

## Communicating the Truth in the University – Dan Rudman

While my primary ministry is not on a university campus, living in a city shadowed by a major university does give me ample opportunity to interact with the university environment. Further, in everyday conversations, it does not take long to see that the influence of the ideologies being pumped out of the university has a direct affect on the society at large. One cannot engage in any meaningful conversation, whether businessman, tradesman, or housewife without realizing that the current university ideas have influenced the mainstream. As one who is interested in proclaiming the truth to a secular society, it becomes clear one must learn to be a student of the culture if we ever hope to influence and be understood.

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This has serious implications for the evangelical church. I have sat with many evangelicals and engaged in many conversations, which confirmed to me why our message has become so marginalized to the modern secular mind. For example, I was recently with some pastors as I attempted to explain that the statement “Jesus is the only way,” is interpreted by the secular society as narrow, pompous, and arrogant. One pastor retorted, “If it was good enough for Jesus then it is good enough for me!” I understand what that dear pastor was attempting to say, but as all exegetes and messengers of God’s Word know, “context” is critical. And this becomes increasingly critical in light of a society that does not “think” or “communicate” within our accepted framework. As Martin Luther once wrote:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. .

And if there was ever a time to grasp and understand “that little point,” it is now.

### We Must Understand the Not So “little point” of Our Culture

For one to truly become a Christian, the human mind has to grasp the reality of “real” truth, “real” guilt, and “real” history. In simple terms, the human need for forgiveness and redemption is very real, not just a story or psychological maneuvering. Further, the realities of a space-time history where Jesus was a real person, died a real blood drenching death, and actually came back to life are all true events in history. These are as real and true as the birth of the one reading this article.

However, dominating university life and saturating the society at large is an ideology that there is no real or absolute truth. “Truth” is simply opinion and relative. These presuppositions further result in a view that history is very suspect and cannot be depended upon. The result is a secularized modern man fragmented and truly lost. And, sadly, the problem for the modern evangelical communicator does not stop with the fact of just knowing of this falsehood. The problem is far greater as, like the pastor mentioned above, we often lack the understanding of how this affects the listening ear of the secular person and how pervasive this system of

thinking has permeated the Church.

Given the understanding of the secular person's current thinking, the messenger must work with an insight to the presuppositions of the audience (whether that is one or 1000). In this case, when it is understood that a modern person sincerely believes (albeit false) that truth is relative and no one has the corner of the market on truth, then when the messenger of the Gospel says, "Jesus is the only way," or perhaps even "there are absolutes" the secular listener interprets this as extremely arrogant and antiquated. The preacher no longer has an audience!

What we fail to grasp is that the truth we seek to proclaim is often locked within a framework of words, terminology, and ideas that are "removed" from the modern man. For example, after nearly two decades of traveling and spending time with ministers from virtually every corner of the world, within a few moments of conversation I can typically guess (with fair accuracy) the denomination and theological persuasion of the minister with whom I am conversing. It is not uncommon for me to know within moments my brother or sister is from the Bible belt, probably a Baptist, and thinks sweet tea is manna from heaven! All joking aside, our use of words and means of communication reveal a great deal.

With this, it becomes important to understand that the typical modern person generally has a faulty understanding of how we arrive at real "truth." As evangelicals, we often want to pound our fist about absolutes (which are accurate in the real world God created), however when we demand, "truth is absolute" or "Jesus is the only way," we need to understand how the modern person interprets what we have just said. Notice I said interprets! Often, we are so caught in our isolated system of communication we do not consider how our listener(s) interpret what we say. Truly, when we expound to the modern person the statement, "Jesus is the only way," what they just heard us communicate was "I (with a very large 'I') have life figured out and I have the answer. Everything and everyone else is wrong!" Notice, this may not be what I meant to convey but this is what they heard me communicate. From their perspective, I am arrogant! They just shut me out!

We have to learn to listen and understand how the mind of our audience works, also known as their presuppositions. It is at this point that we must learn to communicate the Gospel. For example, I just had an interview with a 24-year-old journalist from Brazil. Truly a delightful young woman, within moments of our conversation she was trying to be "tolerant" with her views of morality. Her presupposition was that morality is personal and defined individually. I questioned her about the difference between Adolph Hitler and Mother Teresa. She flatly said there was no difference, they each had to determine morality for themselves and one was not more true than the other. I then asked her, "Okay, do you desire to have children one day?" 'Oh yes' she responded. I asked her, "If your little girl needs a babysitter who would you honestly call, Hitler or Teresa?" I emphasized, "Truly, tonight, who would you call?" She saw my point. If we fail to learn to do this type of work in our communication, the modern person will not stick around long enough to even hear our message. As Francis Schaeffer predicted three decades ago, "If we do not understand it [that is, these presuppositions] then we are largely talking to ourselves." (The God Who is There, p. 11) Sadly, I believe that this has already

occurred.

