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Why Christianity Seems Silly to Intelligent People #4 of 5:

Some Preachers Just Make Me Sick!

Teaching Pastor Doug Brendel

Don't some preachers just make you sick?
 Don't you wonder how some of these ministers even get people to follow them?
 What can people be thinking?

But then, the truth is, I feel more or less the same way about people's taste in a lot of different areas.

"Look at that house! Who would paint a house that color?"

My son will go off to school wearing stuff that I just cannot imagine hanging on my body. You and I might have differing taste in cars — or TV shows — or grocery stores.

In our neighborhood you're either a Safeway fan or an Albertson's fan — what? You're a Fry's fan? What's up with you?

We have different tastes in gas stations.

We have different tastes in presidential candidates.

We have different tastes in comedians.

Some of us would actually prefer comedians AS our presidential candidates.

Even — Leno or Letterman?

We actually decide whether to watch Letterman or Leno on the basis of two variables: style and substance.

Whether we even really realize it or not, we ask ourselves,

What's his tone, how does he look? What kind of humor does he employ?

That's style.

Then we ask ourselves, What does he say? Does he have good guests? Is this worth my time?

That's substance.

This is how we judge ministers too.

Whether we realize it or not, when we step into a church

or turn on a Christian television or radio program,

or come into a Compass DVD group like this,

we're making judgments about the style and the substance of the messenger and the message.

And you know what? ***I can judge a minister on style.***

It's OK.

It's a luxury we have in this country.

There's practically a church on every corner, a preacher on every TV and radio station.

Ask someone how they settled on the church they're attending, and chances are they'll tell you they went "church shopping."

Hey, I've been there. I've gone shopping for a church to attend.
You attend different churches, week after week, like going down the aisle at the grocery store.

There's nothing wrong with that; but you can't do it in most countries.

Friends of our lived in a remote city in Romania for a year.

It wasn't easy to find any Bible-based teaching, in a church or elsewhere.

And if you found a Bible teacher in a church or somewhere, but you didn't like the style of the teacher, too bad.

In some countries, Bible teaching is strictly regulated by the government.

It's possible to scratch around and find Bible teaching, but what if you don't like the style of the teacher?

Too bad. You're stuck with him.

But here in the U.S., we can shop.

We can afford to judge preachers on style because if I don't like this one, I can find another one.

Please bear with me for a moment while I illustrate this concept:

(in a gravelly Southern accent:) Now what I'm about to tell you is the absolute truth.

I was born in September 1955 in south Georgia, Dougherty County.

And from my very first Sunday as a newborn baby I attended Faith Temple, Albany, Georgia,

pastored by a wiry little Pentecostal woman named Inez LaGrone, long dresses and her hair in a bun and she talked exactly like this.

She would start her sermon a normal speed like this —

a normal speed for south Georgia, anyway —

but then she would start to get up a head of steam,

and she would speed up.

By about the middle of the message you had to start listening really close because the words were moving by so fast,

and then Inez LaGrone would start to get excited.

She'd be preaching and preaching and get more and more excited

talking about the power of God's love to touch and transform your life

and all the words would tumble out so fast you almost couldn't possibly keep up

until finally at the very end — Shall we bow our heads in prayer?

I couldn't sit under the ministry of Inez LaGrone today.

She would drive me crazy.

I don't appreciate her style.

But it was Inez LaGrone's passion for God that inspired my parents to devote themselves to raising me according to the principles of the Bible.

I was dedicated to the Lord as a tiny infant, in a simple little ceremony in Faith Temple, Albany, Georgia, by Inez LaGrone.

There was good in her ministry.

We moved to the Chicago area when I was not yet 5 years old, and we attended a church pastored by a tall, handsome man with wavy black hair; his name was Harold W. Duncan.

He was well dressed. He was articulate. But he was bold.

When the church had a financial need, he got up in front of the people and said, "Now folks, we need \$1,500 to make our budget and we need it today.

Get out your wallets. Come on, right now. Now we'll start with hundreds. Hundreds only. Who'll give a hundred dollars?"

And he would literally take the money out of people's hands.

Now you may like that style of ministry, and for years in Lodi, California, Harold Duncan was a very successful pastor.

He remained well dressed and articulate and handsome, even when his wavy hair turned completely silver.

