

Grammar patrol

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

At one church, the children's pastor was explaining to his "children's sermon" audience and the congregation how he had neglected to put the correct amount of postage on a recent mailing to their parents. It seems that since postage rates had gone up, he had put the new extra once-cent stamp on the envelopes but forgot to affix the other, larger amount stamp. He expressed his desire that the parents would forgive him for his oversight.

A little girl's voice rose up from somewhere back in the crowd, "That's alright David, everybody makes mistakes." She brought down the house and the pastor suggested that we could all go home since we had heard the sermon of the day.

We, indeed, all do make mistakes—some of them over and over. As a Christian journalist, I am conscious of my most common errors. One is to use "which" instead of "that," and the other is to use "less" when I should be using "fewer."

As I read through many of our missionary's prayer letters I find some very common mistakes. My purpose in mentioning them here is not to embarrass anybody—as I have indicated I make my share of errors. The intent, rather, is to help you improve what you write.

Recently I saw a very attractive newsletter from one of our newer people on the field. It was filed with great photos, zippy captions and nicely laid out. The problem? The missionary is new to LAM and, at the same time, I don't know all of our missionaries personally either. Nowhere on that publication was I able to find (1) the missionary's name, or (2) the name of our mission, (3) where that missionary is serving.

Now this person's parents, friends and the good members of their home church surely know who this wonderful servant of God is. They know who to pray for. They know where to send support. But I don't. Neither does anybody else who runs across this prayer letter on a bulletin board, on someone's coffee table or in any other location.

Don't leave people guessing. A missionary prayer letter ought to include, at a minimum, (1) the missionary's name, (2) place of service, (3) field address, (4) the name of the mission, (5) the mission's address and (6) the mission's logo. (You don't have a logo you say? Write, we can send you one by email or by regular mail).

Another problem in the same prayer letter was the use of the personal pronoun I—as in *Mary and I went to the market*. It is NOT correct to say *Mary and me went to the market*, nor *me and Mary went to the market*. It is very awkward when you write *I and Mary went to the market*.

How can you remember to write and speak this correctly? Leave out Mary and just include yourself. You wouldn't say *me went to the market*, you would use I. So, *Mary*

and I went to the Market. The same applies to other related forms, such as he and I vs. him (or her) and I. You wouldn't say *him went to the market*, so don't say, *him and I went to the market*. (By the way, always put the other person first in those kinds of sentences and it will sound much better—besides it's good courtesy!).

So, it is wise to use those grammatical forms which....er....that are better so you will make less....er....fewer mistakes.

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