instruction. When confronted with the question “What do you believe?” We are all quick to respond with this brief summary of our faith. Certainly this would be an appropriate response under the circumstances; however, circumstances are not always such and in many cases lead to further, more detailed, discussion of our faith. It is precisely this “discussion” which I wish to address in this article. From the time we are able to first speak instruction in the faith of our parents begins; Sunday school, catechisms, eventually the minister’s sermons on Sunday. These are all essential and important forms of instruction in the Word. However, each stresses instruction in our faith, with little, if any, emphasis on our ability to discuss this faith with others. Society is the one form of instruction which not only instructs us in our faith, but also teaches us how to “discuss” our faith and understand the word of God on our own. Our young people’s societies are the start of their instruction in the art of “discussion”, and it is this societal group which I wish to address.

When I was first asked to write this article, the idea was for me to give the young people a “pep talk” for the upcoming society season. My immediate reaction to this request was, “Wow! that should be tough!” Being only 24 years old, I could still remember when I sat like a “bump on a log” in society (when I was there anyway). However, after thinking about it for quite some time I decided that the task was not all that difficult. Particularly since I can still recall the excellent discussion groups I had the pleasure of participating in at the 1982 young people’s convention. Putting all this aside, however, I want to note that, although this “pep talk” is certainly directed toward the young people, it applies to each one of us regardless of which society we belong to or should belong to.

As I pointed out earlier, discussion is the key factor in society. We must all be able and willing to discuss our faith, and the best way to learn is in society. Learning to discuss our faith in society prepares us for those numerous situations when we are called upon to witness. When such a situation arises, and we are unable to freely express our faith with others, the inevitable impression that is left on those around us is that we are not truly excited to be a Christian. Think about it for a moment. If you were to ask someone who professed to be an avid baseball fan what he thought of the designated hitter rule and he responded, “What’s that?” what would your reaction be? The answer is obvious, the man is bluffing you. This may be an extreme example, but the lesson remains, we cannot bluff our way into heaven, nor can we bluff those around us into thinking that we are truly excited to be a Christian when we do not show that we are; or cannot show that we are.

So, we have determined that society is an important aspect of our instruction in God’s word and also why it is important. Next, it is necessary to make society interesting so as to generate enthusiasm for good discussions and attendance. This responsibility is, or should be, shared by

both the society leader and its members. Society cannot be interesting if either one, or both, is not prepared. Preparing for society should be a five step process. First, you should read the lesson carefully so as to grasp the main theme being brought out within it. Sometimes, in the case of Bible texts it helps to read the chapter preceding your lesson or the chapter following. Second, formulate any questions that arose in your mind as you read the lesson and jot them down. Third, obtain the views of one or two commentaries on the lesson. It is important to get some different views, because this opens up your mind to really consider what the lesson is trying to bring across. Fourth, review the questions you generated in step two. Some of them you may have answered yourself and other questions may have come to mind as a result of step three. Finally, read the lesson again in the light of all the things you have learned from your own study. This may seem like a time consuming process, but it really does not have to be. If you approach the task (if it can be called that) with the right attitude it will not take long and will seem like time well spent. Remember, the rule of thumb, is to spend two hours preparing for every one hour of society. Two hours is hardly going to ruin your whole week and it can turn one hour of staring at each other into something really worthwhile.

The next question that is raised is “What shall we study?” Certainly, what we study is as important, if not more important than how we study. The Psalmists said, “How shall the young direct their way? Thy word O Lord, will safely lead, if in its wisdom they confide.” This does not mean to say necessarily that we must study directly from God’s word, certainly there are several sources of study material within, and without, our denomination. The important factor to remember is that in the final analysis we must confide in the wisdom of God’s word. When all is said and done God’s word, and it alone, should direct our way. Further, on the subject of what to study, I encourage societies to keep in touch with the Federation Board. After all, we are all one society, not several individual societies which stand alone. Let them know what your intentions are so that ideas can be exchanged. Everyone benefits when everyone gets involved, even when several miles separate us.

With society season just around the corner, let’s try to keep some of these things in mind so the next opportunity to witness that arises we can all, young and old alike, be able to enthusiastically say, “I believe. ...”

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