

Rhetoric Gets a Bad Rap

by: Bob Adams

In our just concluded election season, rhetoric almost always got a bad rap. When used in a pejorative sense, rhetoric is equated with empty speech or empty words. In reality, rhetoric is all about influence, and as John Maxwell has said, "Leadership is influence." Church leaders, far more than any politician, should master the use of rhetoric.

Compelling rhetoric makes for compelling leaders. Eloquent speech and writing - in a sermon, staff meeting, community gathering, magazine article, or blog - can convert dispassionate observers into committed participants. Leaders want their words to win hearts and change minds.

Aristotle's work on rhetoric should be a starting point for any leader wanting to use the spoken and written word to persuade listeners to a point of view. Better communication skills demand that we articulate our ideas in a manner that effectively persuades our listeners and readers.

I'll leave the fundamentals of rhetoric to another time and place, for it deserves an extended examination. More people in more places require more persuasion than ever before. But for today, in early 2009, how will you as a leader translate the practice of weaving words into sentences into paragraphs that speak straight into your listener's and reader's heart?