



# The Reflector

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## Designated Sitter

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Once overheard some young men discussing their baseball little league careers. One of the group had been a catcher, another had played second, etc. One was asked, “What did you play?” “Well, I was a designated sitter”, was the terse reply. Not a designated *hitter*, but a designated *sitter*.

Now, you will have to admit that was a clever way to avoid saying, “I was a bench warmer.” Sounds more important too.

Upon reflection, I have concluded that his position was really more important than it sounded. Any good sports coach will tell you that to have a really good team that you need a “strong bench” – that battery of “designated sitters” who avidly support the “starters” and are ever willing to step in and do the job whenever needed. They are essential to the team and are often the real heroes of the game.

In the church, there are certain positions that are more visible than others. Everyone cannot play the same position. (Read 1 Corinthians 12). The strength of the church is too often measured by the perceived strength of the more visible members – the preacher, the elders, the song leaders, class teachers, etc. Oh, these are important positions. They should be filled by those qualified to do the work. As important as they are, the real strength of the church may not be in those who regularly perform these functions. It often lies with the “designated sitters” – those who hold up the hands of the “regulars” and are willing to step in whenever needed to do the best they can in whatever role the occasion calls for. As in a play, the success of the production often depends as much on the supporting cast, working behind the scenes, as it does on those who are seen on stage.

For several years following World War II, there

was a flurry of “missionary” activity around the world. A number of brethren were announcing plans to go to this or that country. They were rightly receiving notoriety as their plans were announced in the various papers published by brethren. I heard one preacher, who was justly proud that two of his sons were among those willing to leave the comforts of home and go into the foreign work, make an appeal for brethren to support all those men who, like his sons, were willing to go. Then someone asked the brother, why he, too, was not planning to join his sons in going, if it were so important. He answered, “Because someone needs to stay at home to help provide and encourage support for those who are going?” I think he was right.

While we must have those who are “on the field” or “at bat”, we also need the strong support of “designated sitters.” Men like Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16), who may not be as visible or as well-known as others, but are always there lending whatever service and support they can to the team effort. When good men are publicly doing their best to promote and uphold truth and carry on the Lord’s work in general, they are there with words of comfort rather than criticism. When those in the public eye are unjustly criticized and persecuted, those “on the bench” are willing to stand up beside them in a show of solidarity.

Thank God for every good “designated sitter.” ■

## The Vanishing Heresy

Hugh Fulford

*(Editor’s Note: I have known Hugh Fulford since the 1950’s when we were in college together. Since the split over the institutional question, he*

has worked among the “institutional” churches. This article reflects his good insight into what is going on in many churches today.)

Several months ago I read Phil Sanders’ book, *A Faith Built on Sand: The Foolishness of Popular Religion in a Postmodern World*. This is a sequel to Phil’s 2000 book, *Adrift: Postmodernism in the Church*. Both are deserving of a serious read by all who would be aware of what is taking place in the contemporary world of Christendom. Chapter 8 is titled “The Vanishing of Heresy.” Phil begins the chapter with a 1987 quote from J. . Packer:

“The net result of all these impulses to pluralism is that ... there are just about as many theologies as there are theologians to devise them; the concept of heresy has almost lost its meaning; and loyalty to the institutional church has for the most part taken the place of loyalty to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, for no one is quite sure any more what the essence of that faith really is” (p. 89).

Packers (and Phils) point is that speaking facetiously heresy is now a thing of the past. It does not exist today! The only “heresy” that exists in our postmodern world is the assertion that something is heresy! Every cockeyed notion, theory, doctrine, practice, and belief is to be uncritically accepted. No one is to be told that they are wrong. Interestingly, however, one postmodernist recently told me, “The Bible is wrong about many things!”

Later in the chapter Phil observes: “The preaching in churches of Christ has changed in the last generation. Over time the church has become afraid to say much of anything with conviction. Preachers preach much love but little truth, much grace but little repentance, much salvation but little obedience, and much on relationships but little on relating responsibly to God Himself. Some speak much on believing and confuse their listeners by speaking little on what to believe” p. 100).

