

Where Do We Go From Here?

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The cultural war is lost. That is what many are saying anyway.

That once-enticing vision for many politically inclined evangelicals is now lost in the sense that the secular red tide has come ashore so high for so long that our society is now undeniably post-Christian. Actually, if we include Europe, the West has been there for a much longer time. This is old news to the other side of the Atlantic.

By post-Christian I mean that these days there is very little significant Christian presence in the centers of cultural power (such as government, education, business, the media or the fields of the arts and entertainment). Though in the US there is not yet a total void, to say that Christian influence on our shores as a shaping factor is anemic is hardly overstating the matter. To say that the prospects for a reversal are getting worse, not better, is just hard-nosed realism.

Personally, I never thought of our conflict with secular society in terms of a battle for cultural dominion, though the progressives certainly view it in that light. Yet one must have been living in an igloo this last generation to be unaware that that is exactly how many evangelicals more or less frame it.

Ever since the late 70's, especially with the rise of the Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority (here in Oregon, its political clone, the erstwhile Christian Coalition), a wide sector of evangelicals shed their political quiescence, feeling we must go after Goliath and cut off his head with his own sword---political activism. And so, modern Davids rose up, organized and mobilized, arrayed in Saul's armor, and charged boldly into the political fray, hell bent upon restoring America to its supposedly former godly foundations.

Of course, to be fair, Christians, as American citizens, have the same right as everyone else to make their voices heard at the ballot box, although the other side at times has seemed to resent that. The issue is just a question of whether or not that tact was the wisest way to counter what we saw as secular creep, moral vertigo, and an accelerating drift away from the once more prevalent Christian worldview.

Contrary to popular belief, never was America a Christian nation. No question however that its foundations were seeded to a considerable degree, carried over from the Old World, with elements of a Christian worldview.

As many saw that precious foundation crumbling, a John Wayne spirit set in for many evangelicals. They rose up as one, so to speak, to put a stop to this cultural takeover, wage political war against these forces of darkness (so right about that) and make America a 'Christian' country again. That narrative was, I repeat, really a historical myth, except in certain preunderstandings that were never seriously challenged for much of our national history. And those assumptions colored our culture with something of a superficial Christian hue, more officially perhaps than functionally, until at last secular progressives gained more traction and drew a bead on those foundational presuppositions.

In angry reaction to what felt very much like a cultural hi-jacking, and a hostile disturbing of our comfortable (too comfortable actually) cultural nest, a determined, maybe desperate, political movement within evangelicalism was born. As I have perceived it over the years, that foray into the political arena springs from the perception that there is more power in political action than the preached Word and more power in the ballot box than the powerful example of lives transformed by the gospel. In that mentality, naturally they have opted for national redemption by political process rather than evangelical witness.

With that outlook I personally have always had a huge difference of opinion. Right there, I contend, is the mindset that has derailed and misguided the whole movement and miscast what biblical Christianity is all about.

In fairness, it should be mentioned that this political 'army' was by no means drawn from exclusively committed evangelical ranks. No small number of those most invested in this cultural war to save America have been people who for whatever reasons, perhaps from Christian influence, just have a native conservative or traditional turn and politically speaking, tend to find an ideological 'home' with us.

Then too no small number of cultural warriors are superficial (or nominal or cultural) Christians who love America and believe God does too. I call them CHINOs---i.e. Christians in name only. This type in our ranks are easily diverted into political tangents and religious heresy and who knows what other trips. Because we allow them to fly under our auspices as a sort of reward for supporting our 'war' efforts, we pay the piper when they go off script and show their false colors.

Nowadays the culture warriors have lost a lot of their critical mass and political influence. The remnant that remains, not small, still have not lost their hope for salvation-by-Trump and somehow re-capturing their former momentum, the turnstiles of culture and at least re-creating that elusive Christian culture that will make America safe for Christian faith and practice.

As I mentioned above, from its early days, I for one was never on board with that quixotic project, even though I personally share with many of its adherents a Christian abhorrence for that plethora of abominations that more and more lend our culture that sinking feeling.

