



Beyond Pretend: A Sheep's Guide to the Universe! by David Lee Scott

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- **Excerpt:** The excerpt on the following pages is from SECTION TWO / THREE QUESTIONS / QUESTION TWO / Who controls my world? / Who is my film editor?
- **Artwork by VAL:** Valerie Anne Loomis / Magna Cum Laude / Indiana State University 2007 B.F.A. (Bachelor of Fine Arts) / An art major and also a musician, Val is quite good at capturing my thoughts in very simple yet profound sketches of our sheep friends.



Who is my film editor?

“You can make the Bible say anything you want it to say.” (Anonymous)

As much as you or I may dislike that statement, and as much as it has been used as an excuse to stay away from the teaching of God’s holy book the Bible, you can hardly argue with its truthfulness. As we discussed earlier in the book, even the most simple instructions from God can be manipulated when we want to do something badly enough.

The question really becomes who will you decide to listen to.

You can “make the Bible talk” or you can let God speak to you through the holy words. You remember our drama in Genesis three, don’t you? Eve had to choose whether to listen to the snake or listen to God. The first rebel used God’s words to make her case, thus becoming the first human to make the Bible say what she wanted it to say. Just curious. How did that work out for her?

What does this have to do with film editing?

A film editor takes the raw data, the footage, and creates a movie, a story. Although this section is similar to the previous section because both have to do with storytelling, in this section I will deal more with the manipulation and presentation of the story by those who preach and teach, the film editors. Preachers and teachers begin with the raw data, the footage, and on Sunday mornings from the pulpit, or on radio and television, or in books and seminars, they present a story.

Going to the “movies” on Sunday morning ...

Who do you want to listen to when you “go to the movies” on Sunday morning?

You are trusting the person up front for the story, so have you chosen to hear someone who will communicate what God wants you to hear or what you want to

hear? That is your challenge. Many people faithfully come to worship God sincerely desiring to hear God speak only to have the message skewed by personalities and agendas, often ever so well meaning, but skewed just the same.

Using several analogies from the film industry I will demonstrate how people attempt to control our worlds. I hope to demonstrate how effective these methods of manipulation are even though the raw data (the Bible) which our “editors” begin with is holy and pure. I will familiarize you with these methods so you can recognize the different strategies employed.

Who is in the film room?

Whoever is in the film room determines the outcome of the story. Here’s why!

The people who influence you the most as you view life on the big screen are the ones who select and weave together the shots from the raw footage. These are the ones who tell you how it is. Life, I mean. So who do you allow in the film room? Who forms your perspective of life from their perspective of life?

Are you presented with a “highlight reel” portrayal of life that blurs the reality of who God is, and who you are before God? Or does the presentation draw you into a closer awareness of God? Does the storyline cause you to show your love for God in worship and service?

Another problem ... Welcome to “Itching Ears Studio” ...

- I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:1-4 ESV).

A few things to be aware of as we choose who edits our “reality show.”

- We all are born with “itching ears.”
- We want to follow the myth. “Tell me lies, sweet lies ...”
- We want other people to tell us what we want to hear.
- We want to determine the establishing shot, determine the point of emphasis.
- We want to be portrayed as right, whether we are or not.
- We believe what we want to believe.
- We accept what fits with what we believe.
- We want life to turn out a certain way - our way.
- We are the focus of our movie.

We must understand that from God's perspective there are only two valid choices: Listen to truth or find an acceptable alternative.

- A time will come when people will not listen to accurate teachings. Instead, they will follow their own desires and surround themselves with teachers who tell them what they want to hear. People will refuse to listen to the truth and turn to myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4 GW).

Everyone will listen to some truth. The key is will we listen to the truth we need to hear? Some people will put up with truth and others will follow their desires.

- For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4 ESV).

Either/or ...

