

THE VINEVILLE PAGE

Helping us all grasp the big picture of where we are and what our challenges are as we face the future.

Ancient Paths for Modern Times—Part One: The Need for Roots

Issue # 10



At Vineville Baptist Church, we welcome tradition. Tradition does, however, go against the grain of contemporary culture. The temper of our times emphasizes the desires of the individual as paramount. The unproven assumption is that what we want at any given time is right and good. As such, our culture is in danger of losing its roots. Perhaps even the Church is losing a grip on the power and substance to keep it strong and vital. We no longer learn the lessons of the past and create a world without the wisdom of those who preceded us. The consequence is that people in our culture go from fad to fad, from “truth” to “truth,” from new experience to new experience, even from church to church in an unending quest to fill the hunger of the soul.

The very real danger for Christians in this age is that we may be in the process of developing a form and rhetoric of faith which satisfies for the moment, but which does not satisfy the soul. In practical terms this means that we may have right belief (orthodoxy) but be unable to express behaviors which are true to the spirit of Christ (orthopraxy). We may even have moments of intense religious experience, but such experiences do not ground us in God in such ways that commitment, serenity, and righteousness are defining aspects of our character.

Religious Faith has a solid foundation. We don't have to reinvent the wheel in every generation. While tradition must always adapt and stand ready to welcome positive new insights and methods, it must never carelessly cast away the wisdom of the

past. The early disciples knew more about faith and spirituality than we ever will. Through the centuries, other believers discovered answers for life through arduous struggle. Others have known the lure of popular culture with its emphasis on personal desire, materialism, and sensuality. They understood well that true spirituality requires struggling with the selfish impulses or in Jesus' words, “Denying self.”

American Christianity is permeated with the belief that you can have it all—you can have both God and the world. As long as you don't directly hurt others, you can do what you want. God is there to meet your needs. One of the driving forces behind American Christianity is relevance—“what is the present felt need?” or to put it more crassly, “What's in it for me?” We have failed to notice the danger that we can become so relevant, we are irrelevant. We have been reduced to being one among many who are just “hawking” one more commodity to help society medicate its empty soul. What is needed

is not a God who caters to us, but a God that is able to command our respect and loyalty to his purposes.

A second driving force behind American Christianity is

emotionalism. Too many believers cannot discern the difference between emotion facilitated from music, religious pep talks, and positive thinking from the emotion prompted by an encounter with God and the mysteries of life. Reverence has been lost in favor of pursuing ecstasy. Ecstasy is important, but reverence keeps you grounded, committed, and causes you to hunger to be useful to God's people. While churches and ministers must certainly be

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different to reach all kinds of people, we must beware. Religion which does not lead you to deny self, repentance, sacrifice, service, and devotion is nothing more than New-Age, man-made religion with Christian rhetoric.

A third driving force behind American Christianity is convenience. People flock to churches that have the most to offer while requiring the least amount of effort from them. Ready made programs for children, social events with peers, concerts weekly, messages on how to succeed in life and get ahead in business are all so seductive. Come as you are; sit and soak—we're here for you. We have certainly improved on the message of Jesus whose proclamation was, "God's Kingdom is present, realign your lives to get on board.

You must change to be part of what God is doing. If you will be God's people, he will be the sovereign One who rules in your life." The masses are already catching on, the church is a commodity that is there for them when and if they want it.

The world is not a friend of God. You cannot have it all. There is a clear divide between asking people to church and inviting them to faith in God. It costs to be a disciple as much as it pays. It is not about us and what we want. It is about God and being touched by a mystery that claims our soul. It is about losing our lives and gaining a deeper life. It is about having less and enjoying it more. It is about giving of yourself and your gifts and your resources for causes and people you will never benefit from in this life. It is about finding your place with a group of

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people that become family in the hardest work you will ever do. It is about being different, not being the same. It is about discovering life, not filling your life with shallow things. It is about being

gentle with people because no matter how hard we try, we never achieve perfection. And the joy of being a Christian, well, it comes from knowing that your life's work means something to God. Now these are traditional values you can build a family on.

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VINEVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH

2591 Vineville Avenue
Macon Georgia 31204

478-743-9366

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