As far back as 1980 when I saw this politicized form of evangelicalism taking shape in reaction and gathering a head of steam, I was always outspoken that this was a misguided strategy. Now I feel a bit prophetic. It accomplished little but to awaken the sleeping monster of aggressive secularism that previously had been oblivious to the potential of our collective clout. It was perfectly clear to me that little David in Saul's armor was no match for an awakened chimera. My view then and now is that 'David' should stay within his game, i.e. stick by his sling and five smooth stones, so to speak.

Now here we are. Today, after all that martial huff and puff and political posturing, after many of our political allies have either disgraced themselves or put their finger to the cultural wind and broken ranks in favor of political survival, the Secular City is more secular, more muscular and more contemptuous than ever (remember, we are the infamous "deplorables" of Hillary and her crowd).

In the aftermath of all that political skirmishing, whatever influence Christians once boasted in the cultural nerve centers of the America, has seriously waned. That sort of defeat is predictable when self-appointed 'generals' decide to wage 'war', choose the wrong ground, and fight by the wrong means.

Today the other side, I think it is fair to say, commands all the cultural citadels and controls most of the main arterials on the way to cultural change. To think that by the electoral process we are somehow still going to flip this cultural landslide is, I believe, naïve, short of dramatic divine intervention, the very definition of wishful thinking.

On the contrary, to project a society progressively more unfriendly to the Faith is being neither an alarmist nor a knee-jerk jeremiad, for any halfway keen observer can read the tea leaves. Unless one is dumber than a box of rocks about the rhythms of modern history, it should not surprise how these 'climate' changes can turn from threatening to violent almost without warning. In fact, for that reason, I keep wondering if our own version of the infamous Nazi-inspired *Kristallnacht* will occur.

So, yes, from that point of view, it is game over. To those evangelical 'freedom fighters' who have not yet gotten the memo, it's go home, get another plan. That political one was a disaster.

Which begs the question: **Where do we evangelicals go from here?**

Certainly, nobody appointed me the evangelical Solon, the famous Greek legislator whose sage advice rescued the Athenians from themselves (for a while at least). Still, at the risk of coming off a bit like Elihu, whose impatience with the answers of Job's three friends finally drove him to speak up, there are some things I would like to get off my chest, if for no one's benefit but my own. (For writing these 'papers' is the way I process things.)

As a local aspirant to a public office said in a recent interview with newspaper people, "I'm too smart to think I know all the answers." With that aphorism I resonate. At the same time, I do claim the smarts to know at least a few of the answers.

Where do we start to re-set? What buttons do we push?

The pathway I suggest is not necessarily in order of priorities. Some of these overlap and intersect to some degree. That said, the first two stations are imperative in any re-set equation.

First, we must recover biblical conviction about the place and power of the Word of God in our mission equation.

Specifically, I mean our confidence in the yeast-like transforming power of the gospel plus the power of the Spirit working through the Word to accomplish God's work and fulfil His mission on earth.

"Lost' confidence? Yes.

For almost four decades I have contended that much of what ails our pulpits, our churches and our whole Christian enterprise starts with an erosion of that conviction. A lot of our mojo goes away when that core trust in the power of the sovereign word of God to effect or orchestrate any and all changes that God choses to bring to pass goes missing.

And one huge evidence of it going AWOL is the virtual disappearance of biblical preaching, and prophetic expository preaching in particular. I do not mean dry, scholastic expository teaching, content to explain merely what the biblical text meant to them then. That is exegetical teaching, fine for the seminary classroom. But what I have in mind is something rarer than diamonds in our ecclesiastical rough today.

What our churches desperately need is a revival of true expository preaching that drills down on the Monday morning significance of the biblical text, comforts the afflicted and afflicts the too-comfortable, the kind of teaching that fearlessly rattles the cages of the churchy, calls out the culture, calls upon the lost to repent and extends the hope of salvation to all by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone, but a true faith that bears fruit to God in loving obedience.

