

Is This What They Mean by *Balance*?

Dub McClish

Introduction

The Forest Hill congregation (FH) in Memphis, Tennessee, oversees and is the home of Memphis School of Preaching (MSOP), both of which have for years commanded my utmost respect, support, and commendation. Brother Barry Grider is the FH preacher and is also on the faculty of MSOP.

The Grider Article

On February 10, 2009, brother Grider published an article in *The Forest Hill News* titled, "I Got Used to It" (see www.foresthillcofc.org/bulletinarticles.html). It is evident from his article that he has "got used to" some things that he at one time had not "got used to" and that he did not learn to "get used to" from either the New Testament or from his instructors at MSOP several years ago.

To be fair, he stated several things in principle with which no faithful brother disagrees in the least. However, in applying those principles, he also said some things with which faithful brethren **will** disagree. Among other things, he sees no difference between praising God **for** the Holy Spirit (as in "Hallelujah, Thine the Glory") and in **directly addressing** the Spirit and praying **to** Him for His direct influence upon us (as in "Sweet, Sweet Spirit").

He mentioned that "some try to legislate" regarding our songs in worship. I am glad to know that he has read my 2007 Bellview Lectures chapter, "Building up the Church Through Singing." It cannot be a mere coincidence that he specifically denies some of the principles I affirmed and even named some of the same songs I used as illustrations therein. As further indicated below, his long-held and deep-seated animosity toward me triggers his pop-off valve ever so often. It thus appears that his sweet, loving, jovial demeanor is a mere facade, covering a hateful, vindictive heart that will cause him to be lost if he does not repent. The Lord is not pleased with "hateful birds" (Rev. 18:2).

Further, he creates a straw man of those "resistant to any kind of change" and condescendingly judges them to be of "weak faith." It is not that some of us are "resistant to any kind of change," but that some of us are still resistant to **certain kinds** of change, such as singing a Pentecostal song directed to the Holy Spirit demonstrates. Are we to infer that brother

Grider is no longer “resistant to any kind of change”? Is this what he and his cohorts mean by their use of the word *balance* since 2005?

The Young Article

Even more telling than his own article is the article he printed, with obvious endorsement, immediately following his own essay. He prefaced this article, “Binding Where God Has Not,” by Tyler Young, with the following editor’s note: “The following article is an excerpt of material prepared by brother Young for the 2008 Lubbock Lectureship.” It is noteworthy, however, that he failed to tell readers that Tommy Hicks, Lubbock Lectures Director, had **edited this material from Young’s MS because of sore disagreement with it**. In spite of knowing of this disagreement, Young impudently delivered the excised passages orally at the lectureship anyway, much to the chagrin of Hicks and his elders. His doing so provoked a public rebuke by Hicks and an immediate stream of questions from various ones who heard the speech. Hicks’s elders were so concerned about this lecture that they had it removed in its entirety from the recordings so that no one who heard them could infer that the Southside church endorsed Young’s comments.

As in brother Grider’s article, there is much in brother Young’s essay with which all faithful brethren will agree. However, in his comments (endorsed by Grider, but rejected by Hicks, remember), he questions whether we should have fellowship concerns about various practices that faithful brethren must question seriously. According to Young, such things as using the NIV for teaching and preaching, dismissing Sunday evening worship in favor of small group meetings or for the Super Bowl, serving coffee and doughnuts in Bible classes, or missing a meeting of the church to compete in a sporting event should not be considered signs of liberalism and should not affect fellowship. Space forbids further elaboration, but these comments indicate the “flavor” of the article. I applaud brother Hicks and the Southside elders for refusing to publish and endorse this material. I encourage readers to read the entire article. The point just here is that brother Grider gave this article his imprimatur; **he is in full agreement with it**.

The Infamous “Circle” Article

However, brother Grider was not through. Immediately following the Young article, he printed an article that has been around for many years, titled “I Drew My Circle Again.” It mocks the concept of recognizing fellowship restrictions. While the Lord’s people should not be self-righteously judgmental, this little ditty implies that one should make no judgments at all.

