

## **How to Write**

*By Neil W. Anderson*

Edward C. Wharton, teacher and author, describes the Bible as “the voice of God” and Christian magazines “as the voice of the church.” More than 400 journals have been associated with the American Restoration Movement, according to J.M. Powell, church historian. Most of these journals were short-lived, but they served as a mirror of a great movement to restore New Testament teaching and practice into life.

One journal, the *Gospel Advocate*, celebrated 155 years of publishing in 2010. Much has been said about the effectiveness of “The Old Reliable” in helping Christians maintain the faith, but this would not have been possible without good writers--ones who want to help those who seek truth to “desire the sincere milk” of God’s Word (1 Pet. 2:2 KJV).

Christians often flirt with two dangers: delivering the pure milk of the Word in contaminated containers or not delivering any milk at all. “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled” (Tit. 1:15 NKJV). Today many are turning away from the purity of the gospel to accept the teachings of men. Like the Athenians, they spend their time “in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21). “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him” (Tit. 1:16). Because we at *Gospel Advocate* want Christians to know God’s Word and live by it, we take our work of teaching through the printed page seriously.

### **Article Content**

Ask a dozen editors how to write, and you will get a dozen different responses. The 16 editors of the *Gospel Advocate*, which included Tolbert Fanning, David Lipscomb, B.C. Goodpasture and Guy N. Woods, each had a unique perspective on what kind of articles should

be included in the *GA* and how they should be written. So as the current editor, here are some things that I am looking for from writers.

• **Integrity.** In order to maintain the integrity of the *Gospel Advocate*, we follow a set of ethical standards, each based on Scripture. These guidelines for writing are adapted from the ECPA (Evangelical Christian Publishing Association) and are respected nationally for those involved in religious writing.

1. Proclaim the truth in love (Eph. 4:25-29).
2. Follow Christian methods of biblical interpretation (2 Tim. 3:14–4:5).
3. Document all resources and validate all research (Col. 2:8).
4. Give credit to whom it is due (Jer. 23:30).
5. Exercise discernment in all spiritual matters (Heb. 5:12-14).
6. Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).
7. Focus on the issues and not personalities (Luke 6:35-38).
8. Be under the authority of and accountable to objective, godly leaders (Eph. 5:21).
9. Seek wisdom from God (Eph. 5:17-18; Jas. 1:5).
10. Do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

All of these points are good reminders of what your motivation as a writer should be. Honesty and integrity in writing, including documenting the sources of your ideas, is an important part of helping your reader grow spiritually.

• **Life Experience.** With the aforementioned guidelines clearly in mind, the writer must determine what he will write. Many professional writers in a variety of fields astutely advise, “Write what you know and what interests you.” The avid student committed to increasing his knowledge and understanding should make the most effective writer. He may not be able to tell

all he knows--he must not even try--but he should write from his overflow of experiences and knowledge. Remember, brevity is your friend. Write clear, concise sentences, and when you proofread your articles, remove any clutter. This will result in effective writing.

- **Motivation.** Make sure that you challenge your reader, either by giving information in an edifying way or by inspiring him to act on the truths you present. Writing is a platform for more than one's own thoughts and feelings. It is an opportunity to motivate and nudge the reader toward changing for the better.

- **Truth Spoken in Love.** Every effort should be made to maintain the focus on issues and not on personalities. However, some issues cannot be separated from those who teach them. I have seen that even in cordial groups people tend to polarize and become defensive when personalities are attacked rather than issues. Back someone into a corner, and he'll come out fighting.

I remember Ira North, editor of the *Gospel Advocate* from 1978-1981, frequently coming into the office and quoting that we "be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." North taught that unity is found in Christ and comes through obedience to His Word. It is another vital aspect of responsible journalism.

Quoting from the Sept. 11, 1873, issue of the *Gospel Advocate*, W.Y. Kuykendall wrote, "I prefer to name no name lest my readers should begin to compare the men who write, rather than the arguments they use." Later in the same issue, however, several brethren were identified as teaching error. God's Word never contradicts itself, so when we speak lovingly in truth it is possible to reconcile "judge not, and you shall not be judged" (Luke 6:37) and "note those who cause divisions" (Rom. 16:17). We strive to avoid name-calling and sarcastic generalizations that serve no purpose but to divide. Certainly we want to help erring brethren understand their error,

but in no other place is it more important to speak the truth in love.

- **Documentation.** Responsible journalism begins with publishing truth--in love. Truth is liberating, setting us free from sin. Because our ministry is one of reconciliation, not condemnation, all information should be verified and documented. “What” is said is often tempered by “who” has said it. Opinions must be reported as such, including the writer’s own. Our purposes are to glorify God, edify Christians and do nothing to bring harm to the church.

- **Accuracy.** It is important that you proofread your article before you send it to us, being careful to recheck scripture references and quoted sources for accuracy. Our editors do their best to catch any errors, but you can help by being as accurate as possible before you send in your article. You want your words to be known for their truth and Christlikeness.

### **How to Submit an Article**

Those interested in writing for the *Gospel Advocate* or any other religious periodical need to learn the guidelines or expectations of the publications that most interest them. In the case of the *GA*, we prefer unsolicited articles from new authors to be 1,200-1,400 words.

We receive articles in several ways. Some of our authors still submit manuscripts that are handwritten or typewritten. Although this may not be our favorite way to receive articles, they are still given consideration. Most of our articles, however, are written as Word documents and submitted to us via e-mail as an attachment. This format is the most helpful because it means we don't have to retype it for the magazine.

Which ever form you choose, always make sure that you include your name, address, phone number and e-mail address on the article. Always keep a copy of the article for yourself as articles can be lost in the mail or misplaced. At the *Gospel Advocate*, we also ask for a biographical paragraph from the author that includes such information as where he went to

school, his occupation, the name of the congregation where he worships, and his responsibilities at the congregation (preaching, teaching, deacon, elder, etc.).

Because we work with a backlog of articles and months in advance in preparing for an issue, it would be unrealistic to expect an article submitted this month to be published next month, so be patient. We seek to maintain a variety of articles in each issue, and that aim requires careful selectivity in choosing articles for each month. All of these guidelines apply equally to *Christian Woman* writers and book writers as well.

### **Writing for the Long-Term**

Writing is unlike any other medium in that our words can last long beyond the closing hymn or the final amen. Your words can go on to influence generations far beyond our own, and when issues of error recur, as they often do, those who fight against error may be able to refer to what you have written to fight against those same errors and lead our brothers and sisters back to Christ.

I find personal comfort and strength that in faith I can ask God for wisdom that all we do be done to His glory. The book of John reminds us that apart from Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5), and nowhere is this more true than in our writing. Doing God's work and leading others to Him is the most important goal to strive for and can lead to eternal consequences for both the writer and the reader.