This is true biblical preaching that goes through the head and before it is finished, digs around in the heart and probes the conscience. This kind of passionate pulpit is largely missing in action today and that is because the conviction about the place and power of the word of God that supports it, has pretty much evaporated. Conviction is the mother of passion.

Where along the way did we lose our grip on texts like Hebrews 4:12?

Because the word of God is living, not inert, powerful, not weak, it has an organic force that causes what it commands, performs what it prescribes, and effects what it exhorts.

That is why the Apostle Paul charges Timothy (and by echo, every man of God) in the strongest and most sacred terms:

"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come [in cycles, I inject] when they will not endure sound doctrine [or teaching] [we are there, by the way]; but wanting to have their ears tickled [you think?], they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth [it's happening wholesale today] and turn aside to myths." (brackets mine)

Well, someone might say, if we are in one of those spiritual cycles, isn't that self-refuting? If it's broke, fix it and fix it means doing something different, getting another plan. Forget this biblical preaching mantra. Find out what people are wanting and give it to them, right?

Not so fast.

Why do you think the Apostle admonishes Timothy to preach the word, not only when it was seasonable, but also when "out of season?"

Because the only thing that will change the picture, cause the worm to turn, as it were, is the steady drumbeat of the word of God. With the Spirit speaking through it and impelling it into the human heart, it is the only spiritually efficient agent for flipping things around! So, be patient and persistent. Preach the word! Hammer away. Don't take your foot off the pedal.

All the other half-baked panaceas we cook up are not valid substitutes. At best some (like music) are supplements. And some of the other filler materials are toxic garbage.

I say, hang your hat on the power of the word. And it is powerful and efficient for its work because as Paul told Timothy elsewhere, there is nothing else in the world like it, for (2 Tim. 3:16-17) "all Scripture is inspired by God [i.e. God-breathed] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness [what else in our tool bag can do all these things]; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." [brackets mine]

Job One for a pastor is to teach the word! Do that and some will fall in; some will fall out, some will shape up; some will be shaken up, some will catch fire, others will start fires, but all these are God's effects for His own reasons.

The late and famed Ohio State football coach, Woody Hayes, was noted for his successful offensive philosophy, dubbed by some as "three yards and a cloud of dust." In other words, nothing fancy, not a lot of passing, rarely any trick plays, but a steady pounding of bruisers in the backfield who, just a few yards at a time, unspectacularly wore down the weary defense.

Well, I am saying, preaching the word is our three yards and a cloud of dust. It's David and his sling.

But, as I said, somewhere back there confidence in the divine game plan drifted away. And that, in my view, is at least one reason evangelicalism is a muddled mess. Our present condition reminds me so much of what a friend of mine (who built interstate roads back in the day) once remarked as the two of us were watching some do-it-yourself-ers constructing a nine-hole golf course:

"Jim, those fellas don't have much force, do they? The (head) guy seems to have a lot more money than he does sense."

That, it seems to me, is pretty much where evangelicalism is today. Not much force. And often times more money (and big promises) than we have sense. We throw hype around like confetti. We gin up fancy programs, stage big events and put on music spectaculars, create celebrity Christians, blow them up 10 times their size, watch them fall one after another like shooting stars, try to out-Hollywood, Hollywood, offer dizzy sound and light shows, bands blaring, words incomprehensible, singers strutting around on stage like peacocks, 'preachers' in full hip (Converse tennies, dreads, and muscle shirts)---oh, it makes me sick to the gills, but more importantly, I suspect God feels a ton worse than I do.

Whip up a lot of emotion, sell books and CDs like they are going out of style, rake in the cash like a casino, and in the end, nothing gained. A lot of feeling and froth, a lot of big hats, big buckles, but no cattle. Who are we kidding?

I can't imagine Jesus as a part of these scenes, not an approving part at least. They boldly promise fire and earthquakes, they sweat and gyrate, but to any discerning eye, at the end of the day, just a lot of religious carnival barkers, sparklers and big bags of gas who actually think they are the message!