- **OPTION #1—LISTEN TO TRUTH: Endure sound teaching and listen to what God would tell us.**
- **OPTION #2—FIND AN ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE: Follow our own desires and find people to tell us what we want to hear.**

We absolutely must understand that choosing Option #2 does not mean that we no longer are interested in biblical truth. In fact, many people who have chosen Option #2 are immersed in church and Bible study. The difference between the two options is not whether we study the Bible and pursue truth. The difference is that in Option #1 we are committed to hearing what God would tell us from the Bible and maintaining a course of obedience as he changes our lives.

The people in the church at Laodicea thought that they excelled in things spiritual but per Jesus' evaluation they were "miserable, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked" spiritually.

So why?

If you are going to choose your own life direction, why go to all the trouble of finding people to justify your decision? Why mess with religion? Why not just do what you want to do? **Because ignoring the truth is not enough. We must suppress it.** The truth of God, scrolled over his entire creation, is so plain, so evident and powerful that it cannot merely be ignored.

- For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them (Romans 1:18-19 ESV).

The entire creation speaks to the presence of God. The sound of God in his world is too powerful to be merely ignored.

- For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:20 ESV).

The truth of God is so powerful and pervasive in his creation that evil attempts to beat the drums of myths and fables to drown it out. And we must choose. God or noise. Written across the sky and buried deep in our hearts, the message of God never stops. **Your choice of who you listen to** (the people you allow to edit the film, the raw data of God's word) will depend on whether you decide to hear the voice of God or whether you decide to suppress the voice of God. Much noise is made in the name of God, but a crucial step on your journey through the universe is determining to hear God over the noise. So who do you ultimately listen to?

Remember that no matter how sophisticated our methodology or elaborate our reasoning, the choices are clear: hear the truth or suppress the truth. Often our complexity is merely pretense: "Yet you do not realize that you are ..."

No editing the raw data ...

God makes it pretty clear that we are to in no way add to or take away from his words in the Holy Book, the Bible. We can see this from the following Scriptures.

- Don't add to these commands, and don't leave anything out, but obey the commands of the LORD your God that I give you (Deuteronomy 4:2 NCV).
- You are to keep with care all the words I give you, making no addition to them and taking nothing from them (Deuteronomy 12:32 BBE).
- For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18-19 NKJV).

In evangelical circles, we would be hard-pressed to find disagreement on the basic principle. Editing God's word by adding or taking away is strictly forbidden. But as with anything human, we always seem to find a way around what God says. I would like to borrow some terms from the film industry to demonstrate a few of our workarounds. You will probably recognize these workarounds. Hopefully it will not be as you sit in the pew next Sunday.

The Establishing Shot

Let's begin with the establishing shot. Please give me a little time to build my story; I think it will be worth the wait.

The establishing shot is "a shot, normally taken from a great distance or from a 'bird's eye view,' that establishes where the action is about to occur."

The principle: By focusing primary attention on a lesser phrase of the text, a person may skew the main point of the text, sometimes leaving it out altogether, but not

always. By giving some attention to all the text, the preacher can then rationalize that he has given a thorough exposition of the passage. Our example will be from Ephesians 4:26.

As I listened to the radio one day, the preacher entered into a discussion on Ephesians 4:26. Certain texts grab my attention when I hear them mentioned, and this is one of them. I remember confronting it for the first time as I taught through Ephesians at an inner city church in Chicago and deliberating how to handle the “be angry” emphasis. Like so many Christians I had been influenced by those who believe that we should never be angry because all anger is sin. But I couldn’t escape the clear statement of the text: “Be angry.” The Apostle Paul was pushing the Ephesians toward honesty in speaking to each other, even if that honesty stirred anger.

I revisited this text at a church I pastored a few years later and was approached by a “disgruntled” (he couldn’t be angry because he was one who believed that good Christians are never angry) member who showed me Bible verse after Bible verse from his friend’s “biblical” counseling notebook demonstrating the sinfulness of anger. What was I thinking? But what he could not grasp was that although anger is **often** sin, **maybe even usually** is sin, it is **not always** sin. *Biblical* counseling notebook aside, no amount of sinful anger verses quash the very clear, strong exhortation in Ephesians four to be angry.

Here is the text, and then I will get to the editing part.

- Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil (Ephesians 4:25-27 ESV).

Using the establishing shot ...

The radio speaker that day may never have heard of an establishing shot, but that is what he used to manipulate the text. In review we see that an establishing shot establishes where the action is about to occur. The establishing shot in the radio message was “do not let the sun go down on your anger.” This is what he led with. As the “director of the movie” he could have chosen to focus on “be angry.” But never during his entire presentation did he emphasize this phrase. He spoke of not letting the sun go down on our anger, of not sinning in our anger and of not giving the devil an opportunity.

With his establishing shot he successfully directed our attention from the main thrust of the verse which was “be angry.” He focused the stage lights on “not sinning in our anger” and “not letting the sun go down on our anger” while allowing “be angry” to languish in the shadows.

He preached the text while disregarding the main point of the text by intentionally avoiding the main phrase of the text, and still probably appeared to most to have given a true exposition of the text.

- **But the anger Paul addressed was vital to the Ephesians' growth in Christ.**

Paul was exhorting the Ephesians to put away the pretense, the lies, and speak truth to each other even if it meant they became angry with each other because the maturing they would do through this was worth it, in fact imperative to maturing in Christ.

- **Anger can be defined very simply as strong displeasure.**

This means I care enough about you and you care enough about me that even though we may become strongly displeased with the other person or her actions, because we are in this together, because it is God-directed, please tell the truth, even if you are angry or I may become angry. But do not sin.

Let's go back the radio preacher. He didn't add or take away words, but he did edit the meaning by changing the emphasis and focusing on the secondary. He used the raw data of Ephesians 4:25-27 and preached the wrong message. Part of the irony is that many people feel that this passive, stoic, never show your feelings or emotions is a sign of spiritual maturity, when it seems that Paul is saying that our honest speaking to each other in love, even if we are sometimes angry, is essential to our growth. Our radio preacher let us down that particular day.

Using the Cut ...

Another well-known radio preacher I heard speaking from Ephesians four "edited the film" with the use of a cut.

A cut is "a visual transition created in editing in which one shot is instantaneously replaced on screen by another."

This man mentioned the command to be angry but then immediately he cut away to Matthew 21:12-13 where Jesus enters the temple and drives out the temple merchants, skillfully shifting the emphasis of Paul's teaching. He compared the "be angry" directed to believers growing in relationship in Ephesians with the anger of Jesus in the temple in Matthew. His point was that the anger Paul spoke of in Ephesians 4:26 was like the righteous indignation Jesus felt so it was okay.

So the movie after his editing went like this.

THE "BE ANGRY" HURDLE!

Who is the angriest person in the Bible?

Search your Bibles using the words anger, angry, wrath, etc. Do you know the answer? God! Based on the number of references, the person in the Bible who is connected to anger more than anyone else is God. This is a pretty difficult hurdle for the "all anger is sin" crowd to overcome. So to avoid the "be angry" emphasis while at the same time trying to appear to stay true to the text, they establish a point of emphasis away from the main teaching of the text. So they preach the text without really preaching the text. Yeah, I know.

Scene One: The command to be angry is given by Paul as a group of Ephesian believers sit around the table discussing their relationships with each other.

CUT to Scene Two: Jesus is kicking butt in the temple, knocking over tables, swinging a whip over his head, clearing his Father's house of the bad guys.

So do you see what happened? As before there was no adding to or taking away words from the text per se, but the cut he implemented changed the emphasis so dramatically that Paul's intent was obscured. Could Ephesians 4:26 involve righteous indignation? Yes. But to focus our attention on righteous indignation neuters the main emphasis and proper interpretation of the text. Paul's emphasis was fellow Christians who are trying to honestly work out their relationships with each other. Possibly they don't like how the other fellow is going about his business as methods and personalities clash.

Another possible scenario is that a brother or sister is sinning and the group is keeping silent. Either way when we do not speak truthfully with each other we deprive the group and ourselves of the tremendous resource that we could be to each other, that being a sharpening stone, a transforming perspective, a grid by which we can see and correct our faults in the context of a loving family living out the teachings of Scripture. We hold back our maturity.

