



The Reflector

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by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

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Trumpeting an Uncertain Sound

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air” (1 Cor. 14:8-9).

If the specially endowed Spirit-gifted Christians needed to go out of their way to make their message clear, should not all the rest of us strive diligently to that end? We are going to be misunderstood enough without our *purposely* or *carelessly* sounding an uncertain sound. It is important to friend and foe alike that they know exactly what our position is on religious matters. Even if we are unsettled in our minds on a matter we should make it clear that we are unsettled and need more study before taking a stand one way or the other.

We hear a great deal today in international political circles about the importance of nations’ sending the right signals to the world about their intentions and resolve, especially in periods of international tension. Leaders know that it could make the difference between war and peace. It is just as important that the Lord’s people send the right signals, in word and deed – if we are going to convert others, edify our own and contend for the faith.

Even though I may not appreciate a man’s stand on a matter, if he makes it clear where he

stands, I appreciate that man. There is too much of a tendency among brethren to send out vague and/or mixed signals concerning what they really believe. Such can be a useful tool to those who desire to “lie in wait to deceive” but those who have nothing to hide have little use for such. It is amazing how “misunderstood” some very capable but factious brethren can be when they are confronted by faithful brethren about their subtle efforts to draw away disciples after them. This has been especially true in recent years with those fellows who want to make the grace of God cover about all the sins of brethren (repented or not) and extend fellowship beyond the limits of Scripture and reason. Have you tried to pin one of those fellows down? If you haven’t it will be a good learning experience for you. You will learn quickly how many ways one can be “misunderstood” while maintaining vagueness about what he really believes.

There are two ways that we can make our faith crystal clear to all – our *words* and our *works*:

The Christian should strive to express his faith in *words* that are easily understood: “unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken?”

Those who had the gift of tongues were to abide by this principle. Those tongues were languages that existed somewhere in the world (Acts 2: 4-11; 1 Cor. 14:11) – not meaningless chanting. The

tongues were only to be used in the assemblies with interpretation or translation (1 Cor. 14:5,18,19,28). Even with interpretation they were to be used sparingly (vs. 27,28). The gift ceased when the perfect or complete will of God was revealed (1 Cor. 13:8-13). Even when the gift was in operation, it was not only useless but harmful unless it could be used to edify by being clearly understood, thus the need of translation.

While not many speak, preach, or teach in a language foreign to their hearers (nor do it miraculously), they might as well. They make truth hard to be understood with theological jargon. Some are masters at “double talk”. A Christian is not to be double-tongued or exploit with deceptive words (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8; 2 Pet. 2:3). The word for “feigned” or “deceptive” in 2 Pet. 2:3 is the Greek word, “*plastos*”, the word from which we get plastic. The idea is words that can be molded or shaped to suit the occasion. Many politicians are masters with such words. It is a useful device for them. One can use words that are subject to a variety or even opposite interpretations. The hearer is led to believe one thing, while in reality the speaker really believes something entirely different. The speaker can salve his conscience with the knowledge that he did not mean what the hearer thought he meant and the hearer is more receptive to the speaker because he thinks the speaker is speaking the truth. It is also useful when one is called on the carpet on any controversial matter. If the words are such that can be fairly interpreted in opposite ways, then one can always satisfy the questioners on all sides of an issue by taking the words, using any of the several possible interpretations, and convincing the questioner that their views are the same – regardless to what view the questioner holds.

It is possible that we may sometimes (intentional or not) cover up vital truth with generalities. In many cases, depending upon the hearers understanding, general words are all that is needed. But

sometimes general terms are inadequate to get the job done of convicting folks of sin and teaching them the truth. All religious people will tell you that they are for *truth* and against *error*. They are for *righteousness* and against *sin*. It is when one gets down to specific points of sin and error or specific acts of sin or righteousness that the reality of one’s loyalty to the Lord is tested.

I heard the story a few years ago about some college students on the campus of one of the “Christian Colleges” that wondered where a certain teacher stood on premillennialism – an issue that was troubling brethren in those days. So, they decided to go into his office and come right out and ask him where he stood. So, they did. Without hesitation, he told them, “Boys, you don’t have a thing to worry about, I stand ‘foursquare’ on premillennialism”. That was a real relief to those young men. They left his office in complete confidence that this good brother stood ‘foursquare’ – until they realized that he had not really said anything!

A friend of mine was wondering out loud one day in the presence of some other preachers as to why he often offended brethren when he preached against certain things and he noticed that other preachers preached against the same things without getting too much flack. One of the preachers present said, “Maybe it is because you preach against it like you think someone has been up to it”.

Now that makes sense. Brethren will endure preaching on “sin”, “false doctrine”, “immodest dress and/or behavior”, “lasciviousness” without offence (or change) as long you do not tell what is sin, what is false, what is immodest, what is lascivious. So, even good words can utter an uncertain sound, if they are too general to get the job done of convincing people to turn from specific sins and believe and obey specific truth. David had no trouble with the principle of the stealing from a poor man nor did he profit by it – until it was

pointed out that “Thou art the man!” It did him little good to know the general principle until the principle was specifically applied to what he had done. (cf. 2 Sam. 12:1-13).

In addition to *words*, the Christian should strive to express his faith in *works* that are easily understood (Matt. 5:13-16, Jas. 2:14-18).

