

“Dumbing Down” the Message

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Paul stated a wonderfully simple and obvious analogy in 1 Corinthians 13:11:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things.

His application of this analogy is to the “childhood” of the church, which needed miraculous gifts to confirm that the inspired men were from God (Heb. 2:3–4). When the church could attain spiritual maturity through God’s completed revelation, she would no longer have—or need—the spiritual gifts belonging to her “childhood.”

In principle, this analogy is also applicable to individuals. Those things which one might be expected to do or say as an immature babe in Christ should be “put away” as one matures. One who persists in speaking and/or behaving in ways belonging to childhood after he should have attained some degree of maturity simply advertises his spiritual retardation.

Some preachers (though well educated) insist on talking and writing as children. I read articles from time to time that use downright “silly” phrases purely for effect. One expects such expressions from adolescents, but when they come from grown men, they sound puerile indeed. Some seem to delight in projecting a “countrified” image, preferring the “slanguage” of illiterates to the correct use of language which the Sacred Message deserves in its transmission. They intentionally employ the vulgar *ain’t* and incorrect verb tenses (e.g., “He don’t know which way’s up.”). They seem to think it clever to use incomplete sentences. If such fellows were educationally deprived, such things would be understandable. However, the men I am describing are anything but illiterate. They stoop to this ignoble convention altogether gratuitously—I suppose for the image they seek to project.

I have read and heard the expression, *God don’t make no junk*, several times over the past few years. The statement is apparently intended to convey the fact that every human being is of great worth because God created us, and that which He creates is valuable. This fact is especially true of mankind, whom God made in His image and placed in control of all other life forms. However, I cannot appreciate such a juvenile, ungrammatical, ridiculous, yea crude, way of expressing this lofty and ennobling truth. It blemishes the reality and beauty of the very concept it is intended to convey. It is silliness gone to seed.

I once read an article in a church bulletin describing some of God's wonderful blessings, upon which the writer concluded, "Ain't God good?" By such a crass and boorish expression, the writer all but ruined the things he had written about God's blessings.

Even when we do our best to speak correctly and with the dignity the message of God deserves, we will make some mistakes. However, I fail to understand the mentality of those who intentionally "dumb down" the terms with which they attempt to communicate the glorious Gospel. One does not find the inspired writers, who got their messages directly from Deity, so speaking! Ought we not to so speak and write that, to the best of our knowledge and abilities, we "adorn the doctrine of God" (Tit. 2:10), rather than detracting from it by ridiculous and silly expressions?

[**Note:** I wrote this article for the "Editor's Clippings" column, and it was published in the January 2001 issue of *The Gospel Journal*, of which I was editor at the time.]

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