A SUDDEN AND CURIOUS EMPHASIS ON "BALANCE"

By DUB MCCLISH

Introduction

Has anyone else besides me noticed a recent upsurge in the cry for "**balance**" in preaching and writing? Further, am I the only one who has noticed that this emphasis is **not** coming from the predictable liberal tongues and pens, but from some brethren who were generally considered sound in the faith? Have others noticed the corresponding parallel to what seems to be this almost orchestrated emphasis, namely the sudden outcry **against** such things as "arrogance," "radicalism," "sarcasm," "invective," "viciousness," "harshness," and "belligerence"? But let me do more than merely indicate such emphases in general terms. In a recent issue of a magazine published by brethren of once sound repute, the following statements appeared in various articles (emph. DM, except as noted):

> ***Balance*** is a word abused by liberals and is anathema to radicals…. Some spend their time constantly critiquing what others are doing and at times even refusing to endorse good and noble endeavors of sound brethren…. The church must maintain proper **balance** if it is to grow and if it is to have a positive influence in our world….
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> Both men [the men are named, DM] are well grounded in the faith, are experienced in the Lord's work, are dedicated to truth, have good **balance**…. There will be unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace among brethren when we seek the very best for each other and get permanently away from a biting, devouring disposition to destroy…. Too many of us do not treat a brother as we would like to be treated were

> roles reversed. Caustic words have a sure way of returning to haunt us…. Is there any among us who cannot make improvement in the way we treat our brethren in Christ? Remember, He died for the very ones we may be seeking to crush….
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> Too many brothers wear *Sound Doctrine* as a badge of Christianity. In reality, the badge of Christ is Love…. A few years ago, I believed that as long as I taught the truth, then my love for others could not be questioned. I gleefully attacked liberals and change agents with sarcasm and satire. If they would have read my articles and heard my preaching they would have been stabbed by my rapier wit…. Many sound preachers and Christians have failed here. Love demands that we care for liberals, legalists, change agents, denominationalists, and…one another. Sitting behind a keyboard pecking out condemnations appears rude, arrogant, resentful, and unkind—all the qualities contrary to love—but it is easy…. We have all heard men defend truth who were more intent on making someone look stupid than inspiring conversion or repentance. Derision and ridicule express rudeness, not love…. We all face people, events and decisions in the church that are not matters of fellowship, but we do not like them. Some choose to "make an issue of them," but love chooses to let them go without a fight…. When change agents knock on the church's door its members must exhibit abiding love with meekness and instruction; this will thwart their will, not clever condensation [*sic.*] or gleeful humiliation (2 Tim. 2:24–26).
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> Christians are not to be arrogant or obnoxious in their conduct…. Brethren are not to be disagreeable so that their conduct in defense of the gospel becomes offensive….
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> We can be pigeonholed as that mean, exclusive bunch who think they are the only ones going to heaven while all else are going to hell…. There are instances where churches of Christ indeed have assumed an identity of belligerence….

The periodical and writers referenced above by no means constitute the only source of such statements, as the following additional quotations, all from "non-liberals," demonstrate:

I am apodictically opposed to acting on rumor, innuendo, and hearsay. And I will not be a party to such. I do not want anything I might say or write to provide fuel for some critic's fire, or fodder for their cannon, as they carry on a battle that inserts them into someone else's affairs…. I will neither participate in nor condone a situation where something that I, personally, have written or said…, ultimately ends up being used by some self-proclaimed **"defender of the Faith"** to write a rumor-based article for a **"watchdog-type" brotherhood journal** in order to provide the author or editor with his personal fifteen minutes of fame.

[A sound Gospel paper was named and described as] …a far **right leaning** paper. By "right-leaning" I mean they tend to legislate for others and print accusations before they have their facts straight [emph. in orig.].

I am presently penning one final piece addressing this **judgmental, censorious, self-righteous, unforgiving** spirit that characterizes a small and diminishing group of brethren in the church.

[A brother described "certain" brethren as]…a few who are in a small, but no less **toxic loyalty circle**…a **small negative faction**, who if they gain control, will only rupture fellowship in the church even more than they already have.

How different that [i.e., the conduct of another] was from brother _____, who, after I sent a brief email…, sent me a 4 page diatribe filled with viciousness and falsehood against me. This only reaffirms my belief that such a man did not deserve nor need to be in the position he was in.