Our behavior before the world and our brethren should be such that it sends a clear signal as to what we believe about matters. (cf. 1 Cor. 8:10).

Inconsistent and hypocritical behavior gives an uncertain ring to our faith. (cf. Matt. 23:1-4, 25-31). Peter was rebuked for such (Gal. 2:14ff). One needs to be careful that his behavior at all times is such that no one will be surprised that he professes to be a Christian. How can one convince another privately that he is a Christian when his public behavior is so inconsistent with the principles taught by Christ. We have known of brethren who would privately tell other brethren that they considered some brother to be “unsound” and “dangerous” to the Cause – yet that same “unsound” and “dangerous” brother is publicly recognized and used in their services like they were as solid as a rock. Is not such sending out an uncertain sound?

Negligent behavior gives an uncertain ring to our faith. (cf. James 1:24-25, 2:18). How can we convince others that our faith is really important to us when they see us neglect the very fundamentals of the faith? How am I going to convince my neighbor that the Lord and His kingdom is the most important thing in the world, when he sees me load up and head for the lake about church time on Sunday morning? How can I convince him that it is all the world to me, when he knows that I am well and hardy *at home* during any service watching TV? How am I going to send a clear signal to him that the gospel must be obeyed by every creature in order to be saved, if he knows that I find time for everything else but to talk to my neighbors about the Lord and His church?

Marginal behavior gives our faith an uncertain

If I were to live as long as Methuselah, I will never understand ...

- ★ How people can who claim that Christ is their everything can complain if an entire worship assembly lasts more than an hour, but can sit out from two to four hours at sporting events and leave with a smile.
- ★ How the hand-holding-touchy-feely approach to worship enhances one’s devotion to God or contributes to edifying the assembly.
- ★ How people can put hundreds of thousands of dollars into a church building with all kinds of ornate trimmings to make it a show place in the community, while dedicated gospel preachers out in “the field” are struggling to keep their heads above the water financially. – eob

sound (cf. Rev. 3:16). There are areas where it is admittedly not as easy to draw the line between right and wrong as it is in other cases. We believe any thinking and honest Christian will have to admit this fact. However, there is an attitude among brethren that is troublesome. It is what I call “border-line” or “marginal” living. It is seeing how close to the border one can live without actually stepping over into sin. Such can be dangerous. I heard of a man during the American Civil War that lived near the border between the north and south. He wore a blue coat with gray trousers. The result was the rebels shot him in the coat and the yanks shot him in the pants.

Let us behave so that no honest, informed, thinking person will have any reason to doubt where we stand on any religious issue, whether it be congregational independence, hair length on men and women, modesty of dress, or whatever. Even when we are forced to admit that we may not know the exact point where one crosses over the border, the Christian will send a clear signal when

he takes a position that is far enough from the border to convince reasonable men that he stands for what the Bible teaches.

Do you stand for what the Bible teaches in religion and morals? Do you make a deliberate effort to express it to others in words that can be understood? Do you strive to send a clear signal to all where you stand by your action? Think about it.

(Editor's note: This is basically an article that I wrote and published in the 80's under another title. I have made a few modifications, clarifications, and corrections where I felt they were needed.)

The Mirror Versus the Window

R.J. Evans

The common philosophy of our culture today fosters the “me, my, and mine” attitude. From early childhood onward, so much emphasis is being placed on “have your own way,” “do your own thing,” and “look out for number one.”

Some see life through a window while others view life in a mirror. Those who view life in a mirror only see themselves. They are only concerned with self, because they can't see the needs of others around them. Those who view life through a window, see others first, with a faded reflection of self. They are truly concerned about all those about them. They do everything possible to seek the good of others. This is how parents should be teaching their children—look through the window, not just focus on yourself in the mirror!

There is another mirror, however, that we need to constantly look into in order to see ourselves as God sees us—the mirror of God’s Word (Jas. 1:22-26). As Christians we must always place Christ and the advancement of His Cause first in our lives. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). Further we are told

to “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

Thus, living the Christian life is a life of ministry and service to others. Jesus taught this throughout the whole time he lived among men. At the close of His life here on earth, He demonstrated what He had been teaching by performing the lowly act of washing His disciples’ feet (Jn. 13).

Give some serious thought to the teachings of Christ before you begin to think you have to have “your way” in everything. Selfishness has no place in the service of the Lord. Stop looking at life in the mirror (of self); view it through the window!

Be Careful about Alliances

There is widespread concern about the political and moral direction of our country. This concern is shared by people affiliated with religious groups of various religious persuasions. The mainstream media usually lumps all these groups together under one heading – “the religious right.” I share the concerns of the “religious right” on political and moral matters and often voice that concern to anyone who will give me an ear. But, there is a problem. While we may hold political and moral views in common with the groups that make up the “right,” the fact is, that each of these groups teach religious doctrines contrary to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11) and encourage and practice unscriptural things derived from these doctrines. In our zeal to defeat the liberal moral and political (socialistic) agenda of those in power, we must not form formal or informal associations and alliances with any of those groups that would make it difficult to maintain our distinctive posture as New Testament Christians. Nor put us in a position where we would be tempted to avoid openly exposing their false religious doctrines and practices. (Eph. 5:11). – eob