



The Reflector

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Instruction And Edification – Fifteen Or Twenty Minutes At A Time

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When I was a “boy preacher” it seemed that getting enough material together for a **fifteen** minute sermon was almost an insurmountable task! One who is limited in experience may feel that he has enough material to preach for an hour or more, but when his lesson is delivered, it only turns out to be ten or fifteen minutes. We have all had those experiences in preaching, whether as the one doing the preaching or as one who is listening and seeking to encourage young men to dedicate their lives to preaching the Word of God. My personal experiences with those efforts go back well over fifty years, and every opportunity we have, we are still trying to encourage others to take on these responsibilities. I am most happy that I can continue to hear those ten or fifteen minute sermons from young men who are just beginning to preach the Word!

But, brethren, I am greatly disturbed, filled with perturbation, and absolutely upset emotionally when I hear of experienced and able men who have “toned down” their preaching to these fifteen, or twenty minute sermons! On top of that, they are leaving the impression with the young and inexperienced preachers that such is really what “preaching” is all about! And if all that is not frightening enough, I am also realizing that much of this preaching is almost totally void of scripture and is nothing more than a simple story or tale of some kind, with much of the “few” minutes being filled up with jokes or humorous tales! To call such as that “preaching” is to absolutely disgrace the concept! It seems obvious that those who are engaged in this

practice are either ignorant of what gospel preaching is all about, or else they are intentionally seeking to avoid saying anything which is spiritually instructive or edifying! Could it be possible that they simply want to “entertain” their audience (Galatians 1:10)? Or is it possible that they are very limited in “intestinal fortitude” and are therefore just cowardly staying away from condemning sin, exposing error and false teaching, and refusing to boldly encourage fellow Christians to live soberly, righteously, and Godly in this present world (Acts 20: 26-27) (Titus 2: 11-12)?

I was recently given an advertisement, involving non-institutional brethren, where one of the lessons had the title, “Tending Your Garden” and the title for another lesson was “Finding Treasure In The Trash”! A congregation in my area just advertised their speaker as “a follower of Jesus Christ and Certified Financial Counselor”. He is further described as “a coordinator of the Financial Peace University, a thirteen week course for personal finances”. You can multiply those titles numerous times with similar tactics being used by the “unity in diversity” followers. Has it reached the point that we must try to be “cute” or use “gimmicks” in order to attract people to hear the gospel preached? My friend, if we really think that this is respectful of the Word of God, then I am convinced that we may well be in desperate need of a spiritual trip to the “woodshed” to find out what gospel preaching is all about! Maybe some are already too far removed to know what a spiritual spanking really is! When the “old time” preachers took

you to the woodshed, you knew exactly where you had been, why you had been there, and you left quickly with the determination that you would never be found “wanting” in those matters ever again! But the kind of gospel preaching which those brethren did, is definitely not welcome in many pulpits today.

Now brethren, let’s get down to some plain talk on this matter! Has it come down to the honest reality that “we just don’t want much preaching” and that we have found a preacher who has such a “wonderful personality”, is also such an outstanding “after dinner speaker”, and that he doesn’t have any real conscience which would prevent him from avoiding anything in his preaching that would “upset anyone” or would “step on anyone’s toes”? Have we found just the preacher who would willingly refrain from telling us that God demands certain things of us or that God hates wickedness in our lives? Have we found the preacher who would not dare call anyone a “false teacher” and who is totally willing to fellowship others who “abide not in the teaching of Christ” (II John 9-11)? Have we found just the preacher who will speak to us “smooth things” or “deceits” (Isaiah 30:9-10)? Yes, my friend, you got it! You understand, don’t you? It is becoming more obvious every day that far too many brethren have developed an appetite for that kind of preaching (?), and that there is an abundant supply of both “young” and “experienced” preachers (?) who will gladly cater to that kind of nonsense!

Now brethren, in all fairness, let’s not get the impression that “long sermons” in and of themselves are necessarily either instructive or edifying. It may well be that some preachers equate the two, but there can be some danger in that as well. We may well have some preachers who are in need of serious help with organizational and time management skills, and we may well have some who are saying the same things over and over again in a sermon until it seems almost to reflect upon the listening ability of the audience! Remember, we are talking about that which is going to truly provide quality instruction and successful edification! If a preacher feels that his ability or effectiveness is to be

judged by testing the limits of endurance on the part of his listeners, then he has definitely missed the point. Having spent many years as an elementary school teacher and school principal, I have come to fully accept that learning theory definitely involves both the attention span and the ability to assimilate instruction. We need some help as preachers if we do not consider these factors as being important to effective instruction. But, brethren, our problems in the church today are far greater than having to deal with a few preachers who feel that a sermon has to be extremely long in order to “demonstrate” their preaching skills!

