



The Reflector

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by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

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The Dumbing down of the Church

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

In recent years, there has been a lot of writing about “the dumbing down of America.” It is indicative of the concern that many have about our educational system and the quality of information disseminated by the mainstream media.

While this concerns this writer, he is far more concerned with the dumbing down of the church – especially in doctrinal matters. In many ways, congregations have improved their teaching programs by implementing better planned and structured courses of study in their Bible classes that are designed to take them through the entire Bible every so many years. This cannot but help increase the over all Bible knowledge of a congregation. This trend is encouraging.

At the same time, almost paradoxically, there has been a dumbing down of the church. A lack of the basic concepts of what is involved in the gospel plan of salvation, God’s overall scheme of redemption, the distinctive nature of the New Testament church, the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies, the other infallible proofs of the deity of Jesus, and such things that were fairly familiar to Christians only two or three generations ago are only marginally known, even to today’s “leading members” in many congregations.

Much of the zeal for the Lord is based on emotion and herd mentality rather than a real knowledge of the text of the Scriptures. Much of the preaching is one dimensional. It is long on

exhorting, but short on laying the foundation of knowledge needed to justify and anchor the exhortations. We need to take seriously Paul’s charge to Timothy:

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

All three aspects of preaching the word, reproving (convincing), rebuking and exhorting must be based on doctrine or teaching. Exhorting a congregation to be “more like Christ” is great *if* they know what Christ was really like, having learned Him from the scriptures. Exhorting folks to do more work of the Lord is fine, *if* they have been taught what the Lord’s work really is all about from text of the scriptures. Exhorting people to love the Lord and one another more is great, *if* they have been taught the nature of biblical love. (Cf. 1 John 5:2-3).

The central element in biblical preaching is teaching/doctrine. The convincing, rebuking and exhorting are the uses made of the doctrine. Any convincing, rebuking, or exhorting is useless if it is not properly undergirded with a knowledge of what the word says. Knowledge of what the word

says is imparted through the teaching element in preaching. The dumbing down of the church has run parallel with a shift away from “book chapter and verse” preaching in favor the smoother flowing style of the pop psychology of popular motivational speakers.

The ability, knowledge, and desire to make a clear contrast between what the Bible teaches and the doctrines and commandments of men has also diminished in recent years. This is a part of the dumbing down of the church. When have you heard a good meeting sermon that clearly delineated the difference between what the Bible teaches and what our religious neighbors teach? One of the qualifications for elders is to be able to “convict the gainsayer.” Notice:

“Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.” (Titus 1:9-11 NKJV)

While this passage is referring to the qualifications of elders it, like other qualifications, is a trait that all Christians ought to seek to attain. One cannot convict and stop the mouths of false teachers without a good knowledge of sound doctrine (teaching).

We can remember when most of the more mature members of the church could refute most of the more popular errors of their religious neighbors. They knew what their neighbors believed and what the Bible taught on those subjects. Preachers made it their business to know what issues were threatening the soundness of the church and were able to show the truth on those issues. This is not as prevalent as it once was. There is such an aversion to controversy that fewer

and fewer are willing put in the study needed to teach on controversial matters. All of this is a part of the dumbing down of the church.

As we work with young people in the church and listen their comments in person or on social networks, like Facebook, we are favorably impressed with their zeal to praise God and give God the glory for good things that are happening in their lives. Also, they are willing to share their joy of being a Christians with those who will listen. In this respects they may be excelling previous generations. However, we need to point out to them that their zeal must be tempered with knowledge.

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (Rom. 10:1-2 KJV)

A zeal without knowledge is like a car with a souped up engine without either brakes or a steering wheel. Young people, and older as well, make sure your joy and praise is based on a sound knowledge of the scriptures rather a subjective feeling or a “herd mentality” where one emotionally jumps on a band wagon without having “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things [are] so. (Acts 17:11).

Because the the failure of the Israel’s priests to teach the people God’s law, God said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge ...” (Hosea 4:6). Let’s not let this happen in spiritual Israel.

A Warning to Preachers: Comments on Crisis-Preaching and Culture-Preaching

Warren E. Berkley

CRISIS: While our preaching must respond to any crisis (involving any sin or error), our crisis-response-mode may tempt us to neglect other things (about which there is no present alarm). If today, for example, I preach on marriage, divorce

and remarriage with such repetition and frequency, I neglect other things taught in the Scriptures, I have fallen under an undue influence. In such a time as this, we must preach what the Bible says about God's law of marriage. We should be anxious to tell people what Jesus said, and warn of the consequences of ignoring Matt. 5:32 and Matt. 19:9. But if we do this in some sort of obsessive manner, we may betray our commitment to preach the whole counsel of God, neglecting things of equal essentiality.

