

"I Got It The First Time!"

by Harry Osborne

One of the 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, for that is not preaching "the whole counsel of God" as commanded (Acts 20:27).

While it is true that some have actually been "hobby-riders," it is also true such charges often manifest a problem with the accuser rather 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 all other truth. Having heard such men during that period, my recollection, and the objective facts of weekly sermon topics listed in bulletins and sermon notes, refute the false charge. Did faithful preachers give numerous sermons on "The Issues" of that day? Yes, they did indeed! Did they need to do so given the urgent problem? Yes, it was essential! Did they neglect the whole counsel of God? Absolutely not, and any objective examination of the facts will verify that point. 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 for sure, but time has a way of manifesting the probable reason for such accusations.

Several years ago, one critic objected to an announced series on the subject of "Fellowship" by retorting that he found no need for the series, as it was a repetition of things covered before. As he put it, "I got it the first time!" We have heard similar objections from some charging this congregation with an obsession or hobby on a particular subject. The first problem encountered with such charges is the fact that the accusers differ with each other about the topic of obsession. Some have said it is "Fellowship" while others have claimed it is the "Creation" or "Evidences." Just as strongly, a few profess that we ride the hobbies of "Attendance," "Institutionalism" or the need for more Bible study. Others have affirmed the obsession is "Divorce and Remarriage," while other individuals have alleged it is really "Modesty" or "Social Drinking" or "Dancing" or another moral issue. On the other hand, our denominational friends have protested that we preach exclusively on "Baptism," "Bible Authority," the "Plan of Salvation," the "One True Church," the "Possibility of Apostasy" or opposition to another denominational doctrine. So which is 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.

Let us remember that we may 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 an individual teacher has not ceasing in warnings night or day for three years? To this point, I have known no one so charged, but let us suppose someone would do so. **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 subjects repeatedly as a brief survey of the Gospels and Acts will show. Those teachings are recorded as approved examples of proper teaching. Three epistles of Paul are predominately given to refuting the Judaizing teachers (2 Corinthians, Galatians, & Romans) not to mention its refutation in Acts and Hebrews. Multiple epistles and letters deal with the error of Gnosticism (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Colossians, etc.). In his second general epistle, the apostle Peter expressed a need for continued reminders of the things he had previously told his audience:

*“For this reason I will not be negligent to **remind** you always of these things, **though you know and are established in the present truth**. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by **reminding** you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you **always have a reminder** of these things after my decease”* (2 Pet. 1:12-15, emphasis mine HRO).

In fact, Peter goes on to note, *“Beloved, I now write to you **this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder)**, that you may **be mindful of the words which were spoken before** by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior”* (2 Pet. 3:1-2, emphasis mine HRO).

Furthermore, if teaching on a subject one time makes any further teaching on the matter useless or tediously repetitive, we might ask ourselves a few questions in light of biblical facts:

- 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 verse eight? If repetition is not healthy in teaching, it is strange that the Spirit chose that means to emphasize the point.
- Paul wrote the same things to the Thessalonians that he had preached while there (see 2 Thess. 2:5). Why write about the same thing again?
- 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 words of 1 Timothy 4:1-4 will be

fulfilled throughout the “latter times” and that we must constantly warn about those things, over and over again. When we do so, some may say, “We got it the first time” and call us bad ministers, while Paul says we will be good ones.

The truth is that the word of God is repetitious in repeating the need for repetition! The pattern of teaching that we are to follow exemplifies the need for repetition. It does not malign repetition or negate the need for such.

As a final thought, we trust that our detractors, after a single criticism, will cease forevermore their objections to repeated teaching on subjects we may deem of particular need or danger. After all, if they repeat their objections, they will violate their own rule and we can merely smile and remind them, “We got it the first time!”