

## “Cautions regarding Clichés (and Soundbites)”

I, like most people, use clichés from time to time. However, there are several problems with clichés which should cause everyone to limit their usage, and even when espousing them, to do so with extreme caution (cf. Matt.12:36). Most of the complications with clichés (and “soundbites” in more modern parlance) are derived from one major issue- **They originate with humans. This means that:**

- **They may not be true at all.** Consider the cliché, “There’s no such thing as a ‘dumb’ question if you don’t know the answer.” While this sounds good, and even noble, it just isn’t true. I don’t “know” whether or not Adam and Eve had navels (since they were “created” rather than “born” {and would thus have a vestige of the umbilical cord}). But if I ask that question in a bible class, or even worse, online, there would be a plethora of postulations and speculations that could and probably would go on for hours if not days. However, the conclusion would ultimately be, “We don’t know, because God (the only real *Source* of truth) didn’t reveal that information,” cf. Deut.29:29. All of which illustrates the “truth” stated in 2Tim.2:23, “*But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing they produce quarrels.*” Titus 3:9 echoes the same admonition, “*But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law (i.e. the then “abolished” Law of Moses); for they are unprofitable and worthless.*” Such things, and the questions which prompt them, are “dumb,” and although we may not be able to prevent them from being asked, we should refuse to engage or seek to answer them. Thus, many clichés are simply based on a false premise, or convey false information.
- **They may contain only partial or incomplete truth.** Consider the oft used ‘adaptation’ of John 8:32, “*the truth shall make you free.*” Though this is a direct quote from the text, it is only a **part** of the sentence. Note Jesus’ whole sentence, “*If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*” So, Jesus did not say that “truth”- either ‘generic’ truth or truth ‘alone,’ would make one “free.” He said that “*the truth*”: (a) in which the recipient would “*abide*” (or  *dwell in* or *obey*) would make him/her a “*disciple*” (*follower*); then, (b) such would enable the recipient to actually “*know*” (*recognize and understand*) “*truth*,” which would then, (c) allow one to be made “*free*” by “*the truth*.” So, rather than ‘generic’ and ‘man-authored’ “truth” making one “free” by itself as the cliché intimates, God-authored “truth” that is “known” and “obeyed” produces spiritual “freedom” from sin. That’s quite different from the oft-stated “partial” quote that misses the mark completely with intent and purpose. So again, clichés/soundbites- even when containing or based on truth, are often misleading because they simple don’t represent the “whole” truth regarding the matter they address.
- **They may contain only sentiments that resonate with the user.** Therefore, rather than expressing “truth,” they only encompass platitudes that the user desires to be true. So their use only constitutes an effort to convince themselves and others of the “truth” he/she wants to be valid. Ezk.18:2 is a good example. Because Israel “wanted” to think that their current punishment for sin was not really “their” fault, but stemmed from the sins of “their fathers” for which they

were bearing the consequences, they circulated a cliché (rendered “*proverb*” in the text), “*The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge.*” This is what Israel ‘wanted’ to believe, but it was not true. God (who “cannot lie” cf. Titus 1:2) said, “*The soul who sins will die,*” v.4b, and “*The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity,*” v.20b. Clichés and soundbites are often nothing more than propaganda to promote an idea or sentiment the user hopes to make accepted “truth” by repetition.

What’s the “take-away” from all of these things? We live in a cliché-riddled, soundbite-believing world. These clichés and soundbites are mostly if not altogether: outright untruths, partial truths, or only sentiments/desires espoused loudly and persistently in hopes that they become accepted as truth. But remember this: **Unless God revealed it, or it accurately restates what God revealed, it probably is at best misleading if not completely untrue.** So beware of clichés and soundbites. “*Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen,*” 1Pet.4:11.  
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