Of course, the only justifiable basis anyone has for drawing lines of fellowship, whether circular, triangular, square, rectangular or any other shape, is where the Lord has drawn them in His Word. I kindly suggest to brother Grider that he needs to draw that circle yet again. Over the past several years, it is obvious that he has considerably enlarged his circle. It seems to be much larger now than it was in the mid 1990s, and it seems be getting larger all the time. It has certainly grown larger than the Lord's "circle" (Rom. 16:17-18; Eph. 5:11; Tit. 3:10; 2 John 9-11).

The only ones I have seen publish this little "Circle" piece over the years are folks who are much more broadminded than the Lord, mostly rank liberals and denominationalists. A quick Internet search as I wrote these words located the "Circle" treatise on the Websites of a Christadelphian, a Nazarene, two Baptists, and three other churches of Christ. Ironically, one of them is the liberal Germantown, Tennessee, congregation, which is "just around the corner" from FH/MSOP, with which they have no fellowship. I assume that brother Grider knew exactly what he was doing when he printed the "Circle" note.

What Will the Forest Hills Elders Do?

In light of the above, what will the FH elders do? Do they agree with and stand behind their preacher in these articles? If they do, they have seriously altered their views concerning some of the things their preacher either said in his article, endorsed in Young's article, and/or implied in the "Circle" article. Is this what they mean by *balance*?

I had the privilege of delivering the 1998 MSOP graduation address. In my remarks, I addressed not only the students. I also specifically cautioned and reminded the FH elders to be vigilant for any drifting in their convictions and/or direction, noting that if brethren began seeing signs of compromise in them, it would destroy the school's and the congregation's great influence for good. They, as well as the faculty, expressed great appreciation for my remarks at the time. (The tape of that speech is probably still stuck away in some dark and forgotten corner of a cabinet in the FH media room, unless someone has remembered [since mid-2005] to destroy it.)

Will the FH elders issue a disclaimer statement relative to the Grider/Young article? If they do not, surely, many are going to have grave concerns about their (and MSOP's) implied endorsement of it and about their sincerity and steadfastness in the faith. Their silence will only compound the sore disappointment of many concerning their fellowship compromises since the summer of 2005 and will make the cloud over the congregation and the school even darker and

larger than it has already developed. I suspect the Grider material has already provoked quite a stir among alumni who earnestly want FH and MSOP to be faithful to the Truth (as we all do). Is the Grider/Young article what these “balanced” brethren mean by *balance*?

What Will MSOP Do?

Does brother Bobby Liddell, Director of MSOP, endorse these articles and all of their implications? Do brother Grider’s fellow faculty members at MSOP endorse the Grider/Young articles? Do they agree that all versions “are permissible for teaching and preaching” and those who oversee teachers or preachers have no Scriptural right (not to mention responsibility) to prescribe which versions shall (and shall not) be used? Does the school have any right to declare itself on the versions issue? A few years ago, it was not bashful to do so. In the twenty-one consecutive years (1985–2005) that I spoke on the MSOP Lectures, instructions to the speakers stated explicitly that we were to use only the KJV or the ASV (1901) in both MS and presentation (a policy with which I fully concur and which I also followed for all of the twenty-one Annual Denton Lectures I directed [1982–2002]). I assume this same policy at one time obtained for the students at MSOP. Does this policy still prevail? If it does, is brother Grider aware of it? (Freed- Hardeman University had its versions controversy in 1977, and it has apparently all but fully relaxed its restrictions in this regard. Does the Grider/Young article signal the beginning of a version controversy at MSOP?)

At one time in recent years, all of the MSOP faculty considered as liberals those who teach and preach from such modern versions as the TEV, NEB, NIV, and others like them of more recent vintage (they even looked down their noses at those who used the RSV and NASB). They doubtless likewise labeled the congregations that had such versions in their pews and classrooms. Further, MSOP has long endorsed brother Robert Taylor’s excellent book, *Challenging Dangers of Modern Versions*, in which he exposes the perversions of several of the pseudo-versions of the Bible. Does MSOP still agree with brother Robert Taylor’s conclusions on this subject (and do the FH elders still agree with them)? Do the FH elders have one versions policy for their pulpit, but a different one for the MSOP classrooms? Do the elders now allow brother Grider to preach from the version of his choice in the FH pulpit, but when he steps across the driveway to teach his MSOP courses, do they require him to use only the KJV or the ASV? (If they have separate policies, lectureship week must drive them crazy as the FH pulpit is in constant use by MSOP speakers. Which policy will they follow?)

