

The Ingredients of a 15 Minute Sermon

By Dennis Gullege

Did you hear about the Baptist preacher recently who decided to cut his religious services down to 22 minutes and issued it as a challenge to see if people would be bold enough to "receive their religion in small doses." He wanted to do for his preaching what McDonalds has done for food - make it fast! What this preacher proposes is nothing new, and he certainly is right up there with some of our brethren in his fascination for brevity.

The length of a sermon is purely a subjective matter. There is no right or wrong as to the time involved. The personal preferences of people get involved and everybody has his opinion about it. As far as opinions go one is about as good as another. It isn't as though I haven't given serious consideration to the ingredient of such, and here are my conclusions:

1. Leave out a lot of Scripture. Keep "opening and alleging," preaching the Word, quoting and reading to a minimum.
2. Dispense with heart felt appeals for lost souls.
3. Don't study.
4. Eliminate applications from Bible passages that might fit our time and situations in life. It might take a few minutes.
5. Quit calling them sermons and call them "nice little talks," or better yet, "sermonettes."

6. Forget boldness in the pulpit - you might be prompted to linger.
 7. Never condemn sin! There is too much of that to deal with. For the sake of brevity you may just have to ignore it.
 8. Minimize any concern for the disobedient and wayward persons in your audience. You might shed too many tears privately and too many words publicly in trying to reach them. And besides, people will be too busy studying their watches to hear what is said anyway.
 9. Leave out any treatment of issues troubling the church. You might be perceived as being "negative," and you might get bogged down in warning people.
 10. Just have something to say instead of something you have to say. Try to squelch any feelings of earnestness about your task. Just get the job done quickly!
- This is what I would have to recommend to my preaching brethren if they are to learn the art of the 15 minute sermon. However, it appears that many of them caught on years ago when you consider some of the ingredients above. All in all, it appears that more is left out of the sermon than put into it.



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442 Westfield Road, Charlottesville 22901

Email: larryrouse@cvillechurch.com
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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

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Humble Yourself and be Taught of God

By Mark E. Larson

Thoughts To Ponder

Always take the lowest place, and the highest will be given to you, for high structures require a solid foundation. The greatest, in the judgment of God, are the least in their own opinion; the more worthy they are, the more humility will be seen in them.

"For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, and **also with the contrite and lowly of spirit** in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Isa. 57:15, NASB). Do you have a lowly spirit? Are you humble before God? For a right relationship with God, every person must humble themselves before the Lord.

Do you *wholeheartedly* believe that "God is"? (Heb. 11:6). No one can truly humble themselves before God unless they believe that God is a *real* actual Person. Though God is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17), you must in faith imagine the existence of God, His presence, His character, and majesty. Full recognition of God's greatness will humble you and cause you to see how "small" you really are in comparison to the Lord (e.g., Isa 6:5).

Will you allow God to teach you His will? Your attempt to draw near to God will be in vain unless you humble yourself and allow yourself to be taught by God and His word. "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is writ-

Yet, if you go to the word of God with a humble heart, it is likely that you will be "cut to the heart." You will see your sins, shortcomings, and the things you need to change about your life. You will be cross-examined and judged which may produce unwanted feelings of guilt (Heb. 4:12).

ten in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me" (John 6:44-45).

To Draw Near to God, You Must Be Teachable

Are you teachable? Most, if not all people would answer: "Well, of course I am!" But are you really? Too often, people allow pride, preconceived notions, prejudices, and personal opinions to get in the way of learning God's will. To be taught by God we have to be teachable and this means we must

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Larry Rouse
Evangelist & Editor

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be humble in our attitude toward Him. *“He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way.” (Ps. 25:9).*

To put it another way, are you as teachable **as a child**? As degrading or demeaning as that may sound to you, the truth is God only wants people who are as humble as children in His kingdom.

Jesus said: *“Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 18:3-4).* This means that in order for God to teach you, you have to lay down your selfish ambitions and pride and take on the lowly and humble position of a child.

Children are, to a great extent, teachable and humble. It is no wonder then why Jesus chose a child as a fitting example of humility to make His point. To be great in God’s eyes, you must like a child, with simple faith and trust, follow the Father’s instructions. Instead of hard-headedness or stubbornness, allow God to teach you, mold you, and shape you into what He wants you to be as one of His own children. Then you can truly be great in God’s kingdom! *“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Pet. 5:6).*

God has made His word understandable (Eph. 3:3-5). God desires *“all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).* Therefore, it is up to each person to open his heart to the Scriptures. Do you have a *“good and honest heart”?* (Luke 8:15). Stubbornness and pride keeps truth out, yet a humble heart holds fast to the truth and spiritual blessings come as a result. To be taught by God, honesty and humility is a must: *“Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.” (James 1:21).*

Humble Yourself to the Wisdom of God.