[After mentioning the dangers of liberalism, an article stated]: There are too many…who are equally **damaging and vicious** in their attack on the body of Christ. In one sense, they are more dangerous due to their contention that they are rooting out all false doctrine and exposing all error. When they are doing so with proper ethics, attitude and **balance**, they are to be applauded. Yet, there is a mentality that seems wholly obsessed with fulltime **heretic detection**, **slandering** brethren, and **scrupulously elevating minutia** as on par with Christ's doctrine. They unnecessarily divide brethren…. They polarize and draw away disciples after

> themselves. They are **fight-pickers**, seemingly eager to engage in lengthy, unending diatribe and debate to the exclusion of other Christian obligations, of righteous, Christlike conduct, and of a charitable spirit that "is not rude…keeps no record of wrongs…does not delight in evil…" (1 Corinthians 13:5–6).
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> [Concerning these "fight-pickers," the same article then opined]: First, they are increasingly turning on one another. Further, they are succeeding in infecting themselves by their biting and devouring. Then, they are facilitating their own demise—that of influence, reputation, trustworthiness, and respectability. However, they have also viciously wounded good men and women…in the process.

I agree (as I suppose all faithful brethren would) **in principle** with much of what the foregoing quotations emphasize. Who among us is not concerned with pursuing a course of "**balance**" and with avoiding a course of "radicalism"? However, as with the fine print in legal contracts, "the devil is in the details," or, perhaps more appropriate to these quotations (and their authors), "the devil is in the applications." At the risk of being labeled a vicious, censorious, far-right leaning, judgmental religious redneck who is part of some horrible and repugnant toxic loyalty circle bent on rupturing fellowship in the church, I offer a few observations on these quotations—and their timing.

The Imbalance of the "Balanced"

Those who call loudly for "**balance**" obviously believe themselves to be near perfectly, if not perfectly, **balanced**. Those against whom the **balanced** brethren inveigh are always "certain" others besides themselves. In fact, they seemingly believe that being **balanced** requires that one frequently preach to others about their lack of this noble trait. To these **balanced** brethren, preaching about the need for **balance**

somehow actually ratifies and demonstrates their own **balance.** I wonder: Is it possible to so emphasize the need for **balance** that one becomes **unbalanced** in his emphasis on **balance**?

An Attempt to Silence

Those of us who have served as preachers and/or elders for a few decades have heard this drum beat for **balance** before. Liberals have long used it in their efforts to "tone down" or silence the warnings of faithful brethren. To them, such warnings, especially if they are specific enough to call names and explicit enough to provide documentation, constitute **imbalance**. We expect change agents and other ne'er-do-wells among us to characterize as "radicals" and "watchdogs" those who expose and resist their errors. Now (as demonstrated in the numerous quotations above) the same pattern has emerged in some who at one time were in the thick of he battle for Truth with the rest of us. Remember, these quotations came not from liberals. Rather, they came from supposedly sound brethren, and they were aimed at faithful brethren who have dared expose errors in the doctrine and practice of some of these **balanced** brethren and/or their associates "who are reputed to be somewhat" (Gal. 2:6).

The Sweetness of Those Who Cry for "Balance"

Consider some of the verbiage of these brethren of **balance** (plucked from the quotations above), which they employed to describe those whom they perceive to be **unbalanced**:

They:

- Carry on a battle that inserts them into someone else's affairs
- Write…rumor-based article[s] for…"watchdog-type" brotherhood journal[s]
- Provide the author or editor with his personal fifteen minutes of fame
- Wear Sound Doctrine as a badge of Christianity
- Legislate for others and print accusations before they have their facts straight
- Will…rupture fellowship in the church even more than they already have
- Polarize and draw away disciples after themselves

They are:

- Self-proclaimed "defender[s] of the Faith"
- Radicals
- Caustic
- Seeking to crush [others]
- Rude, arrogant, resentful, and unkind
- Intent on making someone look stupid
- Obnoxious
- Disagreeable
- Far **right leaning**
- Judgmental
- Censorious, self-righteous, unforgiving
- [A] small and diminishing group

- A small…toxic loyalty circle
- A small negative faction
- Eager to engage in lengthy, unending diatribe and debate to the exclusion of other Christian obligations
- Fight-pickers
- Slandering brethren
- Increasingly turning on one another
- Infecting themselves by their biting and devouring
- Damaging and vicious
- More dangerous [than liberals]
- Wholly obsessed with fulltime heretic detection
- Slanderers

They engage in:

- A biting, devouring disposition to destroy
- Derision and ridicule
- Gleeful humiliation
- Belligerence
- Viciousness and falsehood
- Scrupulously elevating minutia as on par with Christ's doctrine
- Unnecessarily dividing brethren

Having read the foregoing list, one is made to wonder whether or not they have any inkling of the meaning of the traits of civility, kindness, agreeableness, and charity—in other words, the meaning of ***balance***.

