

Why I Write This Column

By PAUL J. SCHARF

Somewhere, along life's way, I was bitten by the bug for writing.

My passion is not so much for writing itself—though I realize that there are people like that. But for me it has more to do with a desire to express my opinion and provide meaningful and useful—Biblically based—content.

It is hard to say exactly when the bug first bit. I can remember making scrapbooks of sports stories clipped out of the newspaper back in my preschool days. Then I remember when I was old enough to read sports columns—and dream of writing my own one day.

As a teenager, I developed an intense interest in the Scriptures. I began to read theological books voraciously. I also started to read and collect Christian articles, think pieces, newsletters, pamphlets, booklets, and the like. But I was doing more than reading; I was learning how to write.

My fire for writing was stoked in many ways in seminary—including one unlikely means. I remember, when I worked overnight security at the school, how I could hear the buzz of the fax machine in the print shop just before midnight. That was the cutting-edge technology back then, and the pages rolling off the machine from various *cultural influencers*—as we would call them now—reminded me that the world out there was moving on while my own world was anchored to the classroom. As much as I loved those classes, I wanted to get back out in that great big world and provide some influence of my own, just like those high-tech authors who wanted to cheat the clock, providing *tomorrow's news tonight*.

I participated in writing the pastors' column for the local newspaper when I served as a pastor in Iowa. Then that period of my life was followed by an unplanned 14-year career in the media as a newspaper editor and reporter.

I wore many hats at the newspaper, and occasionally I would write a column—but that was by no means my main responsibility. During that time, however, I began to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of columns and columnists. And, of course, I learned to envy those who could rise high enough in the world of media that they could afford to live simply by writing columns.

Like everyone else in our tumultuous times, columnists have had to adapt to the rapid and radical changes in technology that have come about over the last 30 years. Those fax machines were still a big part of the news business when I began to work in it in 2000. Can you believe it—at the turn of this century secretaries actually still took the pages that were faxed in and retyped them into the computer!

And while changing technologies have brought many new challenges for columnists, they have also ushered in a world of new opportunities. Whatever the means by which they arrive, cogently crafted words have power. “The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd” (Eccles. 12:11). And it has never been easier to provide them.

The Reformers knew the power of the written word, so they spent much of their precious time translating the Bible and then teaching it by such means.

Perhaps the most influential columnist of the last half-century was none other than President Ronald Reagan. Reagan gave himself to writing columns and recording radio commentaries in his attempt to earn the Republican nomination for the presidency in 1976 and, ultimately, 1980. He was refining his own philosophy even as he influenced the masses, and he charted a course that would impact our nation for decades.

For a number of years, I have desired to write a weekly column on Biblical themes. When I began my service with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, I knew that this was my opportunity. Once I opened a page for my ministry on SermonAudio.com, and had the ability to post unlimited content, I had every reason to begin.

So, I started with a column for Easter of 2020. Since then, I have written a total of 42 columns, including this one. I write on Biblical themes, holidays and current events. I have also written extensively about historical subjects—so far sharing my passion for the Reformation (for which I am compiling an ongoing series about the 500th anniversary of its various aspects) and the Pilgrims.

Meeting the self-imposed deadline of producing a column each Thursday evening creates some pressure, but I hope that it also provides a service to those who take an interest in our ministry. I appreciate the outlets that have run it thus far, and I would love to see it gain an even wider reach—and would be open to any constructive suggestions along those lines.

And, as always, considering the plethora of worthy alternatives available, I am humbled by and grateful for each one who takes the time to read it.

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