Is this what passes for evangelicalism today? God help us!

God is not in it. He is in the still small voice of His Spirit quietly working through His word to accomplish His revealed and often times His hidden purposes. It is a sovereign, efficient operation.

Hey, folks, we ain't gonna get there the way we are going. What we need is to get off these crazy trips, humble ourselves, make ourselves small again, preach the Word, wait on the divine effects, a steady dripping action, dismiss the impatient notion of sudden explosions and expect more often a process of gradual, but godly erosion.

In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus made the point about the power of the word of God very impressively. When the rich man asked Abraham to please, please, please send someone from the dead to forewarn his brothers about the horrible fate awaiting them if they did not repent, Abraham told him that step was totally unnecessary and redundant.

Why? Because they had Moses and the prophets. Duh? The rich man in torment thought that was like throwing a cotton ball at a rock wall. Something more sensational was needed, like a sign and wonder. He thought if his brothers were faced with someone resurrected from the dead, that would put a big dent in them, an unforgettable impression that would flip them.

Abraham corrected him. No, not the case. If those guys would not listen to the word of God (i.e., the testimony of Moses and the prophets), it really would not matter if they were confronted with one raised from the dead.

The message in that interchange? The mysterious, awesome power of the living word of God trumps the force of any miracle, any sign or wonder. If the word of God would not phase their unbelief, dent their resistance, nothing would. They were hopeless.

Exactly what I have been saying.

There will be no revival, no more mojo, no turning of the ship, so to speak, until the pulpit recovers its confidence in the sovereign power of the word of God to change people and cultures. So far as I can recall, great preaching always is the trigger of great revival.

Spiritual warfare requires the right weapons adapted by God for His work. Saul's armor was much more imposing to all than David's little sling and his five smooth stones. But he stayed within his game and it was he who killed the giant, not King Saul or the whole army of Israel.

God loves to baffle the world and do His work with small things, apparently weak things. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). But, oh, we Americans are like Texans---we like BIG. We are victims of statistical paralysis. As happened to David later, we get a little full of ourselves and always want to take a census. We need to lose our obsession with numbers. God often times likes to play small ball, if only we will get our egos out of the way.

Let us do it and get back in the game.

Secondly, we must restore to our game some Christian credibility.

it is imperative that evangelicals re-establish a tighter union between Christian talk and Christian walk, between Christian profession and Christian practice. It's a scandal out there.

We can't get any traction in terms of Christian witness until general godliness displaces our general worldliness, until we become a people in the world living in a manner distinct from the world. We are called to be transformed people, not culturally conformed.

At present evangelicalism suffers a general blurring with the lifestyles of the wretched and infamous. No, God has not called us to be monastics, i.e., to social isolation, but we are called to moral separation. Much too often life in our churches is not all that distinct from life in the culture.

Part of the credibility problem resides in the fact, mentioned previously, that in our American entrepreneurial spirit in trying to build monuments to our own egos in the form of mega-churches, forgetting that the name of the game is making disciples (the two are not always compatible), we have been so successful at attracting the world into our churches that today we seem to have no clue or little inclination to drive the world out of our churches. 'Clean up the town,' in other words.

Evicting this component of our credibility crisis is best accomplished by prophetic pulpits (i.e. no-nonsense teaching of the Word of God), godly leadership, the practice of church discipline, by an intentional church culture that takes making disciples seriously and is jealous of its spiritual and moral integrity. The effort, I think, will be accelerated by the slimming effects of imminent social marginalization and its inevitable sequel, old fashioned persecution. And we may not have long to wait on the last cure.

So long as our congregations remain a hopeless trail mix of fish and fowl, wheat and tares, professors and possessors, this noxious credibility problem will haunt us and lend credence to the popular public smear that “all those church people are just hypocrites.” Of course, that is a gross miscasting of the reality, but what feeds into it is the easy believism heresy that permeates the ranks of (I believe) most evangelical churches and results in a high percentage of our church attenders consisting of those CHINO types I mentioned earlier (Christians in name only). So long as that dry rot persists, that slur will resonant.