The Hypocrisy of Those Who Cry for "Balance"

These self-appointed spiritual physicians prescribe ***balance*** as the do-all, end-all remedy for the ailments of "certain" brethren (besides themselves, of course). I strongly suggest that they need to swallow a large dose of their own medicine. Their definition of ***balance*** includes the following (as long as they are doing it, of course):

- Strongly worded condemnation of brethren for engaging in strongly worded condemnation of brethren
- Very negative outcries against those who are accused of being very negative
- The use of biting and devouring verbiage to assert that some brethren are biting and devouring others
- Judging "certain" brethren for being judgmental of "certain" brethren
- Being obnoxious and disagreeable in alleging that others are obnoxious and disagreeable
- Employing caustic and radical terms to rail against those perceived to be caustic and radical
- Using toxic terminology to describe a small, toxic loyalty circle
- Seeking to "crush" brethren who are accused of "crushing" brethren
- Picking fights with their brethren for being fight-pickers

- Being rude, arrogant, resentful, and unkind in describing some as rude, arrogant, resentful, and unkind

Ironically, some of the most (1) brutal accusations of meanness and (2) strident calls for kindness and sweetness as quoted above appeared in the most angry and hate-filled letter I have ever read from a brother. In every word of condemnation of their inferior brethren (as they doubtless view those they describe), the condemners condemn themselves, but they are too self-righteous to see or admit it. Is it permissible to be caustic in crying out against those who are caustic, as long as the recipients of these causticisms are liberals or "certain" other alleged sound brethren? This seems to be the current course of these **balanced** brethren. I suppose they still reserve for themselves the right to behave in ways that they condemn in "certain" others of us (after the manner of the U.S. Congress toward U.S. citizens). They seem to retain for themselves alone the right to legislate who may speak caustic words, when caustic words may be spoken, and to whom caustic words may be directed.

These men who are now berating "certain" faithful brethren for being self-righteous, obnoxious, arrogant, censorious, unkind fight-pickers would do well to pause, at least momentarily, for reflection and self-examination. In their harsh condemnation of others, implying that they are above such vile attitudes and behaviors, do they not thereby demonstrate in themselves the very self-righteousness they profess so greatly to deplore? Moreover, which of these men have not repeatedly over the past several years done the very things they are now railing against in "certain" brethren? Have they

not all written and/or spoken caustic and censorious words, describing and denouncing others (especially liberals and those advocating direct operation of the Holy Spirit)? Have not many witnesses heard and read their words, including their calling the names of those under attack? Were they **unbalanced** when they were thus behaving only a few months ago, or was such behavior **balanced** then, but is **unbalanced** now? Maybe it is still **balanced** if **they** so behave, but **unbalanced** if "certain" others act the same way. Further, when "certain" others of us have done the same, have these **balance** advocates not applauded and encouraged us for doing so?

But now, suddenly, by their own declaration, they are too genteel for such uncivilized behavior. They apparently do not realize that they, by assuming this posture, have, by implication, imposed a gag order upon themselves. No longer can they bluntly or plainly expose error and its purveyors without violating their own *ipse dixit*. Moreover, since they have decided to endorse, support, and defend a brother who has been marked as a false teacher, will they now endorse and support other false teachers? In fact, they are already doing so. It was therefore not surprising to see several of these **balanced** brethren publicly praising and bidding Godspeed to another marked false teacher at a recent south Texas lectureship. They were merely being "consistent" and demonstrating their exceptional **balance**.

Could it be that one reason for this sudden, concerted emphasis on **balance** lies in the fact that the arrows of Truth fired by "certain" brethren have been finding their

mark with telling accuracy? Is the call for **balance** an attempt (conscious or otherwise) to silence or soften the blows of "certain" brethren who have repeatedly exposed the utter inconsistency of those who profess their opposition to the errors of the Executive Director of an organization while supporting the organization itself? Are the **balanced** brethren trying to convince others that opposing a false teacher while supporting the institution he directs is a demonstration of **balance**? When **balanced** brethren speak on lectureships in which they praise, commend, and glad-hand marked teachers of error, are they telling us what, to them, constitutes **balance**?

In contemptuously describing some as "…a few who are in a small, but no less toxic loyalty circle…a small negative faction…," brethren of **balance** obviously depict themselves as part of some large non-toxic loyalty circle that is wholly positive. Both they and the objects of their verbal blasts know better. If the attitude and demeanor of these men represents **balance,** I fervently desire that I may never run afoul of those who are truly **unbalanced**.

These **balanced** brethren seem to have forgotten (or have failed to apply) our Lord's injunctions: "Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.… Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Mat. 7:1–5) and "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Likewise, they have forgotten Paul's warning: "Wherefore thou are without excuse, O

man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practice the same things" (Rom. 2:1).

Is History Beginning to Repeat Itself?