Whether it is in open-air conversation or private, I am confronted regularly with the need to understand this dynamic of modern man. For example, when challenged as to how a Christian can claim, "Jesus is the only way," I simply say, "Jesus is NOT the only way!" That is right, I say "NOT the only way!" This typically gets many puzzled looks as I go on to explain that if a person could be perfectly righteous, perfectly holy, not a speck of injustice in their actions or thought life they would go straight to heaven. They would not have a need to be rescued. Done issue! However, I then go on to explain my own "real" humanness and thus my own "real" guilt. I explain my need for mercy and the need to be rescued by something beyond just a belief or opinion. It does not take long to then speak of the reality of a "real" flesh and blood Savior on a "real" wooden cross who can rescue me from the mess I have created by my own nature and personal choices. I suggest that their life is probably the same! Often this leads to their response that history is suspect and "How can we know what happened way back then?" At that point I simply pick some obvious event from our recent historical past- like slavery in America. I suggest that slavery may not have occurred. After a few skeptical and whimsical looks, I simply ask, "How do they know slavery happened- they were not there?" I rarely have a person that does not immediately understand the point I am making. Further, I may tell them that when they are a grandparent and they explain the truth of slavery to their grandkids, the fact that it is now another 40 years removed does not change the fact of the matter. The discussion moves on.

#### This Impacts the Way in Which We Communicate about Spiritual Awakening

While the points I am making have great value for evangelism and communication to the modern man, it seems that it also has significant ramifications for the evangelical world as we try to communicate about spiritual awakening. We must realize that most modern believers have also been influenced by this modern secular way of thinking. Though they often state the right propositional facts, often their process of thinking carries with it the same presuppositions as the unbeliever. In our good-hearted attempt to call for "revival" it may look more like pounding our fists and speaking louder rather than realizing our current communication seems antiquated, and frankly irrelevant and misunderstood. The idea of "revival" to the modern Christian (most who have grown up with the false understandings of truth and history), and especially those on a modern university campus, sounds more like a manipulative yelling event, held in a tent, and void of any real substance! In other words, we live in a new world with a new generation that has an entirely different understanding of truth, history, and the words in which we speak. We cannot make assumptions about our terminology and our theology. If revival is a true Biblical and historic description of a return of God's people to truth and a corporate Spirit-filled life, and I believe it is, then our call must be communicated clearly- in context to which the current modern Christian can understand.

This becomes very critical as Biblically and historically the call to God's people has been a call to return back to God. In every case, somewhere along the line God's people have embraced a false "idol(s)" which results in an abandonment of the true God. In essence, the call is always

about repentance. However, given the current way in which most modern Christians actually think, the question has to be asked “What do we mean by repentance?” and “From what are we calling them to turn away from?” This is where the modern secular ideas of truth and history come to bear. We must understand the current culture and from “what” the modern Christian must return. I believe this return goes far deeper than just immorality, but a return to a rational understanding of truth in the reality that God has created. Once again, it will be our ability to communicate and deal with presuppositions that help God’s people understand and return to Him.

Further, once we help God’s people understand the deception and loss of “real” truth, we must call them to return to a historic Christian faith. This is a critically important point! We must help the modern believer understand that we are talking about “trust” in real history and the real God, who exists and has made himself known in real historic time and space. Amongst a host of other errant teachings that have absolutely saturated the modern evangelical church, there must be a return to a sound theological understanding of Biblical faith versus the modern and eastern mystical idea of a metaphysical faith, (that is, if I believe something strongly enough- poof! - it happens!) Faith then is trusting, not in one’s ability to believe, but in the historical facts of the God who is really there.

#### The University has a Key Role in the Future of Spiritual Awakening

This is where our longing for revival and the university seem to play such a significant role in the future for true spiritual awakening. In addition to the fact that the university really is our next generation of families and leaders, the campus is also the center for ideas. Without the university, I doubt very much the modern false ideas of truth and history could have been propagated to the extent they have. As Martin Luther propounded, it seems quite clear that, “. . . [the] point which the world and the devil are at [this] moment attacking” is a proper understanding of truth and history. And this deception, though now in the mainstream of society, is primarily being delivered by the university academy. If we are to see spiritual awakening in this time of history, it only stands to reason that in a very real sense, at least a part of the needed call for revival, will take into account this plague on the universities and seek to communicate in a means the modern Christian can understand. Our communication, still spoken with all the passion of a prophet, must take into account the current presuppositions and call the modern Christian back to a historic understanding of truth, “humanness,” history and good theology.