

CLARITY TRUMPET

For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. — I Corinthians 14:8, 9

Understanding the Heart of Scripture How Are We Treating the Word of God? Part Two

In Part One of this topic I addressed the need for believers to approach the Bible as the very Word of the true and living God as the Thessalonian believers did in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and as the apostle Paul admonished in 2 Corinthians 4:2. I also warned of the common practice of accommodating God's Word to man's comfort zones, and of following any trendy or "new" approach to Scripture, such as is characteristic of those involved in the *Redemptive Method Hermeneutic*. Now I want to turn our attention to two other areas that are very common even in Bible believing circles. I hope I still have some friends when I am through!

Why Do We Feel Compelled to Place Scripture into Sermonic Strait-Jackets?

Far less dangerous but more prevalent than what I discussed in Part One, is the almost universal practice of pastors, evangelists and teachers of Bible studies to so construct *every* message that it revolves around three alliterated points. *Alliteration* is that practice of having each point begin with the same sound or letter. Even expository teachers fall into this trap. Probably without realizing it, preachers or teachers may be guilty of trivializing Scripture, making the Bible simply a source book for sermons rather than the holy Word of God before which we should *tremble* (see Isaiah 66:1-2, 5; Ezra 9:4; 10:1-3; Exodus 9:20,21). Our well-constructed outlines often draw more attention to our abilities in sermon preparation (or the lack thereof) than to the power and majesty of God's Word.

Can you imagine the apostle Paul, or Isaiah, Daniel, or Moses manipulating every message God gave through them to the people so that each message

would fit into three alliterated points — or into just three points, period? Peter didn't do it on Pentecost. Paul didn't do it on Mars Hill. Moses didn't do it when he brought the Ten Commandments down from the mount. And Jesus didn't do in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24), or in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-16). However, it is the way future pastors are trained in seminaries and is seldom questioned.

We hear, "It's the way it's always been done." Perhaps it is time to change that so that God's Word is *released* in all of its power and elevated to its proper level, instead of it being bound by "three points and a poem." Why, oh why, do we stoop to such a level? Psalm 138:2 is a good reminder of God's own estimate of His Word: *I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name. For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your Word above*

all Your name. Shouldn't we embrace the same attitude toward our own Bibles? To do less discredits God's own judgment on the matter. This is not to say that we should worship the Bible. Far from it, for that would be bibliolatri. But we do need to *cherish* it much more than most of us do.

Jeremiah expressed the ideal response when he said, *Your words were found and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts* (Jeremiah 15:16). Later he revealed how vitally joined to his heart Scripture was when he declared in a moment of despair, *Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.' But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not* (20:9). Stop and ask yourself whether or not God's Word is in your

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heart “as a a burning fire.” I know many of you are involved in sharing Scripture with others — as Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders, pastors, professors in Bible schools and seminaries, evangelists and missionaries. The question we need to honestly face is: Is the Word of God so ingrained in me that I absolutely *cannot* ‘hold it back’? Am I *driven* by the fire of His Word in my heart compelling me to spread it far and wide?

Still later, Jeremiah confronted and exposed the false prophets of his day by saying, *The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. ‘What is the chaff [the false prophet’s ramblings] to the wheat [God’s Word],’ says the Lord. ‘Is not My word like a fire,’ says the Lord, ‘And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?’* (23:28, 29).

I don’t often hear or read a message where I sense God’s Word burning me or hammering me through the messenger. Far too many sermons are “ho-hum experiences — information imparted with little or no spiritual power or life — *no fire in the heart*. I am ashamed to say that this sad state of affairs may also be true of my own messages and lessons. May God help me to be radically different!

Why Do We Shy Away from the Gospel?

The heart of Scripture is the Lord Jesus Christ and the shedding of His blood for sin, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden when God apparently shed the blood of innocent animals to provide a covering for Adam and Eve’s nakedness. That theme extends throughout all of Scripture culminating in Revelation: *To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood* (1:5); *You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and redeemed us to God by Your blood....Worthy is the Lamb who was slain* (5:9, 12); *And they overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb.* (12:11). If the whole theme of Scripture is redemption then it becomes mandatory that the heart of our preaching and teaching be the same. If re-

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demption (salvation) is the major theme throughout the Bible why then do we hear so little Gospel in messages Sunday after Sunday. It seems it should permeate nearly every message we preach.

I realize there are those who preach nothing but the Gospel week after week so that their people are starved for other necessary spiritual food, but is that worse than sharing the Gospel on rare special occasions, or not at all? I hardly think so. What is needed is balance, but the kind of balance found in the Scriptures themselves; a balance that leans noticeably in favor of the Gospel being shared faithfully. Not only must unbelievers hear the way of salvation, but God’s people also need to be exposed to solid doses of the Gospel to sharpen their own sensitivity to it and to improve their skills in sharing it. I’m fearful that too few Christian leaders understand that training their people in the ins and outs of the Gospel is just as much a part of equipping their people as is teaching them about prayer, or dealing with temptations, or the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It might do all of us a world of good to follow Paul’s clear and pointed admonitions in two of his letters:

- 1 Corinthians 10:32-11:1 (written to Christians): *Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please [adapt myself to] all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.* The only two areas in which the New Testament tells us to imitate Christ are in His handling of personal suffering

(1 Peter 4:21), and in seeking to save the lost (2 Corinthians 5:20; compare Luke 19:10).

- 2 Timothy 4:5 (written to pastor Timothy): *But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.* “Do the work of an evangelist” could be translated, “Keep on evangelizing!” In our preparation and delivery, sharing the Gospel should be an ongoing practice of us all.

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