The "edit" by the second radio preacher stifles non-sinful anger that should be expressed per Paul's command but is not expressed because it does not fall into the "righteous indignation" category. His edit limits the text in a way that God never intended and now his listeners will feel the need to quash genuine feelings of frustration with their brothers and sisters in Christ instead of following the biblical model that Paul gave them which was:

- talk to each other, put away the pretense and lying,
- be strongly displeased if necessary but don't you dare sin,
- and work it out before the sun sets,
- and don't give the devil an opportunity to wreak havoc in your relationships.

But, no, either I can't be angry at all, or I have to have righteous indignation, so I guess I will just suppress my feelings. But suppressed feelings usually don't stay suppressed. Our inexcusable editing of the text results in gossip, bitterness, an unforgiving spirit and sinful explosions of anger because we have removed the biblical apparatus to deal with our unresolved issues and help each other grow up.

By our disobedience to this text we produce nice Christians who do not realize that stepping forward in Christian maturity is an ongoing battle of faith and courteous Christians who refuse to relate beneath the surface for fear of a sub-cultural environment in which we punish the obedient and reward the indifferent. And now maybe we should wonder if the divine building of Christ appears more facade than the sanctifying work of God.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:19–22 NIV84).

Jesus didn't die so we could be nice, and he didn't call us to be friendly. He calls us to love one another, to lay our lives down for one another, even if it means we get ticked off at times.

- This I command you, that you love one another (John 15.17 NAS).
- Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4.8 NLT).

Often our lack of anger is not a sign of spirituality but of indifference. Our speaker used "the cut" to cut the heart from the text.

As we continue with our film analogies, please let me introduce the montage.

Using the Montage ...

Montage: Scenes whose emotional impact and visual design are achieved through the editing together of many brief shots.

Do you recall my earlier reference to the disgruntled church member who was upset with me because I taught the truth about "good" anger and how he proceeded to school me in the sinfulness of anger from his friend's counseling notebook? He used the editing process called the montage. Multiple shots from various Bible verses, all with the same perceived theme and focus, directed toward the screen in the audience's mind in rapid fire succession to build one image. His message: Anger is sinful and don't you dare say otherwise.

And don't you dare try to teach otherwise even if God himself clearly does so, because I want to hear what I want to hear, believe what I want to believe, and I want to choose my own personal ending for the movie. An old Hollywood adage has it that a film is created three times; when it's written, when it's shot and when it's edited.

So who do you want to listen to? Eve chose a snake.

Good film editors ...

- Good film editors want the best representation of the raw data no matter what.
- Good film editors want the main characters portrayed as accurately to the original as possible.
- Good film editors learn their trade.
- Good film editors seek to improve.

- Good film editors welcome criticism.
- Good film editors don't say more than God does.
- Good film editors know they are not the stars of the show.
- Good film editors are willing to die for the show.
- Good film editors are driven to humility, not pride.

What to remember as we tell the stories and watch the film ...

- The opportunity to tell the story of God should humble us, not make us proud.
- We will struggle with communicating God's thoughts and ways which are higher than our thoughts and ways as the heavens are above the earth.
- We are finite and flawed. God is infinite and perfect.
- We should accept this opportunity with great reverence.

The opportunity to tell the story of God should excite and encourage us.

God in his mercy and grace gives us what is necessary. Stop and think of this. **He will use his people to water this earth with his words just as he literally waters the ground with rain and snow.** God's words will not return until they make happen what God wants to happen. And we are a significant part of that. Praise and thanks to God.

- The LORD says, "My thoughts are not like your thoughts. Your ways are not like my ways. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. Rain and snow fall from the sky and don't return without watering the ground. They cause the plants to sprout and grow, making seeds for the farmer and bread for the people. The same thing is true of the words I speak. They will not return to me empty. They make the things happen that I want to happen, and they succeed in doing what I send them to do" (Isaiah 55:8-11 NCV).



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Kindle Edition 99¢ on Amazon

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