

Let Your Communication Be Yea And "Neigh"

Written by Ben Winslett

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Everyone has a hobby horse. I have a hobby horse. You have a hobby horse. We've all got one. What is a hobby horse, you might ask? Wikipedia explains:

From the term "hobby horse" came the expression "to ride one's hobby-horse", meaning "to follow a favorite pastime", and in turn, the modern sense of the term hobby.

A hobby horse is the following of a favorite pastime. In other words, a favorite subject or pet concept. Unfortunately, in preaching, many times the proverbial nag is negative so as our hobby horse presents itself, it becomes more of a routine rant repetitiously grinding on the souls of our listeners. I have fallen into this pit before and am sure many a minister who reads this has as well. It's just too easy!

Generally speaking, we allow what discourages us to become our hobby horse: The moral decline of our particular culture. The bulk falling away from Biblical truth we witness in Christendom. Local feuds between brethren. Heresies, past or present. Traditionalism. Liberalism in the Church. Homosexuality. Abortion. You name it. If it's a discouraging concept, surely one of us has donned our cape and mask and galloped around on this dark steed.

To be very clear, each of the afore mentioned concepts have a place in pulpit discourse when appropriate. Yet to work the above into every or nearly every sermon becomes taxing on the flocks we are called to serve. Simply put, it neither feeds nor edifies the sheep. At the same

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time, we learn through repetition. We should preach the same concepts periodically so believers are grounded in truth. Yet this is very different than the hobby horse.

Speaking to elders from the city of Ephesus, the Apostle Paul described effective pulpit ministry in Acts chapter 20.

1. He kept back nothing profitable but taught publicly and house to house, repentance towards God and faith towards Christ (verse 20). If it was profitable, Paul taught it. The problem with a hobby horse is that there is only so much time in a sermon. 10 minutes spent on our horse is 10 less minutes the church was taught something profitable, in essence causing us to unintentionally "keep back" what is profitable.

2. Paul declared unto them all the counsel of God (27). If it is a concept found in scripture, it needs to be taught from the pulpit. This means the flock needs a balanced diet and the only way to present a balanced diet is to focus on EVERYTHING taught in scripture, not just one area or aspect of truth and especially not only our favorite or most discouraging subjects. If we don't do this, it's likely the sheep are not being fed.

Paul's admonition for the other elders in Acts 20? Take heed unto yourselves!! This means what I choose to do with my time, both in and out of the pulpit, affects how I perform the work of a gospel minister. Frankly, I must continually "get my act together." This isn't robotics. God doesn't upload words into my brain. Sermons aren't funneled in on the spot. If you hear a preacher who obviously has a good grasp of the scriptures and presents an easy to follow message, what you are witnessing is the result of work and diligence, not magic. In short, he has applied himself. Paul exhorted his long time companion and son in the ministry, Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4, to give attendance to reading, exhortation, and doctrine, to meditate upon these things and give himself wholly to them, that his *profiting* may appear to all. It is obvious to our hearers when we study. It is equally obvious when we don't. I will add a personal observation: A lifetime of study goes into each sermon we present. Preachers should spend their lives wearing out one Bible after another.

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Volumes could be written about effective study manners and methods but let me remove a burden from your shoulders. Simply teach the word! Our job isn't to find deep mysteries and paint never before seen types and shadows each Sunday, but to preach the word. Just teach the plain language of the Scripture; Take an epistle and learn the author, approximate date, audience and background. Read it slowly. Look up words in the dictionary. Break down sentences. Grasp the context and overall purpose. Digest the lesson and present it to the church, one lesson at a time. To quote a friend in the ministry in reference to preachers trying to present "deep" thoughts, the deepest a man can possibly get is to simply explain what Scripture is saying. Just preach the word!

In closing, the entire purpose of our work is that God's children would be edified, or built up. Sheep feed in green pastures; keep them in one place too long and the grass has been all eaten and trampled. Also, sheep drink at still waters rather than tempestuous, violent waves. As Jesus admonished the Apostle Peter, if we love Jesus we must seek to feed His sheep.