Are the students now taught that when they enter their preaching work, they should turn a blind eye if the decision-makers in the congregation decide to dismiss Sunday evening worship for home meetings or the Super Bowl, as Young's article suggests? Will these young preachers allow members where they preach to forsake the assembly in favor of a sporting event without a word against it? Will brother Liddell issue a disclaimer statement relative to the Grider/Young article? If he doesn't do so, must we not conclude that he is in agreement with its contents? Is this what these brethren mean by *balance*?

The New Gospel Journal—Some Implications

The Grider material raises some interesting questions relative to *The New Gospel Journal*, which underwent another rather drastic shakeup as of January 1, 2009. The combined November–December 2008 issue of *TNGJ* (which arrived in mailboxes in mid-March) announced the resignations of Grider and his fellow-editor (since August 2005), brother John Moore. In their place, the paper announced that brother Curtis Cates is the new editor as of January, relinquishing his role as TGJ, Inc., board president, held since 1999. John Moore was added to the board, joining Ratcliff (president, treasurer, and business manager), Hicks (secretary), and Paul Sain (added to the board several months ago). In his departing editorial, brother Grider made sure readers understood his indispensability to *TNGJ* by stating that he would continue to serve as an “adviser” to the board and the new editor.

Tommy Hicks, who refused to publish Young's material because he considered it Scripturally unjustifiable, could not have appreciated Grider's endorsement and publication of Young's material. Hicks would not be the first board member to have cause for such trepidation about Grider's convictions. however. Ratcliff, Hicks's fellow board member, objected to similar material from Grider in 2003. During my tenure as editor of *The Gospel Journal* (1/2000–7/2005), I published an article by brother Grider (9/2003) in which he made statements similar to, but not as far-reaching as, the ones in his recent F-H bulletin article. Some of his comments made me wonder at the time, but with no previous negative “vibes” otherwise from him, I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. Ratcliff, however, did more than merely wonder about his statements. He was much displeased with Grider's article when he got the paper, so much so that **he insisted on a disclaimer in the next issue.**

I discussed the matter with brother Cates, TGJ board president and director (at the time) of MSOP, and he talked to brother Grider about it, suggesting he write a statement of clarification. He refused, saying he stood by what he had written as he wrote it (which then got

my attention more fully). Accordingly, brother Cates and I worded the following disclaimer for the next issue:

Our September issue carried an excellent article, titled "Jesus' Prayer for Unity," by Barry Grider, whom I hold in the highest esteem as a devout and faithful brother. In his article he issued a caution about allowing undue suspicion to become a barrier to Biblical unity – a caution well taken. A few of our readers have thought that some might get the impression he was somehow encouraging the adoption of the three practices he used as illustrations (i.e., projecting hymns on a screen, moving the time of midweek service because of a holiday, or allowing a mechanical instrument to be used in the building to accompany secular songs in weddings). These few have further been concerned that *The Gospel Journal* might have left that impression as well by printing the article. Neither impression was intended. The point was simply made that these practices in another congregation should not, **in and of themselves**, be causes of disunity, even though we would not personally encourage their adoption. While granting that many brethren are not nearly as suspicious as they should be about various grievous errors and their purveyors, it is possible to fall into the radicalism of being overly suspicious. This was the point of the illustrations, with which *The Gospel Journal* agrees completely.

When Tommy Hicks proofread the October 2003 issue with the disclaimer, he sent a pre-publication copy of it to Ken Ratcliff, since he was the one who had suggested the need for it. The statement was not strong enough to suit Ratcliff, so he submitted the following in its place:

Our September issue carried an excellent article, titled "Jesus' Prayer for Unity," by Barry Grider. In his article he issued a caution about allowing undue suspicion to become a barrier to Biblical unity – a caution well taken. It has been asked whether the article approves of the three practices he used as illustrations (i.e., projecting hymns on a screen, moving the time of midweek service because of a holiday, or allowing a mechanical instrument to be used in the building to accompany secular songs in a wedding). To many, a wedding ceremony is a religious service when conducted in the church building by a preacher. Even if instruments are only used with secular songs, it can easily be assumed that the church therefore approves of instruments in a worship service. Also, the changing of the time of a mid-week service because of holidays, sports activities, etc. may be an indication of our real priorities. However, the basic point of the article is that we must exercise caution against undue suspicion. While granting that many brethren are not nearly as suspicious as they should be about various grievous errors and their purveyors, it is possible to fall into the radicalism of being overly suspicious. This was the point of the article, with which *The Gospel Journal* agrees completely.

