

Plain & Simple

by Wayne Goff

Some preachers and teachers attempt to show their great knowledge and wisdom by using prolific words of great pomposity. For example, "A cylindrical object propelled forward assembles no sphagnum." Fortunately I learned early in my work as a gospel preacher to do my best to keep things simple.

Complex?

As a young preacher I read commentaries and became fixated with their great vocabularies and complex sentences. Consequently when I began writing, I would duplicate their efforts. My wife, Emily, was the first to point out the fact that I needed to simplify my writing and my preaching. With her helpful editing early on, I learned how to write for better understanding. My writing helped my preaching.

Let me give you a quote from the great mind of Alexander Campbell to illustrate the kind of language I was reading. Even a simple introductory paragraph like this might be challenging for some:

"The present general order of things is exhibited in miniature in the preceding remarks. There are many who advocate the present order of things — not, we hope, the effects of that order, but the system of things which legitimately issues in these results." [*The Christian Baptist*, vol. 4, p. 322, 1827]

Now do not misunderstand me. Mr. Campbell was a brilliant mind and I enjoy being mentally challenged by writings of men like him. And I recommend all of us expand our minds once in a while by reading and studying this material. It is excellent. But I do not recommend that we write and preach in this manner to the average audience of believers and unbelievers. We must present God's Word in its beauty, entirety and simplicity in such a way that it will convict and convert the hearts of men and women.

Therefore my objective as a gospel preacher became to make every sermon as plain and simple as I could so that it could be understood by anyone of the age of accountability. Consequently, the greatest compliment I could receive is when someone said, "My 9-year-old understood your sermon." Now there are some subjects too difficult to make simple (see **2 Peter 3:16** and the book of **Romans**), but we can do our best to reduce the complex down to its lowest common denominator.

Jesus: Master Communicator

Obviously Jesus, the very Son of God, the Inventor of language, knew how to communicate His message to anyone and everyone. In fact, the apostle John introduces Jesus in his gospel account as "*The Word*"! He Who spoke the world into existence surely knows the power of words!

John 1:1-18, the Prologue, describes some of the most complex ideas about Jesus Christ while using the simplest of words: Word, God, life, light, darkness, flesh, glory, grace, and truth. Profound truths couched in simple language is the true evidence of genius.

Of Jesus' own teaching, one needs only study the **parables** by which He spoke. They are beautifully natural and simple, but they contain thoughts that require careful examination and thought. When asked why He spoke in parables, Jesus explained:

"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (**Matt. 13:11-13**).

Simply put, Jesus spoke in parables so that those who truly **wanted** to know the truth would take the time to study and learn what was meant. For

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