This is a problem that we can mitigate by general reforms, but my guess is that marginalization and persecution will come closest to filtering out a lot of our rampant internal corruption. The chastening I do not welcome, but the holy effect will be most beneficial. Churches will get much smaller when that happens, but also much stronger. Less will be more. That’s a switch!

Thirdly, we must rediscover our mission.

It’s always good to know what you are. It also helpful to understand what you are not.

The Great Commission was never about taking control of cultures and worldly institutions. Somewhere many got the idea that we were about saving the Titanic and have nearly exhausted themselves feverishly polishing its brass. Hey, folks, it is not about saving the ship, it has always been about rescuing those on it. One by one by one by one.

If along the way, that rescue mission results in enough critical mass (in terms of conversions) that the numbers change the dominant tone and values of society, so much the better. However, cultural redemption was never the aim; that was just a happy effect.

To put it differently, it would help immensely if most of us came to terms with the fact that we are strangers on this planet, not settlers here. The right perception changes the whole dynamic of interaction.

We need to rethink our relationship to this temporal world. Planet earth and all its institutions were never our town or meant to be. We are just tourists here, not citizens, people just passing through on a mission. Our mission was never to make this world a better place, never to reshape this foreign country or acquire power and wealth in it. The program certainly never was to usher in the kingdom of God on earth, a quaint idea once popular. Nor is it (the latest version) to bring heaven down to earth.

Did I say we need to get back to the word?

To put it yet another way, we are, as it were, God’s fifth column in the world. Christ said it, why do we forget it---My kingdom is not of this world, though in it. Spiritually speaking, we are the kingdom of God invisible to the eyes of the world and the culture; we are that narrow realm of people in and through which God reigns on earth and through which He extends His knowledge into all the world.

We were never planted here to take over the world, but to call His elect out of the world. Jesus will take over soon enough without us lifting a hand or shaking a leaf or breaking a tender twig.

God doesn't intend for us to take the world by a storm, by fire or earthquake. Until He breaks in and speaks up for Himself (and He will), let us be content to be faithful witnesses passing through foreign territory, let the Spirit do His work through the Word and let us disabuse ourselves of any dreams of temporal dominion. That won't happen until Christ appears and sets up His earthly kingdom. Until He returns, let's refocus our vision on the original plan---going into all the world and making disciples. One life and one family at a time.

We know the game plan. It was there all the time. But when we allow those whose egos and ambitions and appetites for celebrity and fat statistics (and cash cows) to alter our destination, they take us way off course and the results are never good. Remember the Crusades? There's a history lesson.

Fourthly, we must drop anchor in the truth, damn the secular torpedoes, come hell or high water, stick with the Word of God against the gales of political correctness.

Can we just find the conviction and courage to be confident that at the end of the day, the truth will prevail and every lie God will countervail? The Enemy acts. As God wills, He counteracts.

I just have to say it: we are such weenies! Where is our backbone in the face of cultural blowback?

It seems to me we are like little children so afraid that the neighbor kids won't like us or let us play with them, that we shame ourselves trying to pander to them.

Why do so many evangelicals fall over themselves, seeking ways to accommodate the views of the ungodly so we can gain (or maintain) a positive image or relationship with the cultural gatekeepers? Don't we know that is a losing game? Enough compromise is never enough. What prophet or apostle ever operated that way?

We must stop trembling in fear of being abused and mocked by the academy or in the media for our biblical fidelity and Christian principles. Can we stop, just stop, quaking in our boots for fear that we might take a forbidden position or make a politically incorrect faux pas that would ruffle the feathers of the PC police who may then pin on us the stinking tail of the donkey.

If we are going to take up our crosses and follow Jesus, we must be prepared to be asses in the eyes of the world. The world didn't crucify Jesus or execute many of His apostles because they thought they were just princes of people. Nothing has changed in 21 centuries.