The notion exists in many quarters that preachers ought not to emphasize doctrine “because doctrine only divides.” The idea is that we should “preach only Christ.” But to preach Christ is to preach “doctrine.” It is “doctrine” to affirm that Christ alone is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and that no one comes to the Father except through Him! (John 14:6). But there are multiplied millions who do not believe that Christ is the only

way to God. Therefore, Christ Himself is divisive. He said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I came not to bring peace but sword” (Matthew 10:34).

What does it mean to preach Christ? Can we preach Christ without preaching what He taught? Can we preach Christ without preaching the doctrine of Christ? Philip the evangelist preached Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch and the eunuch asked to be baptized (Acts 8:35-39). How did the eunuch know that he needed to be baptized unless in preaching Christ to him Philip had told him what Christ said one must do to be saved? Jesus said: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

The apostle Paul did not subscribe to the idea that doctrine is not important or that there was no such thing as heresy. He named “heresies” as one of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-22). He further warned that “the time will come when they [the professed people of God, hf] 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 away their ears from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (II Timothy 4:3-4). In this respect, the ones of whom Paul spoke were like the wayward people of God in the Old Testament who said, “Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things...” (Isaiah 30:10). Translation: Don’t tell us what we need to hear; tell us what we want to hear. Don’t rebuke us for our sins; rather, show us how we can continue in our sins and still be good church members. Show us how we can be religious without having to be righteous! Make us feel good about ourselves! Such are the times in which we live. ■

## Peddlers of Doubt

Edward O Bragwell, Sr.

“Let us draw near with a true heart in *full assurance* of faith.” (Hebrews 10:22). “That thou mightest know the *certainty* of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.” (Luke 1:4).

It would be difficult to overemphasize the gravity of the responsibility upon the teachers of the word. This is brought home to us each time we read: “Be not many of you teachers, my brethren,

nor that we shall receive heavier judgment.” (James 3:1 ASV). The responsibility becomes more acute with each passing day. It is not a responsibility to be taken lightly nor “toyed” with.

There is a trend among some brethren that gives me no little concern. It is the trend toward becoming **peddlers of doubt**. We can become unwitting victims of the “age of doubt.” It has become a fashionable mark of “intelligence” for one to be a doubter. If one dares to set forth a position with reasonable certainty, he is considered a dogmatist who “feels that he and he alone has all the truth.” Many pages in religious journals and many pulpits are given to merely raising doubts on a variety of subjects. Authors and speakers become *long* on questions and *short* on answers. Judging from some of the things I’ve read and heard lately, I get the idea that about the only things we can be sure of is that we cannot be sure of anything.

Sometimes doubts and questions are raised because one is trying to get people to “think.” Now I’m all for “thinking.” Most of us could do a great deal more of it. None of us can accept the thinking of another without searching the Scriptures to see if it is so. (See Acts 17:11). But I cannot help but believe that proclaimers of the gospel have a moral responsibility to sow what they most certainly believe to be the truth, rather than to toss into the wind seeds of doubt. Doubt has a way of flourishing without our deliberate cultivation.

If one fails to appreciate those who are “doting (sick) about questions and disputes of word,” and so states he is often branded as one “steeped in orthodoxy.” He is said to be satisfied with the “status quo.” Of course, no one should ever become wedded to any position that he refuses to examine often. Nor should he fear full and open investigation on the part of others. Nor should he be so in love with his position that he would not change even if it did go against some generally accepted (orthodox) position of brethren and upset the “status quo.”

No doubt we will be hearing more in the future about “orthodoxy” and “status quo.” What do these terms mean? “Orthodox, adj. 1. Generally accepted, esp. in religion.” “Status quo, the way things are; the existing state of affairs.” (Thorndike-Barnhart Comprehensive Dictionary). If a thing that is “generally accepted” or is according to the “existing state of affairs” is questionable, then it should be

questioned. But the thing is neither right nor wrong simply because it may be “orthodox” are according to the “status quo.” These are but two more good terms which are made into prejudicial epithets and used to denote some kind of stigma.

My brethren, we must not allow the fact that we have learned that some past positions (which we assuredly believed at the time) were not true shake us to the point that we must now proceed with uncertainty about everything we believe. “Let us draw near with a true heart in *full assurance* of faith.” ■

*(This article and the one to follow were written in the mid-‘60’s for the church bulletin at Charlotte, Tennessee where we labored at the time.)*

## “Will Ye Plead For Baal?”

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

God told Gideon to “throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place . . .” (Judges 6:25-26). Gideon did just that, to the displeasure of the men of the city. They demanded that Joash, Gideon’s father, bring out his son that he might die. It is interesting to note that the scriptures do not say that they objected to Gideon’s building an altar to God, but to his tearing down the altar of Baal (v. 31). It is at this point Joash asked, “Will ye plead for Baal?”

