

# “Disclaimer Devotions”

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher  
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- Psalm 119:102-105
- 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Years ago when the package delivery company FedEx was still called Federal Express, they made some award-winning TV commercials featuring a fellow named John Moschitta. You probably don't recognize the name, but if you ever saw the commercials, you'd remember him. John's claim to fame was that he had trained himself to be a fast talker. He could articulate nearly 600 words per minute.<sup>2</sup>

Since those days, we've heard many commercials where people speak amazingly fast—but not because they had John Moschitta's talent. No, computers are able to make fast-talkers out of anyone. They do that in a few ways. The computer can cut out tiny bits of silence between words to make them closer together. Computers can also play the sound at a higher speed while also adjusting the pitch so the voices sound normal, not like Alvin and the Chipmunks.

On the radio we usually hear this speed-talking at the end of the commercial. The television equivalent of speed-talking is when they display teeny-tiny text at the bottom of the screen. That's when the sponsor has to include various statements that are required by FCC regulations or by the corporate lawyers hoping to prevent lawsuits. Whether in text on TV or in print ads or spoken on radio, these legal messages at the end of commercials are called “disclaimers.”

Some disclaimers are downright silly. I read about a TV commercial for an insurance company depicting a woman jumping out of an airplane, free-falling thousands of feet through the air and eventually landing softly on a purple blanket that represented the security of a certain insurance company. Obviously the actress in the ad jumped out of an airplane wearing bulky clothes that hid the parachute she was wearing. They filmed her during freefall, then when she opened her 'chute, they stopped filming. Later on the ground, when she jumped from an off-camera platform into the cushy purple blanket, they edited that onto the previous footage, thus creating the illusion that she jumped from the plane and landed in the blanket.

The disclaimer that appeared at the bottom of the TV screen? *“Dramatization. Do not attempt.”* (Like any of us would jump out of an airplane onto a blanket, I don't care how many parachutes we were wearing!)

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<sup>1</sup> Originally preached August 3, 2008

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Moschitta\\_Jr.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Moschitta_Jr.), accessed 7/19/2021

Then there's the baby stroller that bears the warning label: "*Caution: remove child before folding stroller.*"

In your own home you may have an electric hairdryer with a tag that warns, "*Do not use in bathtub or shower.*"

There's a prescription sleeping pill that actually carries that caution "*May cause drowsiness.*"

I got to thinking about disclaimers the other day, things like:

- *Tax and title extra* (because you're never going to pay *exactly* \$29,995 for anything);
- *Your mileage may vary* (because you drive in real traffic not in a vehicle emissions testing laboratory);
- *These results not typical* (you see these especially on the ads for weight loss products and programs);
- *Available to qualified buyers* (so if you have excellent credit and don't need it, they'll give you the loan, but if you really need the assistance, you probably don't qualify);

Disclaimers are everywhere, and they seem to grow longer and longer, and more and more annoying. What if we could somehow use those annoying tiny captions and those annoying fast-talking legal cautions to our advantage. Martin Luther, the great Christian reformer, once noted that "God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but on the trees and flowers and clouds and stars." In other words, the gospel message could be proclaimed everywhere—in the people and things and places all around us.

So what if we were to change those fast-talking, tiny-print disclaimers from annoyances into blessings, using those commercial disclaimers to inspire brief devotional moments, bringing to mind wisdom and guidance from the Bible? Let me offer a few disclaimers, followed by a devotional thought.

Disclaimer: "*Limit one per customer....*" Devotional thought: Our society seems to push us to worship our work (we've never done enough) or worship money (we never have enough) or worship shopping (we never buy enough) or worship appearance (we never look good enough). But the disclaimer "*Limit one per customer*" could remind us that there is only one object truly worthy of our worship. From the sixth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy we remember, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might" (vv. 4-5). So, only God is worthy of our worship.

Disclaimer: "*Past performance does not guarantee future results....*" Devotional thought: When we hear that disclaimer, we should say to ourselves, "Thank God!" We can think of that disclaimer as assuring us that the mistakes we've made in the past do not condemn us to a hopeless future! The prophet Jeremiah wrote, in Chapter 31, "I, the Lord God, will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs" (v. 34b).

Disclaimer: “*I approved this message.*” Devotional thought: When Jesus was baptized and emerged from the waters of the Jordan and the Spirit of God came down upon him, a voice thundered from above, “This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased” (Mt. 3:16-17). In other words, God has approved the life we have as we live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Disclaimer: “*Hurry, this offer is for a limited time only.*” Devotional thought: What are we waiting for before we commit to reforming our lives to follow Jesus Christ in all that we say and do? What are we waiting for? We don’t have all day, or even all year, and especially all our days. Writing to the Christian believers in Rome, St. Paul urged, “The commandments... are summed up in the one command, ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.... You must do this, because you know that the time has come for you to wake up from your sleep. For the moment when we will be saved is closer now than it was when we first believed’” (Rom. 13:9b, 11).

And finally, Disclaimer: “*Drink responsibly.*” Devotional thought: Jesus used food and drink to assure his believers that he *truly* is with us always. The apostle Paul memorialized that action in a letter he wrote to the Christians in Corinth, Greece. You’ve heard this before:

“For I received from the Lord the teaching that I passed on to you: that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup and said, ‘This cup is God’s new covenant, sealed with my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me.’ This means that every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.... [Paul continues] So then, everyone should examine himself first, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup. For if he does not recognize the meaning of the Lord’s body when he eats the bread and drinks from the cup, he brings judgment on himself as he eats and drinks.... [Paul concludes,] If we would examine ourselves first, we would not come under God’s judgment” (1 Cor. 11: 23-26, 28-29, 31).

Even though we gather for our Lord’s Supper on a regular basis, we should not treat it lightly. Recall that disclaimer to “Drink responsibly.” That can remind us to approach the Lord’s table with devotion, seeking to eat and drink and live responsibly.

Let us pray that our hearts will be open to the power of God’s Holy Spirit which we receive in that meal. May we be receptive to how God wants to move us, to change us, to reform us so that we more closely follow the example of Jesus Christ the Son.