Does our reputation in the eyes of Christ-hating, sin-loving persons mean so much to our tender egos that that we would accommodate religious and moral lies that we might appear in the eyes of the blind to 'see' better than they thought? What are we thinking?

If we are ever to get this evangelical train back on the tracks and regain some traction, the truth, i.e. the revelation of God, must once again become a hard and fast non-negotiable standard in our quest to be heard. Like Jehoshaphat, we must become a movement that "takes pride in the ways of the Lord," not one led by timid, gutless leaders who play the angles in efforts maintain their respectability and not get their carefully crafted image shot down for violating one or another of the secular Ten Commandments.

We are not out to offend the world, but certainly we should realize that unintended offense is par for the course in our interface with the world. The fact is, any courageous and faithful leader and disciple of Christ who (by definition) hues the biblical line and stays the moral course, no matter who or what comes against him, is never going to be respected or admired by the culture *for long*. (No, the late Billy Graham is no exception to that rule, but that is another story I will bypass here).

I say, let us hang our hats on the sovereignty of God in our daily interaction with the larger culture and stop trying to handle the hostiles like crystal, afraid if we drop the ball, it is game over. The kingdom of God is secure. It will not crumble like a cookie over our bobbles, but its doctrinal integrity will certainly be obscured by spineless, self-protective babble.

Red alert, people, God is sovereign, not the culture. We do not need permission from the culture to be heard. Whatever walls are there, whatever ear plugs people may be wearing, the Spirit of God can make himself heard whenever He pleases, however He pleases, as loudly and effectively as He pleases. So, speak up and don't mince and dance when it comes to the truth. Remember Acts 2.

Yes, there is such a thing as human due diligence in this mission. But my sense is that some take on too much. We are going to make mistakes, we going to blow a few calls and make some things messier than they needed to be. All that God already has foreseen and comprehended in His plan. If we will just stick to that plan, stay tight with the Spirit working through the word, things will go exactly where our sovereign God has ordained.

Let us find out what we are supposed to do, do it, do it well and leave the rest to Him.

So why don't we just be faithful, get small, not tall, and be fully assured that, despite all the odds, if we stick with our business, He will do His business and at the end of the days the books will balance.

In the process, as a seminary president recently wrote to constituents, we must *master the art of contending for the faith without being contentious in the faith*. For those of a more mellow disposition not being contentious may be no problem, but for those of us with a more militant make up that restraint may be more challenging.

However, if we are more resolved by grace to do right rather than be right, we can learn to walk that fine line, as have so many of great servants of God in the past. That said, let the mellow fellows remind themselves that mellow can mean yellow, so that personality has its own perils.

And in all this interaction with the culture and its ugly bouncers, we must refuse to be intimidated by those who castigate us as judgmental. Those accusations one should read for exactly what they are-- the outcries of a guilty conscience. Those reactions are dead giveaways, left-handed witnesses that their offended consciences are barking like dogs that don't appreciate being disturbed.

Listen, we can't let them shame us into silence on this. Don't we realize there can be no good news until we first deliver the bad news? So, just expect the incensed reaction as a matter of course. The natural man or woman does not want to hear about their sins, resents any guilt trips, no matter how justified, and will make as sure as possible there is hell to pay if you force them to take one.

That backlash is part of the price of doing God's business. That is prophetic work. It is also a Christ-like work in the spirit of love to warn those in peril of disaster in time to avert it. We cannot expect the blind to see that any more than we can expect the dead to walk. So, let's just buck and take the flack.

Can you imagine Jesus and His apostles (e.g. the Jesus of Matthew 23) toning it down had the scribes and Pharisees started whining and complaining that Jesus was being 'judgy' (a millennial term) as He excoriated their religious hypocrisy? Nonsense.

Look, what God has condemned, we are obliged to condemn---unapologetically. God decides, we just report. Which is to say, what God says is wrong, we just echo His verdict.

So, can't we just stop this ducking and hiding from the secular blowback. We see what is going, or at least we should. Let's learn to not blink and stand our ground. There is no place in this spiritual warfare for pussy willows.