For me, I just couldn't appreciate that style of ministry.

But you know, Harold Duncan taught our family the joy of giving to God ...

He taught us the biblical principle of not hanging on to material possessions so desperately ...

He taught us to get an eternal perspective on temporary things.

There was some good in his ministry. A lot of good.

I have a friend who ministers in a major mainline Protestant denomination, he ministers in robes and a collar.

He is brilliant, he loves God, but he is very soft spoken

and he manages to find the most intricate and complex modality of transmission of the very substance of requisite inner conceptual machinations absent any reasonable references or sub-references to colloquialism.

He uses big words.

I couldn't sit under his ministry today.

I don't appreciate his style.

But that man has an incredible ministry of reaching the people of that stuffy old Protestant denomination with the truth of God's Word,

and leading them into genuine life-transformation through faith in Jesus Christ.

He is one of the most influential leaders steering his denomination back to its historic scriptural foundations.

There is incredible good in his ministry.

*I have a friend who preaches in what I call the preacher **monotone!**...*

*He gets on a certain pitch like this and he stays on it till he gets to the end of the **sentence!**...*

*If you close your eyes during one of his messages and start to drift off to sleep, you'll probably have a dream involving a **police siren!**...*

*Sounds something like a vacuum sweeper being plugged in and out of a **wall outlet!**...*

I don't like his style.

But man, when he opens that Bible and starts to teach you, the Scriptures POP into your life.

He has a gift for helping people *live* the Word of God.

If we get too hung up on a preacher's style, we can lose out on some valuable substance.

And the substance is what it's all about.

What is a preacher? Really just a teacher.

His job is to teach the Scriptures.

To help us learn and understand what God says in his Word, and how we can *live* according to this truth.

That's his job.

And that's the job we have to hold him accountable for.

So I can judge a preacher on style if I want to, but I **must judge a minister on substance.**

Each one of us has the responsibility of listening to the teaching and *comparing* it to what Bible actually says.

We can't just take what a preacher tells us and assume it's the truth.

God holds each one of us accountable.

You won't be standing in the Compass Fellowship line in heaven.

There won't be a First Methodist Church area, or a Baptist section, or a Presbyterian zone.

You don't get to heaven and God says, "Ooh, man, what a bummer,

The Compass Fellowship fed you a pack of lies, I am sorry — but, since it wasn't really your fault ... come on in."

You don't stand before God in the shadow of Doug Brendel or our senior pastor David G. Brown or Billy Graham or anybody else.

You will be there, standing before God, on your own.

We will help you; this is what The Compass is about — helping you to walk with God and live as effective a life as possible.

But we can't live it for you.

You've got to live it yourself.

The Bible says in **1 Corinthians 3:8**, "**The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.**"

And this issue doesn't just affect eternity for you.

It affects your everyday life.

If I teach you something in error, and you just buy it lock, stock, and barrel, and you go out and live by that erroneous teaching,

you pay the price for it.

I mean, God will judge me — James 3:1 makes this clear: teaching you something that's false? That's serious stuff, and I'll be judged very harshly.

But in the meantime, who suffers the consequences of your busting God's design?
Me? No. *You* suffer.

So you need to know the truth.

And the only way you can be sure that what you're hearing here is the truth,
is for you to compare what you hear to what you read.

You need a Bible of your own.

This is so important that I actually give Bibles to people who are willing to commit to
reading them.

If you need a Bible and can't afford one, or don't know what kind of Bible you should go
buy, you can contact The Compass and we'll be happy to help you, no questions
asked.

It's that important.

And once you've got that Bible, you gotta start reading it.

We found in our study 3 sessions ago that the Bible is actually believable, and
trustworthy.

Read it and find out for yourself!

You need to know what it says — because if you hear something here through The
Compass Fellowship that doesn't square with the Scriptures, you've got to get to
the bottom of it.

You contact us, or talk to someone else you trust for the truth about the Bible. Ask
questions. You check it out.

This is not a game. This is not for fun.

This is your life. This is your eternal future.

This is serious business.

Don't let The Compass or anybody else mess it up for you.

In **Matthew 22:29**, Jesus looked at the people around him, all struggling, consumed
with their problems, and he said, Y'know why you're so goofed up?

