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HE DON'T LOOK RIGHT

Time for some unabashed name dropping. I am a cousin to Missy Robertson. Yes, the Missy Robertson who is married to Jase Robertson of the immensely popular television show, "Duck Dynasty." For those who have not seen the show on the A&E network or online, "Duck Dynasty" is a television "reality" show about the Robertson family, who have made a fortune producing duck calls. Very little of the show is about the manufacture of the duck calls, however. It is about the funny situations families can get themselves into, and out of. Willie, the businessman in camouflage, is either coming up with a harebrained idea or rescuing big brother Jase from one. Their father Phil dispenses redneck wisdom and tries to turn his "yuppie" granddaughters into redneck hunters. Through it all Phil's wife, Ms. Kay, holds the family together, mostly with food. Every show ends with a prayer around a huge family dinner table.

The producers of "Duck Dynasty" once kept in the reference to Jesus in Phil's family prayer. They rarely show the family at church, and only occasionally allow references to faith. Yet this is a very faithful family. Phil and (unbearded) son Alan are elders of the White's Ferry Road church of Christ in West Monroe, Louisiana. Willie is an excellent preacher, with great faith and knowledge of the scriptures. Missy's parents are a driving force behind "We Care Ministries" (see "We Care" in Minutes With Messiah, February 2012).

All that is background. If you have watched the show, you may have noticed that Phil, the patriarch, sometimes comes across as a bit crude. In some parts of the country people might ask, "This is an elder in the church?" And that brings me to the point of this article. God puts many different kinds of people in the church. Phil Robertson might say they are "rednecks or yuppies." The apostle Paul said, "Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, and female." (Gal 3:28) Not everyone will be somebody's idea of what is appropriate. Why, there are even sinners in the church! Just because somebody offends my Victorian sensibilities doesn't mean they are wrong. What some may consider crude language may be what others need to hear, to realize that they can become Christians, too. What others may consider prudish may be appropriate for a separate group of potential converts. If we did not have all

different kinds of people, the church would be a country club, not a church.

But what of the elders? Shouldn't they be held to a higher standard? Granted, a long beard and a head scarf are not what most people think of when they picture leaders in the church. But those things are externals. In Titus 1, Paul didn't insist that elders wear dark suits. In 1 Timothy 3 he did not require a man to be clean shaven, or even neatly trimmed. The qualities Paul lists in those places have to do with what a man is and what he believes, not how he looks or talks.

Sometimes we call those passages the "qualifications" for elders. Some seem to think once a man meets these qualifications and is named an elder, he is an elder for life. If his children later prove to be unfaithful or he rejects the clear teaching of the Bible, he can remain in his leadership role. He once met the qualifications, so he is an elder until he chooses to quit.

On the other hand, sometimes we expect our elders and preachers to be what they are not, and cannot be. We have put Paul on such a pedestal that when he calls himself the "chief of sinners" we say he must have been talking about his former life. Preachers can't have arguments with their wives or yell at their children. Elders cannot say things that might sound earthy. Our leaders and teachers must be perfect, even if we are not. Maybe because we are not.

What you see of Phil Robertson on television might not be the perfect elder, by some people's standards. But don't be fooled by an editor's scissors, or a long beard. Even the editors cannot cut out the man's faith in God. Yes, I would love to meet my cousin's father-in-law and shake his hand. And not just because his beard looks a lot like mine.

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WORD

“Words, words, words! I’m so sick of words.” When Eliza Doolittle sings this in “My Fair Lady” she is asking a young man to show her, rather than tell her of, his love. Certainly the world is full of empty words. A person may “give my word” and then not fulfill the promise. We are assaulted by so many words in advertisements that the products that get attention are the ones that don’t use words, or use the fewest. Even in writing articles for a print newsletter like “Minutes With Messiah,” one has to worry about word count. And yet, words are not always negative. In scripture we find times when a word or a few words are very important.

Creation

In the beginning there was God. He spoke, and there was creation. All from a word. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” God, word, creation.

As you read the Genesis account of the creation it becomes clear how powerful a word can be. In the Hebrew, some of the times that God spoke something into being, the “let there be xxx” is one word (*ma’owr*: Let there be lights). Sometimes it is two words (*Asah Adam*:

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Let us create man). Regardless of how many words, God spoke and it was so.

If the whole universe, everything we can experience, came from just a few words spoken by God, what are the implications for us? Perhaps those implications can be reduced to three words: power, creator, end.

Power. If a single word from God has power, what in our comprehension is more powerful than God? What do we need to worry about? The God who can speak worlds into being is able to take care of us. If he can create with a word, surely he can provide for us with just a word. Jesus concluded a section of what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount (although it may be a compilation of several sermons) saying:

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after

all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day [is] the evil thereof. (Matt 6:31-34)

Creator. If everything we know was spoken into existence by God, then he is the creator of all. The creation is not greater than the creator. What in all creation need we fear? “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:38-39)

Governments, economies, and people are all creations of God. While he may not control every little detail of his creation, God has his eye on all. If any part of his creation threatens the ultimate well-being of one of his followers, he is able to step in and take action. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28)

End. The creator has the power to undo what he has made. “Then I went down to the potter’s house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.” (Jer 18:3-4) If the potter can destroy or remake a vessel, how much more so can God destroy his creation, or remake it. If you are reading this, you know that the world did not end on December 21, 2012 as some predicted it would. Nevertheless, God can bring this world to an end whenever he chooses. That is a scary thought to some; to those who belong to God it should be a promise of better things to come.

