

“MORE”

(The Second Degree of Modifiers)

by Bill Reeves and Tim Haile

In reference to modifiers, there are three degrees of comparison, illustrated by these three adjectives: good, better and best.

- First degree: **declarative or positive**; e.g., *This book is good.*
- Second degree: **comparative**; e.g., *This is a better book.*
- Third degree: **superlative**; e.g., *This is the best book of all.*
- Other degrees of modifiers are seen in these words: *much* or *many*, *more*, *most*; *great*, *greater*, *greatest*.

Companies frequently use the second-degree modifier in advertising their “*New and Improved*” product. The new product is alleged to be “better” than its predecessor.

False teachers commonly employ the **second** degree of modifiers in promoting their false doctrines. This is true in politics and religion, as well as in other fields of discussion. It is a subtle tactic and therefore very deceptive. Rather than reveal the true objective that the false teacher has, the impression is left that really the only thing being promoted is something **a little better than something else**.

Should the false teacher boldly declare his ultimate intention or goal, the listener would be shocked and thus turned off. But by incrementalism, the false teacher proceeds in a slow manner to manipulate minds toward the ultimate goal, not shocking the listener but rather suggesting to him that something is *just a little bit better*. The ultimate and real goal results in complete apostasy!

Let’s consider some illustrations of this deceptive tactic of the false advocate:

1. Some brethren in Christ are affirming that they believe in a “*more expanded role*” for women in the church. What they really advocate is that **women be allowed to be elders and preachers just like men are!** God says that a woman is not permitted to teach, or exercise authority over man (1 Tim. 2:12).

2. Dr. Stephen J. Corey, president of the United Christian Missionary Society of the Disciples of Christ, Indianapolis, IN., wrote in the 1936 Religious Census of the Department of Commerce: *“Mr. Stone favored ‘Christians,’ as the name given in the beginning by divine authority. Mr. Campbell and his friends preferred the name ‘Disciples’ as less offensive to good people and quite as scriptural.”* What he means is that we should not be “offensive” **at all** toward the denominational world!
3. He also wrote: *“During the first few years of the movement, Alexander Campbell and other leaders were often engaged in more or less heated controversies with representatives of other denominations. Gradually, however, these discussions became less frequent and at the same time more conciliatory in tone.”* What he means is that debates are heated controversies and that they shouldn’t exist at all, and that all dealings with other denominations should be **entirely conciliatory**. But, he used the second degree of modifiers (“less,” and “more”) to take his readers at a slower pace toward the ultimate goal. The Bible tells us to *“earnestly contend for the faith”* (Jud. 3).
4. A recent TV segment on dealt with men cheating on their wives (Jan. 23, 2006). It reported that women want *more room* in this area. The interpretation and real meaning: wives want to want to engage in extra-marital sex with the exact same freedom that **their husbands use** to so do! If men are going to engage in illicit, promiscuous and ungodly sexual relations, women want to do likewise! However, both commit sin in so doing (Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 7:2).
5. Some people speak of things that *“help you feel closer to God.”* Why closer? How much closer? Why not be imitating God **all the way** (Eph. 5:1; Matt.5:48)? Some believe that certain things, or certain ways of doing those things make them feel *“more spiritual.”* There is no such thing; we are either *“led by the Spirit”* (spiritual), or we are not (spiritual) (Rom. 8:6, 14)!
6. Some people speak of being *“more”* or *“less” edified* by certain preaching/teaching methods. People are *“edified”* (built up) by the straightforward teaching of the *“whole council”* of the word of God (see Acts 20:26, 27, 32). Translation: These people really mean that they are offended by the teaching of the *whole council* of Truth, and they want something that makes them *feel* better.
7. Some want a preaching style and content that is *“less offensive.”* Why would a person push for *“less”* offensive when the Bible tells us to give NO offense! We are to be **non-offensive** (Matt. 18:6). Paul said,

“giving none offense...” (1 Cor. 10:32)! Translation: These people have confused the *offense of the gospel* (Matt. 15:12; 11:6; 1 Pet. 2:8) with a *personal* offense against a brother (1 Cor. 10:32). They attempt to weaken the effect of the gospel in order to salve their consciences in the areas where they and their friends are wrong.

8. Some politicians claim that their party can do “a better job” than their opponent’s administration. They adopt campaign slogans like, “*We can do it better!*” This sounds good but it does not reveal what they really have in mind. They use the comparative degree but where they are headed is the superlative!

The question to put to all false advocates is this: “Just *how much* more (or less) of the thing or matter do you have in mind?” They will dodge the question, because they are not really interested in the second degree, but only in the third. They are using the second degree to lead their listeners to the third. This is to where their advocacy is leading! This is their true goal, but to so state it would not help their cause at all, and they know it!

Incrementalism is like the proverbial dripping of water on a stone: in time it wears away the stone! By moving the listener “more and more” toward the desired end, finally the listener accepts the full-blown apostasy! The “good” (declarative or positive degree) pattern of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13) is finally supplanted by the “best” (superlative degree) of human wisdom (false doctrine), and this is accomplished by subtly employing “more” (comparative degree) compromise of truth.

Be on the lookout for the comparative degree! It is everywhere; it is common. It may tell you that you’re listening to a false teacher. Don’t be deceived! The strength of the false teacher is in his words; in *sound* and not in *substance*. “Smooth and fair speech” (Rom. 16:17,18) is his principle tool.

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