You cannot be taught by God if your heart is proud and you presume to know beforehand the will of God (Isa. 5:20-21; Prov 3:7; 12:15). Many people believe they are wise enough to know what is right and wrong on their own without the study of God’s

word. As a result, they end up telling God what they think is good and evil. In so doing, many make the mistake in believing that God thinks the same way as we do! *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9).*

Yet, if you go to the word of God with a humble heart, it is likely that you will be “cut to the heart.” You will see your sins, shortcomings, and the things you need to change about your life. You will be cross-examined and judged which may produce unwanted feelings of guilt (Heb. 4:12). It is for this reason that many treat Bible study as a mere academic exercise instead of a time for self-examination, reflection, and a means to draw nearer to God. *Don’t let that be you.* Recognize that the Scriptures are designed in such a way that if we listen with a humble heart *we will* be challenged (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Let God challenge you with His teachings, humbly accept what He says, and then obey the Lord.

What Does Humbling Ourselves Before God Require?

Unload the “Baggage” so You Can Really Listen to What God Says. Set aside your personal opinions or feelings and the philosophies, traditions, and popular opinions of men (Prov. 14:12; Col. 2:8; Mat. 15:9; 7:13). Family wishes or religious traditions must not be put above the Lord’s will (Mat. 10:37). Feelings of prejudice against the one who delivered the truth to you must be repented of (e.g., John 9:34; Gal 4:16).

Sometimes it requires Starting over and Rebuilding Your Faith. Saving faith in Christ is based upon the teaching of God’s word. *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).* This is the **only** way to build your faith the way it is supposed to be built. Sometimes as a result of Bible study we discover we have believed and practiced that which is contrary to the Scriptures. As embarrassing or humiliating as it may be for you to make corrections in your life, don’t let your pride stand in the way of having a right relationship with God. For fellowship with the Lord depends on **your** willingness to humble yourself and be taught of God.



Does Jesus Care?

By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

The song, "Does Jesus Care?", written in 1901, has been a comfort to Christians during the trials of the past century. It is one of my favorites. The other night, while meditating on the words of the song, it occurred to me that the title could have a much broader application than the wonderful words of comfort in the song. We could profit greatly by applying the question to many areas of our lives and seeking to find the answer from the scriptures. For example, does Jesus care, one way or the other, whether one is a Jew or Gentile, bond or free, rich or poor, when it comes to saving him from sin and adding him to the church? The answer is, no he does not care one way or the other. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:13). Let us see if we can apply this to some other matters.

Does Jesus care who wins the Super Bowl or the Alabama-Auburn game? One would think that He is deeply concerned from listening to some post-game interviews. Players and coaches often are heard giving the Lord credit for their victory. While it is commendable that they would think of the Lord at such a time, I can find nothing in the scriptures that convinces me that the Lord cares one way or the other who wins a football game or any other similar contest. However, there are other areas where many professed Christians seem to think that he does not care when the Bible indicates that he really does care.

Does Jesus care what church we belong to just as long as one is sincere in his choice? "There is one body..." (Eph. 4:4). The body is the church (Eph. 1:22, 23). "But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Cor. 12:20). "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. (Eph. 5:23). If there is one body and it is the church and if He is the head of **the** church and savior of **the** body, then He must care one way or the other.

Does Jesus care what or how one worships as long as he is seeking to honor God? Jesus said, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). "In spirit" suggests that he cares how one worships. 1 Cor. 14:40 teaches that worship

services should "be done decently and in order." "In truth" suggests that he cares what we offer in worship. It must be according God’s word – the truth. Also, He said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matt. 15:9).

Does Jesus care what day we observe the Lord’s Supper in His memory? Luke wrote, concerning the early disciples’ practice, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread ..." (Acts 20:7). The breaking of bread here obviously refers to the Lord’s Supper since early Christians were forbidden to come together *as a church* to eat a common meal (1 Cor. 11:18, 22, 34, NKJ, NIV).

Does Jesus care what length of hair one wears? From what I am seeing more and more among members of the church, one might conclude that Jesus does not care, one way or the other? It is not unusual any more to sit behind a couple at a worship service and not be able to tell which is the male or female by their hair styles. Yet, the scriptures say, "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering (1 Cor. 11:14-15). Does this not indicate to us that the Lord does care one way or the other about the length of one’s hair?

Does Jesus care about the clothes one wears? "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Tim. 2:9-10). The Bible also clearly teaches that one is to be clothed so that "the shame of thy nakedness do not appear" (Rev. 3:18). Clothing can make one’s nakedness appear by either leaving certain parts of the body bare or by being so form fitting that nothing is left to the imagination.

The list of applications could go on and on. It would be a good exercise in Bible study for one to list all the things he could think of about which he could ask "Does Jesus care?" Then go to the scriptures to see if He really does care one way or the other.

Yes, Jesus does care, in the words of the song, "when my heart is pained ... when my way is dark ... when I’ve said ‘good-bye’ to the dearest on earth to me." He also cares about other things in our lives as well. If we seek to please Him, we will care about those things for which he cares.