CULTURE: There is another, very different, influence that may put us in position to violate our commitment as preachers. I'm talking about what the culture or market demands. In our time there is great interest in sermons known for their perceived practicality, popular style, brevity and emotional value. Generally, people have little interests in sermons delivered to respond to some sin or error. There is greater interest in vague, good advice, social commentary or the fashionable, ecumenical approach.

Though it may seem unlikely, there is the possibility of preachers falling into both of these pitfalls at the same time! (The devil can easily use the unlikely to slowly accomplish his purpose.) If you preach on marriage, divorce and remarriage over and over - then use the rest of your time catering to itching ears, you leave out a huge bulk of Biblical truth that holds great significance and need. When is the last time you delivered a sermon about the Lord's church, the Holy Spirit, the difference between the covenants, the error of premillennialism, etc., etc., etc?

The solution? Let your preaching be governed by one thing...The Word!

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering

and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Doy Moyer wrote this, that fits the topic well:

Balance in Preaching

Preaching is not the easiest task in the world. The preacher knows that he must address subjects that are difficult and, sometimes, offensive to some. His job is to preach the word, in season and out, reproving, rebuking, and exhorting with great patience and instruction (2 Tim. 4:2). He knows that there will be those who do not want to hear the truth, but would rather heap up teachers who will say those things they want to hear. And there are plenty of ear-ticklers available.

The preacher must be bold, uncompromising of truth, and plain-spoken so as to be understood. He knows that he cannot water the message down so that it loses its power and focus. He realizes that he has a great responsibility toward himself and those who hear what he has to say (cf. 1 Tim. 4:16). When he confronts sin, he must rebuke it. When he faces false teaching, he must be courageous. In all things, the true preacher knows that he answers to God first, and is not in the business of pleasing men (cf. Gal. 1:10).

But there's another side to this. Sometimes, in our fervor to "preach it like it is," we overstep our God-given boundaries. In the name of hard preaching, it is easy to "go past Jerusalem" and start getting downright mean. In order to win arguments and make ourselves look good, it is tempting to ridicule those who are in opposition to us. We can become rude, unkind, and abusive. Sarcasm (or better, irony), may have a proper place, but not when it is at the expense of

gentleness, love, and respect. We can become careless in how we speak to others, and about others with whom we disagree. We may even begin to thrive on being offensive. We boast about our little debating techniques: “Did you see how I got him?” But this is a manifestation of self-righteousness and, ironically, shows a disregard for God and His Word.

How so? Because, while in stressing certain commands and steadfastly exercising our duty to reprove and rebuke, we may ignore other commands. We are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Our speech is to be “with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person” (Col. 4:6). We are to be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving, and devoid of bitterness, wrath, anger, and clamor (Eph. 4:31-32). With those in opposition, we are to correct with gentleness (2 Tim. 2:25). These are just as much commands of God as any other! To ignore these in the name of “sound” preaching is not only Pharisaical, it is just plain sinful. Contending for the faith does not equal being contentious and ugly.

Just remember, there is a difference between kind and mushy, between graceful speech and that which compromises truth. We need to learn these differences if we will really be faithful servants of God. The spirit in which we do something is every bit a part of the doctrine of Christ as those more difficult issues that we so often struggle with. Teach the truth, but let’s do it in the way God has told us to do it. Keep the balance.

Via [The Auburn Beacon](#)

Careful to Answer

by Robert Turner

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were called before the king and faced charges of refusing to worship the golden image he had erected, Nebuchadnezzar asked, “Who is that god that shall deliver you out of my hands?” Things looked pretty

dark.

But they replied, “We have no need to answer thee in this matter” (AS). The King James version reads, “We are not careful to answer thee in this matter” (Dan. 3:15-16). The thought seems to be, we will not choose our words carefully — concerned lest we offend; we will not try to “talk our way out of” this situation. And they added, “Our God is able to deliver us” (if it suits His purposes to do so) “but if not, be it known unto thee, o king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

Several years back a preacher said John (the Immerser) “lost his head” because he “lost his head” — he was not tactful in his criticism of Herod. John had said, of Herod’s marriage to his brother Philip’s wife, “It is not lawful for thee to have her” (Matt. 14).

John was not “careful to answer,” someone might say. Well, he certainly was not trying to “butter up” the king. On the other hand, John and the captive Jews of Daniel 3, were very careful to maintain their faith in God and to court His approval. John lost his head, and the three Hebrews were thrown into the fiery furnace, but each gained more than he lost. We “have no need” for any man’s approval as we have need for God’s approval.

Jesus said, “Fear ‘not those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell” (Matt. 10:28).

We are not advocating crudeness! Daniel’s brethren were respectful to the king; and love for souls will forbid our becoming a bully with the truth. Shouting, stomping pronouncements of damnation are often signs of weakness, while genuine strength is accompanied by humility. But genuine strength speaks truthfully, directly and clearly, regardless of temporal consequences — and because of inevitable eternal consequences.