I fear that brethren may at times “plead for Baal” in principle. They insist on building up the church without attacking the doctrines of denominationalism and or false brethren. If Gideon had had the wise (?) counsel of some of my brethren, things might have been different. He could have found a nice clean spot that would not be in the way of those coming to the altar of Baal and there built his altar to God. That way, they could have gotten along so nicely together, and who knows, they might could have worked out some kind of union sacrifice upon some heathen feast day. If the worshipers at the altar of the Lord had just played it smart (?) and ignored the altar of Baal, some of the folks in town who believed that one altar is just as good as another might come over and worship at the altar of the Lord. Then the

men of the city would sit up and take note of the growth (?) of Gideon's crowd. But, if Gideon kept running down folks altars he would have to be moved on because things like that just cause trouble.

Paul wrote, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Jesus, His apostles, and early Christians went about casting down all forms of error. It is almost the unanimous verdict of historians that the reason early Christians were persecuted by the heathen public was not their teaching a new system of religion — but their aggressive opposition to other forms of religion. For example: "Heathenism was hospitable to new forms and objects of worship, while Christianity was exclusive. Where gods were already counted by the hundreds, even by the thousand, one more god would make no difference . . . One emperor wished to place a statue of Christ in the Pantheon, a building in Rome, still standing, where all the important gods were worshiped. But the Christians rejected the offer with scorn. They would not have their Christ recognized merely as one of many dieties". (*The Story of the Christian Church*, J. L. Hurlbut, p. 50)

We hasten to add that when one tears down the "altars of Baal," that he should not leave the space bare, but erect the "altar of God." Truly, there is a time to break down, and a time to build up" (Eccl. 3:3).

Brethren, let us not "plead for Baal." ■

## Being "On Time" For Worship

Barney Keith

Have you ever thought about how scrupulous people can be in the matter of punctuality in their being on time for their various commitments? If a concert is set to begin at 8:00 P.M., - they arrive in plenty of time to take their seats before that very first number begins. If they are to be dinner guests at a 6:00 P.M. affair, it is almost certain that they will leave home in ample time to make it. They would not want to insult the hostess. If employed

by a company which requires them to report for work at 7:30 A.M. they get up early and make certain they "punch in" on time. These same people make arrangements to meet specific appointments with their physicians and dentists. Also if they have an appointment to discuss a business deal at a specific hour, they will be there unless it is necessary to cancel it because something very urgent comes up unexpectedly. Parties, picnics, dinners, concerts, sports, business obligations - all such affairs are attended to by most of us with all punctuality.

Have you ever noticed that Christians sometimes are not as punctual when it comes to the business of Jesus Christ? It may well be that in no other area is there such a high incidence of tardiness. That which is of the greatest importance is often handled with the least diligent effort. The common practice of all congregations is to have fixed hours of Bible study and worship on the Lord's Day and during the week. These hours of services are well-understood by all. Is it too much to expect the disciples of the Lord to do everything they can to be present before time for the services to begin? Every thinking person is well aware of the fact that unexpected things may delay anyone occasionally. The baby may suddenly become ill or need attention. A flat tire or other car trouble, a long distance telephone call, overflowing of the plumbing, coming upon an accident or traffic jam - just a host of "happen-stances" may cause people to be unavoidably detained, causing them to be late for the services. But really - is this *usually* the case? And especially if people find themselves being habitually late?

Surely this whole problem could be solved by each of us if we took to heart some plain Bible teaching about the attitudes we should have toward Christ and His work. Think about such passages as these: "*Give diligence* to make your calling and election sure." "Be ye steadfast . . . always *abounding* in the work of the Lord." "Set your *affections on things above* . . ." "Seek ye *first the kingdom of God* . . ." How shall we escape if we *neglect* so great salvation?" "*Lovest* thou me more than these?"

It is possible for one to break the bad habit of chronic tardiness at the services of the Lord if we will just make these sentiments a vital part of our lives. (Think about it.)