Note that he particularly **removed the commendation of brother Grider** that brother Cates and I had included, as well as making the disclaimer much more specific. Ken's wording was OK by me, and we ran it in the October issue. (Thinking that I was behind the disclaimer and its wording, I strongly suspect that I have been in the Grider "doghouse" ever since, which animosity he has openly indicated on various occasions since July 2005. Now that he knows who was responsible for the disclaimer, will Ratcliff now will be in his "doghouse"?) Obviously, Ratcliff had a considerable problem with brother Grider's statements at the time, so much so that he could not bring himself to commend him in the disclaimer. Hicks's objections to Young's material that he excised, endorsed by Grider, are basically the same as Ratcliff's were to Grider's 2003 article relating to the convictions expressed. Furthermore, from the foregoing material, it is obvious that Hicks was fully aware of, and apparently agreed with, Ratcliff's concerns as expressed in the disclaimer. In spite of these facts, both seemingly were content to turn *The New Gospel Journal* over to him in August 2005, demonstrating thereby either blatant hypocrisy or a drastic change in their convictions. Politics indeed makes strange bedfellows, whether in government or in the church.

According to the Grider announcement in the November-December issue of *TNGJ*, he will remain in an "advisory capacity" to the board and the new editor, thus still closely associated with the paper and its principals. Will this latest Grider article stir Ratcliff's 2003 concerns anew, or has he swallowed those (and others) so long ago he can no longer taste them? Will Hicks be able to keep a lid on his pride at Grider's implied rebuff in printing – with endorsement – that which he (Hicks) refused to publish? If Hicks could not stand Young's material, how can he possibly stomach Grider's? Will Hicks and Ratcliff now get together and call upon new editor Cates to publish a disclaimer regarding new "advisor" Grider's article, as Ratcliff did in 2003 when Grider was only a lowly writer? Do Ratcliff and Hicks have any convictions left on these issues that they once counted grave? Verily, the mess and maze of political loyalties and compromises that has surfaced among these brethren since July 2005 rivals the long- standing mess of advice, consent, and compromise in Washington D.C.

If they call for a disclaimer, will the other half of TNGJ's board agree? Brother Moore might not take too kindly to embarrassing his former co-editor. Brother Sain has not always had the highest opinion of Hicks, calling him a "liar" in one heated phone conversation over a grievously late MS a few years ago. If the board splits on the disclaimer, will editor Cates, still closely associated with FH and MSOP, and thus with Grider, be able to palliate the

understandable indignation Ratcliff and Hicks must be feeling toward Grider, and thus avoid the disclaimer? If the board fails to issue a disclaimer, must not readers of *TNGJ* rightly conclude that **the board and its new editor agree with the things both Grider and Young wrote**? Perhaps it's time for brother Cates once again to remind the board that "if they all don't hang together, they will all hang separately," as he did in another *TGJ* crisis a few years ago. Is this what *The New Gospel Journal* folks mean by *balance*?

Conclusion

Brother Grider's publication of the "Circle" is but the latest symptom of religious evolution in him and his cohorts that, unlike the Darwinian sort, is **not** taking eons to demonstrate and continue its development. It began to manifest itself in earnest around 2005 when they decided to put monetary, friendship, family, and/or brotherhood political interests ahead of the Gospel Truth and its fellowship demands (Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11). However, the seeds of such behavior must have long been lying latent, just awaiting the right circumstance to call them to the surface. Men do not make such radical reversals of conviction and behavior instantaneously. If the FH elders, the MSOP director, and The Gospel Journal board observe the "passover" regarding the Grider/Young article, they will all have proved their utter hypocrisy by continuing to profess concern for sound doctrine and Scriptural fellowship. We will thereby have further vivid proof of what they mean by *balance*.

[NOTE: This article appeared in the April 2009 issue of *Contending for the Faith*, David P. Brown, editor.]

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