

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

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"God Gave Them Up"

When man refuses to see the abundant proof of God's *"eternal power and divinity"* in the created world he *"glorifies Him not as God, neither is thankful."* (Romans 1:19-21)

This asserts that the Creator has so demonstrated Himself in His product that, even without the inspired word, we should be able to see that the "First Cause" must have always existed (arguing it always will exist) and is therefore "eternal." And this leads us forcibly to the conclusion that this "First Cause" is of a nature different from that of His creatures; has a divine nature. All who so recognize God "look up" to Him with the honor so justly due Him, and reckon themselves subject to Him. Such a respect for the Creator has a sobering effect upon mankind. We *"live, move, and have our being"* in His presence; aware that *"all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."* (Heb. 4:13) Perhaps this is basis enough to conclude that except we walk circumspectly before Him, we "sin against Heaven" and must repent. (Acts 17:28f)

When man denies the presence of the eternal and divine God, (does not like to retain God in his knowledge) God (1) gives him up to uncleanness; (2) gives him up unto vile affections; (3) gives him over to a reprobate mind. (Read Rom. 1:21-24-26-28) This seems to be another way of saying God allows man to "stew in his own juice" or reap the consequences of his own folly. Man is incomplete without God. It is *"not in man that walketh to direct his steps."* (Jer. 10:23) On this basis alone we should see that *"righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people."* (Prov. 14:34) A nation that tries to substitute fear of punishment, respect for law, patriotism,

or even Emperor- worship to upgrade the state and its citizens, will fail. There is no satisfactory substitute for faith in and respect for the God of us all.

Godless Evolution, and other materialistic concepts which enthrone human reason and seek to leave God out of the universe – these must bear much of the blame for our amoral and immoral society.

Religions which place their stress upon social welfare seem, on the surface, to be so "relevant;" so intent upon solving current problems. But to the extent they divert the attention and resources of the church from its chief function – the promotion of spiritual values – faith in the real, personal God to whom belongs our full and complete allegiance – to this extent these religions join hands with all other soul and nation wreckers.

"God gave them up," "God gave them over" – re-read those verses from the Roman letter. "Like a terrible refrain" says Lenski. "This is more than permission to fall into uncleanness, and it is less than causing the fall. God's action is judicial... Thus God uses sin to punish itself and the sinner."

When man does recognize and respect His Creator, even as he sees Him in the universe, he is ready to hear God's word, and obey Him.

✍ Robert F. Turner



THOUGHTS ON THE LENGTH OF SERMONS

From time to time we hear comments about or read articles dealing with the attitude of some toward sermons which they consider to be too lengthy. Most of these comments or articles deal with what is considered to be a poor attitude on the part of listeners. Even though most of these comments and articles are very good and probably needed to be said I feel that maybe some additional thoughts on this matter may prove to be profitable.

Indeed, it is a sad commentary on a child of God when the most important thing, to him, about a sermon is its length. A person should listen in view of gaining a better knowledge and understanding of God's will, however some have no desire for such knowledge and understanding. When a person has no desire to listen in view of

gaining this knowledge and understanding his only thought is to "get it over with" and the "sooner the better." As has been noted in some of the articles mentioned above, people have time for the things they are really interested in. When the length of a sermon is the only (or primary) concern of an individual then it is very apparent that he is not really interested in things spiritual. The truth of the matter is that the problem is not the length of the sermon but this person's attitude toward the word of God.

On the other hand, just as it is a sad commentary on any listener whose only concern is the length of a sermon it is equally sad that the most noticeable thing about some sermons is their LENGTH. Why is it that some men may present a lesson of one hour or more in length and there is very little (if any) comment on the length of the lesson, but some other man may speak the same length of time (or even less) to the same audience and there is much comment about the excessive length of the sermon?

It is true that there are some members of the church who are so uninterested in spiritual matters that they "demand" the 20 or 25 minute "pep talks" instead of desiring to hear in view of increasing their understanding of God's word, however I am convinced that their number is in the minority as far as brethren are concerned. Maybe we preachers need to examine our preaching to see if all the problem is with the listeners. I know some preachers who are constantly being criticized by brethren for their "lengthy" sermons and usually these are the preachers who do most of the criticizing of brethren who can't "endure" long sermons.

Is it possible that these preachers DO need to be criticized, but the wrong thing is being criticized. The LENGTH of the sermon may be the thing criticized when the CONTENT of the sermon is the thing that really needs to be criticized. In Nehemiah 8:3 we read of people who were attentive to the teaching of God's word from the morning until midday. This example is sometimes noted by preachers to illustrate the kind of attention people should give when the word of God is being proclaimed. Truly, such reverence and attention to the word of God is worthy of imitation; however the Bible tells us that Ezra, and those with him at that time, "read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:7). Their preaching was such that it

merited the attention of those who desired to know God's will. The emphasis was on WHAT was taught and not on HOW LONG someone spoke.

I have found that most brethren are not critical of the length of time a preacher preaches if he has something profitable to present, however these same brethren do not appreciate being asked to listen to someone who rambles around and has very little to say that is profitable because he has not studied or prepared himself to "cause people to understand" the word of God. The word "endure" may be the right word for describing what these "listeners" must do.

If you are a listener that is constantly criticizing the length of sermons you need to examine yourself. It may be that it is your lack of interest in things spiritual that needs to be corrected rather than the length of the preacher's sermons. If you are a preacher who is frequently criticized for your long sermons you need to examine yourself and your sermons to find out why the length of your sermons is the most notable thing about them. It may be that brethren are critical of the wrong thing. Maybe the thing that needs to be criticized is not the LENGTH but the CONTENT.

Let all of us concentrate our attention and efforts to learning what God would have us to do. If we will do this I am convinced that we will not hear as much talk (either from the listeners or the preachers) about the length of sermons.

✍ James Hahn

Belleville church of Christ	
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Schedule of Services	Elders
Sun. Bible Study... 9:30 a.m.	Charles Carpenter... (317) 839-3873
Sun. Morning Worship... 10:30 a.m.	James Hahn. (317) 745-1507
Sun. Evening Worship. 5:00 p.m.	
Wed. Bible Study... 7:00 p.m.	
Evangelist	Deacons
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