Proofing Other People's Writing

There have been, over the years, a couple of other preachers that have asked me to "proof" or proofread their writing(s) before publication. Though my efforts to assist were admirably appreciated, the work was difficult. It wasn't enough to simply mark grammatical errors or point out areas needing clarification or revision, since to be truly helpful, I needed to provide options that grammatically and more clearly stated what they were trying to convey. Thus, "You can't say it that way" or "That doesn't actually say what you intended" were followed by alternative constructions that were at least more grammatically palatable (to the extinct I could provide such) and actually bore the author's intent (which sometimes required additional clarification from him). But here's the thing…

Though one of these preachers declared me a great proofreader and grammatical coach, I'm TERRIBLE at proofing MY OWN WRITINGS! This, if you have read much of what I write, you undoubtedly have discovered. Someone told me this deficiency comes from my brain already knowing what I've written is supposed to say, and thus "auto-correcting" it in my head so that it appears to be proper and correct when I read it. Perhaps, but they may be giving my brain far too much credit.

All of which is to point out what may already be obvious: **Most of us are much better at seeing (and pointing out) other people's mistakes than identifying and admitting our own.** It's that "log" and "speck" thing from Matt.7:1-5. Even the smallest of errors in someone else is noted, magnified, cataloged (surely for future reference/use later), and typically publicized while our own errors are ignored, glossed over, minimized, and secreted away even when discovered. **But why are we so much better at identifying the errors of others over our own?** Here are some possible explanations:

- **Because we *focus our attention* more on others' errors than our own.** In Jas.1:22, it is readily apparent that when peering into the *"mirror"* of the *"perfect law of liberty"* one is supposed to examine *his **own** natural face.* V.23 further confirms this point by adding, *"looked at **himself**…."* Others do sometimes need our assistance in removing *"specks"* from their eyes, but only if/when we have removed the *"log(s)"* from our own peepers, Matt.7:5!

- **Because it allows us to *feel better about ourselves.*** This is a symptom of chronic "Comparisonitis"- constantly *comparing* ourselves to others, and then *judging* ourselves thereby. It's as if we believe the "Christian race" is won by merely finishing ahead of the majority of other participants. It isn't. It is a *race* requiring *self-control* rather than *self-comparisons* to others, 1Cor.9:25-27; personal *faith* and *endurance* rather than merely besting others, Heb.12:1-2; and, *keeping "the faith"* ourselves and finishing *our **own** course* rather than someone else's, 2Tim.4:7 (KJV). Constantly pointing out others' "foot faults" and "disqualifications" doesn't keep us "on course," or insure our personal victorious completion of the race.

- **Because we think it makes us *look better* to others.** Unfortunately "image" is more important to us than "reality." We use all sorts of filters to remove imperfections and artificial enhancements to improve our "image"- none of which changes "reality." However, as we've probably heard or read before, "Blowing out

someone else's candle doesn't make yours any brighter." Our *"light"* (<u>cf. Matt.5:14,16</u>) is supposed to born of true character by reflecting the genuine *Light of the world,* Jesus Christ- not simply being the only one remaining after blowing out everyone else's candle or torch.

I don't really want "proofreading" work from others- I have enough to do trying (and often failing) to "proof" my own work… which is probably also good policy regarding our efforts to "proof" the lives of others while ignoring our own as well. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at <u>southportcofc.org</u>)