Jesus said this should be a comfort to those who follow God. The one who can speak creation into existence is the one who can speak those who threaten his people out of existence. “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt 10:28)

Law

The same One who could create worlds with few words also created a Law the same way. In fact, some of the rabbis say that when God spoke the Ten

Commandments on Sinai, he actually spoke all ten as a single word. Complexity in simplicity.

How often do we use a multiplicity of words in order to express, or fail to express, or even obfuscate, an otherwise simple construct of human mentality? Translation: Don't we sometimes use too many words, making our thoughts less clear? When God had something important to say to the Jewish people, he did it in one (or ten) words.

When we teach others, do we teach in words they understand, or do we use "religion-speak"? Do we speak of repentance or of changing. Do we talk about atonement or justification rather than being forgiven? Do we speak of God's grace or favor when people would understand love better? The jargon of Christianity could fill a small dictionary, but confuses or scares away some people. Which is easier to say, and understand: Because of God's grace he sent his only begotten son as an atoning sacrifice so that anyone who has faith in him will not face eternal punishment but have an eternal existence with God; or "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only birth-son to that those who trust in him won't die, but rather live forever"? (Jn 3:16)

Even worse, do we take the simplicity of the word of God and make it into a complex set of laws. Faith Comes By Hearing is an organization that is dedicated to getting the Bible into the hands of people in their "heart language." They just send out audio Bibles. There is no need to send commentaries or preachers, because people who hear the Bible can learn what God expects of them. We don't need to make lists of sins and good deeds (although Paul was known to do just that on occasion). If we are to evangelize the world (tell the world about God's good news) all we really need to do is give a person a reason to read or hear the Bible, give them a Bible, and stand back.

Spirit

The apostle John used "word" to describe Jesus. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Jn 1:1) In that way he ties Jesus to the creation, which was also "in the beginning" and with words. Years before John wrote his gospel, however, Paul associated "word" with the Holy Spirit. "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which [Spirit] is the word of God." (Eph 6:17) (Greek grammar makes it very clear that the word is the Spirit rather than the sword; as does English grammar, though most people ignore it.)

The Bible is often described as the word of God, which it is. In doing so, however, we have restricted the word to the written (or spoken) page. The word of God is much more than that. Since the word is the Spirit of God, much as our own word express our inner being, the

"word" cannot be limited to what we read or hear. The Bible, and the accompanying indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is an manifestation of who God is, of His essence.

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor 3:16) If the Spirit is the word, then the Spirit dwells in you by the word, and the word dwells in you by the Spirit. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col 3:16) Some people say our worship has no spirit in it. If we are letting the Spirit/Word dwell in us richly, then we are compelled to teach in song from the heart. If we are merely singing, without the intent of teaching and admonishing, then there is no spirit in worship.

How does the Spirit dwell in us? By our taking of the word into our lives fully. The Spirit dwells in us only in proportion to how much we study the Bible. We study the Bible only in proportion to how much we allow the Spirit to dwell in us. Note that the statement said "study

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the Bible," not "read the Bible." Many people have read the Bible without ever taking in the word. Some read the Bible to dispute it; others because they expect doing so to count as some sort of merit, fulfilling an obligation without demanding understanding. A historian is not a person who casually reads books about history; until one includes study and analysis one cannot be called a historian. In the same way, until one gets into the word the word will not get into that person.

Once a person takes the word of God into the inner being, the Word begins to yield benefits. By knowing the word, one knows God. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." (1 Cor 2:11) Furthermore, the Word speaks for us when we have no words of our own. "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Rom 8:26)

Like Eliza, we may get sick of words. But without words from God, we wouldn't even be here to get sick.

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

View 1:

I was dead and buried. The old man is dead and now I walk in a new life. It is a life of following Christ. I am happy in this new life. But the old man I was does not want to stay dead long. I want him to stay dead, but he is a zombie. I have to keep putting him to death.

Some people don't believe in zombies. They think that once a person is dead, he is dead. Once the old man has been buried (although many don't believe in burial) he cannot come back. After all, Paul says in Romans 6 that the newly living don't act like dead men.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (Rom 6:3-6)

This is the same Paul, though, that describes, in chapter 7, his struggles with the old man. That old man keeps wanting to come back. That is the same Paul that says, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." (1 Cor 9:27, NIV)

The old, buried man wants to come back to life. After all, I inhabit his body. This flesh in which I live belongs to him. He holds a lien on this house, and wants to evict me. The old landlord does not like the new tenant.

We must always be on guard against zombies. Most particularly, I should be on guard against the zombie that is me. I have to keep him dead until the apocalypse.

View 2:

I was dead. Now I am undead.

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members [as] instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (Rom 6:11-13)

It is now my obligation, my calling, to make others undead, too. My goal is the zombie apocalypse, when all those who think they are living become undead, like me. They say the zombie apocalypse will come when zombies reach a critical mass. The zombies that now are make more, who make more. Eventually the "undead" will outnumber the "living" and everything will fall apart. But isn't that our goal?

It all started with one. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." (1 Cor 15:20) Then a few thousand. And more, and more.

As one of the undead, it is my moral obligation to bring more into the status of undead. "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom 8:12-13) Paul felt that debt. "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also." (Rom 1:14-15) What self-respecting zombie does not feel that obligation?

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