We had better wake up and realize that we are dealing today with a cry for “less preaching”, not just in time, but also mostly in “content”! And when you limit the “sermonetts” to fifteen or so minutes, then you can mark it down that **content** is also very much limited. It seems obviously clear that our major problem today is that a lot of folks simply “don’t want much preaching”. And you can place a major emphasis on the fact that the **content** will be lacking anything which is “controversial”, seriously lacking in “condemnation of sinful practices”, and it will certainly **not** contain any exposure of “error, false teaching, false teachers, or unsound doctrines”! When you have to be so careful not to “offend” anyone or make anyone “feel guilty”, then you must make the decision to give a “sweet little talk” for about fifteen or twenty minutes and send everyone home “feeling good about themselves”! It seems to be a “let’s get this over with as quickly as possible” so that we can go eat, play and socialize with one another!

And, after all, that fifteen or twenty minutes which I patiently sat through should purchase enough “fire insurance” to prevent me from spending eternity in hell! Surely my “enduring” a couple of “sweet little talks” each week will demonstrate to God that I love Him with all my heart! My friends, who do we really think that we are deceiving? Or is it possible that we don’t even have enough conscience development to understand what is happening to us? Don’t be fooled brethren, the “experienced” preachers who are involved in this

ridiculous facade know **exactly** what they are doing, and both they and the Lord know **exactly** why they are doing it! And you can be assured that their problem is not senility!

Brethren, if our desire is for “preaching” which will tickle our ears and placate our conscience, then both our faith and our spiritual service is sadly lacking (II Timothy 4:1-4). Such a one certainly hasn’t had his or her heart and soul into seeking quality instruction and edification from God’s Word! How long has it been since we really studied our Bible for several hours? How long has it been since we even picked up a Bible except to quickly fill out a few answers in a class lesson book? How long has it been since we took the time to read a teaching publication put out by sound and faithful brethren? How many gospel meetings with “old fashioned and scripture filled sermons” have we attended in recent months? And since we are well into the computer age, are we making any real effort to search out and be instructed by scriptural teaching on web sites operated by faithful brethren? How long has it been since we conducted a Bible class in someone’s home – or even in our own home? Yes, you got it! You can understand that, can’t you? We can see clearly that most problems stem from folks who “just don’t want much preaching”! We have an “ignorance is bliss” mentality in our midst and it is taking us down the road to digression and apostasy with the speed of a bullet train!

I preached a sermon on “fellowship” in a gospel meeting not long ago – and I must admit that it lasted over an hour. Possibly in my own feeble way, I was trying very diligently to show the various digressions in which we have had division and breaks in fellowship, beginning some fifty years ago with the institutional and sponsoring church departure and coming right down to the present “union in perversity” nonsense being advocated by so many today. I had a brother come up to me after the sermon and he, as best as I can remember, spoke these words: “You told us a lot of things tonight that we didn’t know, and you told us a lot of things that we didn’t need to know”! Brethren, I am persuaded that this really sums up the degree of desire for instruction

and edification on the part of far too many brethren among us! We appear to have a number of brethren who are insisting that preachers (?) “tone it down”, and these preachers (?) are readily complying with fifteen or twenty minutes of “y’all be sweet” or with a “let me entertain you with a funny story”! And even more amazing, they have the audacity to call it **gospel preaching!** Our Lord is disgraced by such mistreatment of the Truth! Maybe forty minutes or even an hour might be too long for some brethren to “endure” a sermon, but the length of the sermon is **not** really the heart of the problem! The problem is **content!** The problem is in **what** is preached! So when you know that you can’t really preach about anything which would stimulate the conscience of the hearers, then you just substitute fifteen or twenty minutes of “small talk” or “laughter material” and call it a **sermon!** Don’t you just know that our Lord and the apostles would be tremendously impressed with such “total dedication” to “fight the good fight of faith”!

These folks aren’t fooling anyone but themselves, and at times I really wonder if they are not fully aware that they are “just playing games” and calling it their religion! Only they and God know whether or not they have integrity, but the scripture tells us that “by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Matthew 7:15-20). What is really happening to gospel preaching today is obvious to every God fearing man and woman! If someone doesn’t awaken quickly, then many of our brethren are going to be so far down the road of denominationalism to ever even think about turning them around!