This latest crusade for **balance** scares me. It brings back haunting memories of similar cries I heard as a young preacher—cries that proved to be the seeds that have matured into full-blown, widespread, arrogant liberalism and digression in all of their irreverent ugliness. In the early 1960s, a few brethren begin to call for more "**balance**" in our preaching. At first the cry was faint, but it grew louder and more frequent with time. The charge was that brethren in general and preachers in particular had been too negative, dogmatic, mean, and narrow-minded. Along with these charges came another: There had been too much emphasis for too long on "the plan" (i.e., the plan of salvation, the pattern for the church, et al.) and not enough emphasis on "the Man" (i.e., the person of Christ). Thus arose the controversy that brethren energetically discussed for an extended period in the Gospel papers concerning "the Man or the plan." The excuse and theme of those who sought to tone down the Gospel was, *We need to be **balanced**.*

The seeds planted by those crying for **balance** over forty years ago took root in many of my generation. These men, some of whom were classmates of mine in two different colleges, have been among the leaders in the awful apostasy that presently characterizes so much of the church. Some of those who swallowed the "**balance**" bilge

went on to obtain advanced degrees, returning to various schools operated by our brethren. These **balanced** professors have succeeded in destroying or damaging the faith of thousands of precious young people, providing tremendous impetus to the malignant digression that has now affected two generations. Some have authored books that depict the church as a narrow sect of which they are terribly ashamed. Still others have wielded great influence from the pulpits of large, urban churches. I dare say that all of these consider themselves prime examples of **balance**. Likely, they teach "loud and long" on the need for **balance**. Correspondingly, such men (and women) consider as decidedly **unbalanced** (if not downright nut cases) those who still dare preach that there is one body, that the distinctive pattern for it is clearly discernible in the New Testament, and that the church has been restored and is reproducible in every succeeding age. Perhaps the ultimate blasphemy to such **balanced** folk is to identify faithful congregations of the church of Christ in our time as the church of the New Testament. We may generally trace the progression of liberalism from its seeds in the 1960s to the full-grown plant of the present in the following stages:

1. A few began to cry for "**balance**," along with the outcry against their perception of "**negativism**" and "**dogmatism**." (Never mind that the church experienced its greatest numerical growth in modern times [the 1950s and early 1960s] in our nation by this so-called "**negative**" and "**dogmatic**" approach in preaching and debating the Gospel and conducting home Bible studies.)

2. The cry for "**balance**" gradually became a cry for "**moderation**."

3. The cry for "**moderation**" evolved into a cry for "**tolerance**."

4. The spirit of "**tolerance**" gave birth to unabashed **liberalism**, which neutered the Gospel message, resulting in blurring the meaning of fellowship, compromising the plan of salvation, corrupting the worship, and generally denominationalizing the church.

Forty-five years ago, many of those who began chanting for **balance** were **generally considered to be sound and faithful men**. I fearfully observe that some who are of that reputation today are the very source of the revived ***balance*** mantra. Is history beginning another of its cycles?

I have long opined that the out-of-the-closet, in-your-face, easily-identifiable, proud-of-it liberal is not the greatest enemy of or threat to the Truth. Outright liberals are dangerous enough all right, but we know who and what they are. The greater danger the fence-straddlers—those who can talk strongly when they are around strong brethren, but who wilt like daisies in a sauna when they are in a group of compromisers. These are treacherous religious fifth columnists, spiritual subversives, who, like old Joab, will thrust a dagger in your ribs while kissing you on the cheek. They will not take a stand if it will cause them inconvenience, sacrifice, discomfort, or disfavor from friends or family.

Their earthly attachments are stronger than their loyalty to the Christ and His Truth. After the manner of Judas, they are willing to betray principle, righteousness, integrity, and honor (to say nothing of faithful and loyal friends) for their thirty pieces of silver. Such folk test the wind to see who is going to "win" before deciding their course, instead of examining the evidence, choosing the right, and standing for it, even if they must stand alone. Such **balanced** brethren are far more dangerous than admitted liberals. One brother has tagged them as "moderate liberals," and I think he may have a point.

Conclusion

The Lord's people have long struggled to find terms to distinguish between true and false brethren. *Faithful* and *unfaithful, sound* and *unsound, conservative* and *liberal* have all been employed. Now we have a new set of terms, thanks to our brethren who have recently rolled out and jumped on the **balance** bandwagon: *balanced* and *unbalanced*.

Balance, like beauty, is at least somewhat in the eye of the beholder; it is somewhat subjective. Those who are calling for **balance** so loudly just now obviously believe they know perfectly well what it is, and just as obviously, they believe they are **balance** personified. In the 1960s, the ones who cried for **balance,** "**balanced**" a large percentage of the church right into apostasy. May we be on guard lest it happen again. The best definition I know of **balance** in spiritual matters is from Paul, who said he

"shrank not from declaring the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). If we will follow his noble example, we shall achieve **balance** as God defines it.

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