

Psalm 76*Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)*

God in His church is known,
His name is glorious there;
He there sets up His earthly throne,
And hears His people's prayer.

The powers of death and hell
In vain her peace oppose;
A word of His the storm can quell,
And scatter all her foes.

The Lord to judgment came;
Earth trembled and was still:
'Tis His, 'tis His the proud to tame,
And shield the meek from ill.

The fury of his foes
Fulfills but His decree:
Ye saints, on Him your hopes repose,
And He your strength will be.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Sword Thrusts or Honey?***Jon Pratt*

Words are powerful things. Proverbs 18:21 reminds us that death and life are in the power of the tongue. Our words can produce negative effects ("rash words are like sword thrusts" – Prov 12:18) and positive ones ("gracious words are like a honeycomb" – Prov 16:24). Yet James 3:1–12 shows that we Christians will more likely face the negative outcomes of what we say than the positive fruit of well-disciplined tongues.

This reality has been on display in the last two weeks while observing the firestorm created by a few poorly chosen words uttered at the recent "Truth Matters" conference hosted by Grace to You and Grace Community Church in southern California. This event celebrated the 50th anniversary of John MacArthur's pulpit ministry, with the "Sufficiency of Scripture" as its theme.

The words I am referring to were not spoken during one of the main preaching sessions. Rather, in a short 7½ minute time span during some Q & A banter led by Todd Friel of *Wretched Radio* fame, John MacArthur told Beth Moore to "Go home!"; Phil Johnson declared Moore's preaching/teaching to be "narcissistic"; and MacArthur implied that Latinos, African Americans, and women do not know biblical Hebrew and Greek well enough to participate on Bible translation committees.

I would like to unpack the context behind each of these statements and then provide some observations about what was said. My goal in this is not to act as a judge either of the motives or of the righteousness of the behavior of the individuals involved; only our omniscient and holy God is capable of this. Rather I am writing as a commentator on the wisdom and value of this particular use of words at this public event. And I would like to ask whether there is a better way to defend and propagate our highly valued theological positions.

So what is the context out of which this Q & A session arose? Though John MacArthur and his church are not part of the Southern Baptist Convention, he and conservative evangelicalism in general have watched with great interest as the SBC debated and considered several controversial issues during its annual meeting in June. Two of these included: 1) the use of inter-



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sectionality and critical race theory as important tools for Bible interpretation, and 2) the permission of women to preach to both men and women. This latter point was particularly interesting since the SBC has formally adopted a complementarian position in its Baptist Faith and Message. And since controversies often swirl around specific individuals, Beth Moore, an oft-published author and Bible teacher, has become the poster child of this issue about women preachers ever since she delivered the Sunday morning sermon on Mother's Day at the SBC church she attends.

With all of this in mind, Todd Friel chose to use a rather flippant method to generate a response from John MacArthur about the Beth Moore situation in the SBC. He suggested that he and the speakers on the platform with him play a word association game in which he would say a word and then receive a single word or "pithy response" to that word. So he began with "Beth Moore" and MacArthur's response: "Go home!" The crowd of complementarian, male preachers gave rousing approval. When the video clip hit social media, the moral outrage and regurgitation of egalitarian arguments in defense of women preachers was predictable and abundant. And who can blame them? Writing from the perspective of a complementarian, my question to John MacArthur and the organizers of the "Truth Matters" conference is, "What were you hoping to accomplish with this little word association game?" I can think of at least four possibilities: 1) a good laugh from the conference attendees; 2) convincing young evangelical men and women to become complementarians; 3) causing fence-sitting egalitarians to adopt complementarian views on women preachers; and 4) embarrassing fellow complementarians who are currently engaged in this ongoing discussion in evangelicalism. Unfortunately, many of my fellow complementarians would say that the game resulted in producing numbers 1 and 4 while actually causing the opposite effect for numbers 2 and 3.

Shortly after the "Go home!" comment, Phil Johnson resorted to a bit of name-calling when he labeled Beth Moore as "narcissistic" in her preaching. His reason for using this language was because she has gone on record as saying that when she studies the Bible "she puts herself in the narrative." This is quite a claim made by Mr. Johnson, especially in light of the fact that many hermeneutics texts would encourage the student of the Bible to enter into the narrative as a way of understanding its impact so that the major message of that narrative can be conveyed to the audience in preaching and teaching. I could be wrong in assuming the best behind Moore's statement, but this is all we have to go on. Mr. Johnson never gives the context of the quotation nor does he give anything else to support the narcissistic label. If true, this is an astounding claim; if untrue, this is an unkind and unfruitful way of referring to someone else's activity. As a complementarian I can think of many better words to describe Moore's preaching to mixed audiences, e.g. unbiblical, unnecessary, unfortunate, unhelpful, confusing, etc. But "narcissistic" does not have a honeycomb feel.

As the conversation about women preachers continued, MacArthur pointed to the way that cultural views of egalitarian thinking have infiltrated the church and especially the SBC. As evidence of this, he pointed to a recent panel discussion of SBC leaders who suggested that all future Bible translation projects have at least one Latino, African-American, and woman involved. MacArthur's assessment of such an idea? "Translation of the Bible? How about someone who knows Greek and Hebrew?" I realize that John MacArthur does not believe that there are no qualified Latino, African-American, or female scholars who could help translate the Bible. But he must also recognize how minority groups (and in this case women are minorities in the world of English Bible translation) would hear a statement like this. While public speakers can never completely nuance everything they say, they ought to be sensitive to our cultural moment and not give a foothold to unnecessary criticism by those who are already inclined to disagree.

Is there a better way to deal with the subject of women preachers and intersectionality and Bible interpretation? I think so. When talking to fellow believers who embrace the same gospel message (and thus denying that Jesus's words to the religious rulers of His day and the apostles' words to false teachers are models for us in regard to this present subject), we are called to use edifying speech that gives grace to the hearer (Eph 4:29), that is seasoned with salt (Col 4:6), and that is characterized by gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:16). May God give us the wisdom, skill, and tact to use our words well. And in this present circumstance may we keep from giving opponents cause to question our mental capacities, compassion, gentleness, and *biblically correct* complementarian viewpoints.



This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
