"I Got It The First Time!"

by Harry Osborne

One of the oldest methods to attack teachers of truth is to falsely characterize them as preaching **only** on a given subject. Of course, the subject named by the accuser as the sole topic of concentration is often the same truth upon which the accuser wants nothing at all said. If a person is truly obsessed with a given topic, a quick examination of the record will verify the obsession so it can be rightly exposed. It is never right to concentrate on any topic to the exclusion of all else, not preaching "the whole counsel of God" as commanded (Acts 20:27). It is unjustifiable!

While it is true that some have actually been "hobby-riders," it is also true such charges have more often manifested a problem with the accuser than with the accused. Faithful preachers of the 1950's and 60's have been characterized by some as opposing institutionalism to the exclusion of other truth. Having heard such men during that period, the objective facts of weekly sermon topics listed in bulletins and sermon logs confirms my recollection – such charges are false. Did faithful preachers give numerous sermons on "the issues" of that day? Yes, they did indeed! They needed to do so with the growing errors of institutionalism (support of human institutions from the treasury of the church, sponsoring churches violating the Bible pattern of autonomy and the “social gospel” programs sponsored by the church). Did they neglect the whole counsel of God? Absolutely not, and any objective look at the facts will verify such! This writer learned and retains sermon notes on many topics supposedly "neglected" that were preached by brethren known for opposing the errors of institutionalism. Brother Jim Cope was certainly no "hobby-rider," but I recall his advice to me given on more than one occasion and repeated in numerous sermons: "The three laws of learning are repetition, repetition and repetition."

When one falsely charges that a single-issue hobby exists, though the objective record proves otherwise, we should ask ourselves why the accuser seeks to avoid the topic of objection. Is it a truth not believed by the accuser? Does it expose one's guilt or failure? Could it suggest a desire to compromise truth on that issue? Might it be seen as a topic that will not attract the numbers desired because it is deemed "negative" or unpopular by the majority? Might the objection be evidence of the accuser's pricked conscience as he actually knows he should have taught more fervently on the topic to which he now objects? Only the accuser and God know the answer with certainty, but time has a way of manifesting the probable reason for such accusations.

A few years ago, one critic objected to a series of classes on particular topic by retorting that he found no need for the class since it repeated things already covered. He remarked, "I got it the first time!" Over the years, faithful brethren have heard similar objections from those charging an obsession or hobby exists on a particular subject. Make no mistake about it, there are those who are hobby-riders as evidenced by an examination of their recorded teaching. However, the first sign of an inaccuracy with such charges is that the accusers differ with one another about the topic of obsession. I have heard the same teacher, said by some to be fixated on "Fellowship," be accused of only addressing the "Creation" issue. Just as strongly, others professed he made a hobby of "attendance" or the need for more Bible study. Another group affirmed the obsession was "Divorce & Remarriage," while additional people alleged it was really "modesty" or "social drinking" or "dancing" or another moral issue. On the other hand, denominational folks protested that he only preached on "baptism," "authority," "the plan of salvation," "the one true church," "the possibility of apostasy" or opposition to numerous denominational doctrines. So which was it? When considered, the list of claimed "hobbies" starts to suggest a pattern of preaching on a variety of topics rather than a one-issue obsession.

We should remember that we can warn repeatedly against current dangers and still preach the whole counsel of God. Acts 20 shows us this point. The same Paul who declared the whole counsel of God to those in Ephesus also said, *"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years* ***I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears****"* (Acts 20:31). Can one truthfully say we have not ceased in warnings night or day for three years concerning current threats to the faith? No one has done so, but let us suppose someone would so charge. **Paul did that very thing and still declared the whole counsel of God** (Acts 20:27). The problem is not that we have warned too much against present dangers, but that some disregard and ridicule legitimate warnings even when they are less frequent than was done in Bible times.

Repetition was characteristic of the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Jesus prayed the same thing to the Father three times (Matt. 26:36-44) and the Father did not respond, "I got it the first time." Jesus and His apostles dealt with the same subject repeatedly and such is recorded as approved examples of proper teaching. Three epistles are predominately given to refuting the Judaising teachers (2 Corinthians, Galatians, & Romans) not to mention its refutation in Acts. Multiple epistles and letters deal with the error of Gnosticism (1 John, 2 John, 3 John and Colossians). The Old Testament also has numerous books dealing with the same subject or period of history – some using exactly the same words. Why did Paul say, *"Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the* ***same things*** *to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe"* (Phil. 3:1)? How apropos was Galatians 1:9 following the same thing said in verse eight? How fitting is it that Proverbs 14:12 says the exact same thing as Proverbs 16:25? If repetition is not healthy in teaching, it is strange that the Spirit chose that means to emphasize points. Paul wrote the same things to the Thessalonians that he had preached while there (see 2 Thess. 2:5). Why? What is the implication of Hebrews 2:1 saying, *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them "*? Why give those topics more earnest heed if the reader "got it the first time" with no need of further consideration? What does it mean to put the brethren **in remembrance of "these things" (1 Tim. 4:6)? We are to put them in remembrance of the fact that the evils of 1 Timothy 4:1-4 will be fulfilled throughout the "latter times" and that we must constantly warn about those things. When one does so, some will say, "We got it the first time" and deride him as a bad preacher, while Paul says is a “good minister” for doing so (1 Tim. 4:6). The word of God is repetitious in repeating the need for repetition!**

**As a final thought, once the critic gives his objections to repeated teaching on subjects deemed of particular need or danger, we trust that he will forevermore cease his objections. After all, if he repeats his objections, he will have violated his own rule and we can merely smile and remind him, "We got it the first time!"**