Logic is on our side. For it is we who threw ourselves at the foot of the Cross for the benefit of the atoning blood of Jesus and that precisely because we discovered we were sinners indeed, that there is none good, none righteous before our holy God, no, not even one. If we condemn human behaviors, it is because we first condemned our own.

So, let them freely revile us as idiots, jerks, or whatever, but self-righteous we clearly are not. That dishonor belongs in spades to our detractors who usually insist they are natively good people, needing no salvation, no Savior, no nothing but their own filthy rags of righteousness. That is the ultimate in self-righteousness and no way can we compete with that.

So, why do we cringe and retreat at that slander? Why do we stick our tails between our legs and slink off apologetically for being (allegedly) harsh and insensitive when we simply are relaying to those at risk the plain truth as God has revealed it?

Let me ask something: Physicians who withhold the naked truth from their patients hardly compensate for their malpractice by a gentle bedside manner, do they? When people are at risk of eternal condemnation, walking in gross sin, and living defiantly, what gross malpractice it is when we meet that situation with greater effort to impress upon sinners our own 'grace' than His? Should we dumb down the truth to soften our own public image?

By all means, let us speak the truth in love, but at the end of the day, speak the truth. Otherwise 'love' is just a silly buzz word. Drop anchor in the truth and refuse to drift, for love rejoices in the truth, not in a charade.

Well, there you have it, or at least I have it for my own satisfaction and edification---my prescription for getting the evangelical train back on track and headed again in the right direction. However, I must confess that I am not optimistic that the patient is ready---or even realizes how sick he is. But maybe, just maybe, one day after I am long passed, somebody will come across this pastoral prescription and say, "Oh, my, was this guy ever right!" Probably too much to hope for.

*When I happen to be reading an article or blog or book, I (like most people, I presume) want to know the credentials of whoever decided to put his or her thoughts and ideas out there for public consumption. Not that a perfectly anonymous soul may not have something to say really worthy my attention, but if I know something about an author, it helps me filter and contextualize things.

I have spent 55 years (and counting) in the ministry, 21 of those in academic ministry, the rest in pastoral ministry (seven years in one church right out of seminary, then an academic hiatus, and now 28 years in my present church, overlapping one year with my teaching ministry). During this time, I founded *The Final Word*, a radio Bible teaching ministry.

I hold a BA degree in journalism (from West Virginia University Institute of Technology); a Th.M. in NT Literature and Exegesis from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a MA in Classics from the University of Colorado (Boulder). In my academic ministry I headed up the Division of Ministerial Studies for several years and have authored five books.

A scholar I am not, and though some regard me as an intellectual guy, more accurately I see myself as simply a thinking pastor who is devoted to and grounded in the Scriptures and unabashedly committed to a biblical worldview in the face of burgeoning secularism. I am well known to be unafraid to tell it like it (or how I think it is), much to the consternation of those who congenitally prefer the tip toe approach to most controversial or sensitive issues. On that score, I confess a generally low tolerance for those of a wimpy nature who are forever in self-protective mode, avoiding taking any forthright Christian or moral stance that might draw flak on themselves from the PC crowd or dissenting colleagues.

The sentiments expressed in this brief paper are views I have voiced in one way or another for years, to the applause of some, to the exasperation of others. For most of my teaching years, particularly in my seminary stint, I sometimes felt like a dog baying at the moon. For there I contended with some colleagues (and students) who held, shall we say, a less than high view of the pastoral ministry and would have preferred to see us do almost anything but 'preach the Word.' Not all by any stretch, but enough of those characters in the mix to make those years a trying experience and to tell me if we have these kinds of views circulating in a theologically conservative seminary, of all places, evangelicalism and the churches which these students are going to lead are in trouble.

Nothing I have seen or learned since 1990 has done anything to dissuade me of the correctness of my views. Things have only gotten worse, in my opinion.

So there, you know a little about me and where I am coming from.