“You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”

God does not authorize preachers to put words in God's mouth.

In fact, God reserves some of his harshest words for preachers who put words in God's
mouth.

In **Jeremiah 23**, God says,

**16 “I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not
speak to them, yet they have prophesied.**

**31 ...I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The
Lord declares.’**

**32 They ... lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or
appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,” declares the
Lord.**

**40 “I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace — everlasting shame that will not
be forgotten.”**

Strong words! Why such strong words?
Because that's how important this issue is to God.

Jesus said in John 3:6,

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the spirit is spirit.”
Just because it comes out of a preacher's mouth doesn't magically turn it into the truth.
If it's born of the flesh — if it's just the preacher's take on a subject — then that's all it
will ever be.

But if it's born of the Spirit — if aligns with the truth that God has expressed in his Word,
the Bible — then it has a power to change your life,
and that's a power that comes *not from the style of the preacher* but from the Creator
himself.

Now you may not like what you hear from us here at The Compass.

And you may not like what you read in the Bible.

There are plenty of things in the Bible that really rub me the wrong way.

I don't like some of the details of the way God designed me, and the way he designed
the world.

Even I don't like everything God says to me in the Bible — and I'm the teaching pastor
around here!

But God didn't give us the Bible for our amusement or entertainment.

He gave it to us for our health.

In fact, the Bible says,

2 Timothy 4:

**2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and
encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.**

**3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to
suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of
teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.**

4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

We may not like what a preacher says.

But it's not about whether we like it.

It's about whether it's the *truth*.

The reality is, we need teaching. We need teachers. Whether we want one or not.

We need teachers who comes from a different perspective than our own.

The role of a teacher is to bring something new into our lives — a *new* viewpoint, a
fresh understanding.

If we only allow into our lives teachers who are *identical* to us, we won't receive what we
need.

If I wheel a big operating table in here, and an IV bottle on a pole, and tray full of
surgical instruments, and I announce to you that I'm going to remove my own
appendix, somebody would probably rush up here and stop me.

My wife would, anyway.
 Probably.
 You generally can't perform surgery on yourself.
 You need someone else to do it.
 Someone with a different perspective.
 We need the surgery that God's Word performs on us.

And we need it performed by someone outside of ourselves,
 someone different from ourselves,
 someone with a different perspective,
 a different style.

Think back to when you were in school.
 Think about which teacher you truly learned the most from.
 Not the one you liked the most, or the one who was the most fun,
 but which teacher actually taught you the most stuff ...
 which teacher was actually the most *valuable* to you?
 Now — was that teacher just like you?
 Probably not.
 That teacher was different from you in significant ways.
 Did you *choose* that teacher?
 No, the school district *foisted* that teacher off on you.
 If you had been able to choose your teachers all through school, you might have missed
 out on some of the best and most valuable learning experiences of your life.
 (So in a way, we might actually come to the conclusion that it's to our *disadvantage* to
 have so many churches and preachers to choose from in our American culture!)

The Bible says, in **Hebrews 4:12**, “**For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**”
 You know, the truth is, I don't *want* to need surgery, but I need surgery.
 A minister may annoy us by using the sharp scalpel of the Scriptures on us,
 but that doesn't change how much we need that work to be accomplished in our lives.

What I've observed is that sometimes people get uncomfortable with the *substance* of a
 certain ministry, and to escape the discomfort of confronting the inner working of
 God's Word in their lives, they decide they don't like the minister's *style* —
 when it's really the *substance* they decide they can't live with.

So the real question winds up being this: Do I have the character, the maturity, to focus
 on substance, and not get hung up on style?

You know, the style that one person considers entertaining, the next person considers
 offensive.

God has designed the human race as *diverse*.

We don't all have the same tastes.
 We don't all have the same temperament.
 We don't all appreciate the same styles.
 We don't have to go to the same church.
 We just have to go to the same God.

Romans 12:5 says, **“In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”**

Ephesians 4:4 says, **“There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called.”**

Our styles can be different.
 Our substance can't be.
 Our substance is right here — it's the Bible, nothing more, nothing less.

* * *

I know a number of people who have bailed out of churches or even bailed out on God because of a bad experience with a member of the clergy.