So, what do you and I consider to be instruction and edification? Do we equate it with a “hunger and thirst” for righteousness (Matthew 5:6)? Do we value it as noble to “search the scriptures” (Acts 17:11)? Do we know what sacrifice and dedication is involved in “seeking first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33)? Do we really believe that by the scriptures we are “furnished completely unto every good work” (II Timothy 3:16-17)? Are we honestly concerned about being “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth.”? Yes, you got it! You understand, don’t you? Brethren, the night is far spent and day is a hand for us to

cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light (Romans 13:11-12). The time is here for us to take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit so that we can quench all the fiery darts of the evil one (Ephesians 6:10-20). Some of us, like this writer, have spent most of our lives trying to preach, defend, and uphold the Truth – and even today we must still face isolation, ridicule, name calling, and rejection from many of our own brethren because we would dare ask them to stand boldly for the Truth and to lift up the sword of the Spirit against the forces of evil which threaten our faith and the faith of our families. When we “old timers” are no longer here, who will be willing to walk in our footsteps? Who is going to have the courage to take this ridicule and abuse as they boldly cry out against sin and unscriptural teaching and practices? Who will be on the front line in the heat of battle? It is our hope and prayer that God will give us strength to remain in the heat of battle until that very hour when we get the call to go home to glory. Yes, brethren, we are drifting, and far too many are going down “the swift whitewater stream of apostasy” without even realizing what is happening to them. Brethren, I am truly concerned that instruction and edification are fleeting values among God’s people. Bible knowledge and conviction is being viewed as unnecessary! Churches are having less preaching by doing away with Sunday evening services all over the country – will Wednesday evening be the next fatality? Gospel meetings are viewed as either “old fashioned” or “unproductive” and if you “must” have one, be certain to make it as brief as possible! What are you and I doing to turn this around? Whatever it takes, and I am persuaded that you can mark it down, that the instruction and edification which will be needed is **not** going to be accomplished by sweet little fifteen or twenty minute sermons! “And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my

preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

Editorial Comments:

In the above excellent article, brother Reed addresses a problem that is becoming more acute by the day even among “non-institutional” churches. Like in many secular institutions, the order of the day is “downsizing.” Preachers are “downsizing” their preaching. Congregations are “downsizing” their worship and edification activities.

When I was a boy many congregations, especially in rural areas like where I grew up, did not have “regular preaching.” Occasionally, some preacher might be in the area on a Sunday and preach for us. Then there was the annual “big meeting.” Few of these rural churches had Sunday night or mid-week services. This was the best that we could do, given the economic and travel limitations of the day. But things got better. There was more money to support preachers. Most of the congregations began to have “regular preaching” either by full or part-time preachers.

There was better and faster travel so that people could make it to the building twice on Sunday and again at mid-week. Most of these churches added these tools of edification to their schedules and they proved to be extremely helpful. Brethren became more knowledgeable beyond first principles. There were some in these congregations who resisted these “changes” and opted to continue to come on Sunday morning and “take the Supper.” But most saw these things as an improvement to their knowledge and edification as children of God.

To my knowledge, no one argued that one had to have a “regular preacher” and Sunday night and Wednesday night services to be a church of Christ, but came to realize these things were lawful and that the churches that were following this course were more knowledgeable and better edified than others.

There are congregations today with peculiar circumstances where it might not be expedient to have these things. The long distance that many of the members may live from the building and other factors may come into play to make it expedient to drop these “extra services.” But this would be the exception and not the rule.

So, I am not saying, nor do I believe brother Reed is saying, that a sermon must always be longer than 15 or 20 minutes. Nor that churches must always have Sunday or Wednesday night services or even gospel meetings. But I do believe brethren need to honestly examine themselves as to why they are going for shorter sermons and fewer activities. Is it because it would be more or even as effective in seeking the lost and edifying the church? Or is it to make it simply more “convenient” for brethren by freeing up time for other things of a non spiritual nature. Maybe a little more TV time in the evenings or more free time on the “Lord’s Day” for other things. Does the circumstances of the members really make it more practical to dispense of the “extra” meetings and keep sermons as short as possible? Or again, is it just to satisfy their fleshly desires for less religion and more time for pursue convenience for the sake of convenience and leave more time and energy for other pursuits? Think about it brethren and be honest.