May I just say to you, if this applies to you, “I'm sorry.”

I know you placed your trust in that minister, and that minister disappointed you.

Maybe you got hurt. Maybe badly. Maybe very badly.

I'm sorry.

I can't explain or excuse what happened to you.

I can understand if you say, “Okay, Doug, I understand all that. I'm not hung up on matters of style.

But shouldn't preachers conduct themselves differently than laypeople?

Doesn't God hold them to a higher standard?

Don't they have a responsibility to live a godly lifestyle that reflects well on God and on the Church?”

Well, I can appreciate that sentiment, and we can look at that issue from a scriptural standpoint.

But first, let's look at this first from a practical standpoint.

Two little old grandmothers; they attended the same church.

A new pastor comes to minister to the congregation; he drives a Cadillac.

One little old grandmother is horrified.

She says, “That is shameful! A luxury car! Flaunting himself around town! Bringing reproach on the church by letting people believe he is taking a huge salary out of the offering plate!”

So the pastor trades in the Cadillac.

Now he pulls into the church parking lot in a Geo Metro.

The other little old grandmother is horrified.

“That is shameful!” she says. “An economy car! That is obviously just false humility! And furthermore, he is bringing reproach on the church by letting people believe we don't pay him a comfortable salary!”

On most matters of style, a preacher just can't please everyone.

(I drive a Chrysler. Our lead pastor David G. Brown rides a motorcycle. So here at The Compass, we've achieved perfect balance in our automotive theology.)

Okay, but wait a minute, you say.

Isn't there a place in the Bible that lists special standards for clergy? special requirements for them to meet if they want to serve?

Well, yes, as a matter of fact, you can find certain specifications in Acts, in 1 Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians, in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James.

And do you know what these lists of stipulations include?

Nothing special.

Self-control, be hospitable, don't be a drunkard, don't be quarrelsome, don't be too materialistic.

In other words, you read God's requirements for ministers, you soon begin to realize, Hey, these are the same things God wants for *me*.

They're the same things that God wants for every person on earth:

The same thing God wants for *you*, so that your life can be good.

This doesn't tell us that the preacher got to be a preacher because he is somehow better than the rest of us.

This tells us that it's just as healthy for us to line up with God's ideal as it is for the preacher to line up with God's ideal.

God wants the same things for me that he wants for ministers.

And why? Because this is God's design.

This model is healthy for us.

The message here is not that the preacher has to be better than us.

The message here is that the preacher doesn't get any special breaks — and neither do we.

It's healthiest for us to be just as in line with God's ideal as it is for the preacher to be in line with God's ideal.

The preacher's got to walk the walk just as much as he talks the talk — but so do we.

He's got to live the life just like we do.

But if he doesn't, it doesn't let us off the hook.

We still suffer the consequences if we don't live by God's design.

The old-fashioned word for it, which I don't really like, is *sin!*

Sure, some of us seem to have a gift for teaching. So we stand in front and teach.

But we are *all* called to live according to God's design — not just teachers, not just preachers.

I Peter 4:11 says,

“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.

If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised.”

So we have to ask ourselves,
 How do I judge this teaching?
 How do I judge this Compass Fellowship?
 How do I judge *any* church?
 How do I decide what kind of meetings I'm going to attend?
 How do I decide what teacher I'm going to listen to every week?
 Am I shopping for comfort?
 Do I just want something that will please me, make me feel good?
 Do I really just ... want what I want?
 Or do I really want what God wants for me?
 Do I really want *all* he has for me?
 Am I willing to open myself up, and give myself over to him, and take in *everything* he
 wants to give me, for my own good?

How do I decide what I really believe?
 Do I believe what I really believe, or do I believe something that some preacher tells me
 to believe?
 What's the real, bedrock, bottom-line, unilateral, universal truth about my life?

I can't answer this question for you.
 You have to do that yourself.
 Am I deciding what kind of teaching to allow into my life on the basis of style? Or on the
 basis of substance?
 This isn't like Disney World, where you decide which ride to go on based on which line
 is shortest.
 This is your life. There's a lot at stake.
 My prayer for all of us is that we'll grow more and more casual, maybe even
 adventurous, about matters of style, but at the same time more and more
 serious, even rigid, about matters of substance.