

A PREACHER'S PREPARATION

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There used to be a popular put-down relative to the education standards, and no ordination requirements, required of church of Christ preachers. The put-down went something like this, *"In order to preach for the church of Christ all you need is a King James Bible and know what the church is against."* In my early days of preaching, over 50-years ago, there was some measure of truth in that insult. Once the doctrinal litmus test was passed and you affirmed that you used only the King James Bible you were allowed to preach.

Well things have changed. Since the church moved from the caves to the cathedrals; from across the tracks to the better side of town, the academic requirements for a preacher have taken on new meaning and power. Thus, qualifications for a man to preach have been adjusted to include academia; to mirror the professional standards of the world. Preaching is a business.

Many of our early Christian colleges were two year programs started with the goal of preparing preachers. Bible courses were taught by men who had been on the front lines of preaching and working with churches. Few had graduate degrees and some had no degrees. Students were taught the Bible as the inherent, confluent, full and plenary word of God (i.e. 2 Timothy 3:15-17). The Great Commission was burning in the hearts of teacher which inspired students to "go into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15, 16).

Teachers were men who had real world and real church experience; they weren't just passing on notes they had gained in a seminary or Bible college. They weren't using liberal and secular principles by tacking on a few Bible verses. They didn't teach theory or create doubt and confusion in the minds of students. Churches were growing as these prepared men went forth preaching the word, which they believed they had been commanded to do (cf. 2 Timothy 4:1-6).

Well folks all of that has changed. The model of Jesus calling mature men with experience in the real world to preach has changed. Christ's three year school of ministry for the "common disciple" has evolved to an academic echelon few choose to go through. We still refuse to use

the word *seminary* because of a prejudice toward denominational churches; yet many of our preachers attend and get degrees from conservative to liberal seminaries.

We have a “seminary curricula” under school and program names deemed more appropriate. Accreditation has become the Holy Grail all colleges and graduate schools are trying to satisfy. Before secular thinking guided what qualified a preacher to preach and a teacher to teach a preacher, the word of God was the accreditation standard. It was the A.U.G degree based in 2 Timothy 2:15, *Study to Show Thyself approved Unto God” (KJV).*

In my opinion every preacher God uses in ministry must first be prepared to function in that ministry. For example Jesus warned that *“if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (John 15:12-14).* The act of preparation is the equipping and making ready for the task ahead or at hand; to get ready to function properly. As never before the church needs qualified teachers of preachers and preacher who are biblically prepared to preach. Sadly, I know of cases where so-called teachers of preachers have had little or no preaching experience in the day to day work of church work. They use the textbooks written by those who have had real church experience; thus they are teaching theory. This isn’t a sound Bible model.

As a turtle slowly out runs the rabbit, so the church has managed to move slowly from a biblical model of training preachers to an academic model which believes that scholars are the best prepared men to preach and lead the church. As the church has moved slowly from the first century to the 21st century, she has become more and more identified with the political and non-Christian world in which she has been sent to “convert.” The church has become subject to the same educational and professional standards of the world; a world that lies in wickedness (cf. 1 John 5:19). Caesar tells the church schools what to do, if they wants to be accredited.

The first colleges founded in America were committed to training men to preach the gospel. The first was Harvard College, then Yale, Princeton, etc. A casual reading of these schools catalogues reveal how far, far away they have gone from their original purpose. The degree designations sound biblical: The Master of Divinity, The Master of Theological Studies, Doctor of Ministry, Doctor of Theology, etc. The courses are more secular than biblical.

Most of these programs recommend in order for a student to get in, a strong background in history, philosophy, literature, social studies, fine arts, psychology, etc. In some advanced degree programs an applicant is expected to have an elementary knowledge in languages: Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German or French.

I trained, or tried to train, preacher students for over 30-years. Looking back I see a number of mistakes I made, as well as blind spots in my philosophy of preacher training. I am not opposed to a preacher having a balanced education. This used to be guaranteed by a high school diploma, but this is no longer true as some graduates can't read the text on their diplomas. I even venture to say that some college graduates are not very literate. I've seen it firsthand.

A Biblical Model

When we look through the pages of Scripture we don't find one bound model or example of how to prepare a man to be a spokesman or preacher. When Israel was trying to find a replacement for King Saul, Samuel offered a candidate. Here is how God replied to Samuel's suggestion: *"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for men look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the HEART'" (1 Samuel 16:1-7).* One credential—HEART!

The preparation of a preacher starts with the HEART—the inner man.. A man may have academic degrees, be handsome and well groomed, be an orator with a golden tongue, be a good people person, and has offers from large congregations, but if his heart isn't right, God doesn't approve of him. A preacher may have great homiletic skills, be a great students of hermeneutics, know theology, and doctrine, and is a great organizer, but what about his heart?

Therefore, the training of a preacher must begin, continue, and always involve his heart. I confess that during my years of training preachers there wasn't a course or major emphasis placed on preparing the student's heart. I guess we assumed it would happen automatically by studying the Bible and ministry courses. Not so!

The word *HEART* is mentioned approximately 1000 times in the 66 books of the Bible. This makes it obvious that God is very, very interested in the attitudes, actions, and dispositions of the heart. Here are just a few of the verses where God tells us about heart:

1. The preacher must be self-disciplined to be pure in heart (Matthew 5:8).
2. The preacher must learn how to keep his heart with diligence (Proverbs 4:23).
3. The preacher must guard his heart from envy (Proverbs 23:17).
4. The preacher must remember God knows the secrets of his heart (Psalm 44:21).
5. The preacher must keep the word active in his heart (Psalm 119:11).
6. The preacher must remember his heart is touchable by God's word (Acts 2:37).
7. The preacher must remember his treasure deposits relate to his heart (Matthew 6:21).
8. The preacher must trust the Lord with all his heart (Proverbs 3:5).
9. The preacher must continually guard his heart (Proverbs 4:23; Philippians 4:7).
10. The preacher must not let his heart be troubled (John 14:1, 27).
11. The preacher must remember God will give him the desires of his heart (Psalm 37:4).
12. The preacher must not harden his heart (Mark 6:52).
13. The preacher must remember the mouth reveals what's in the heart (Matthew 12:34).
14. The preacher must praise God with his whole heart (Psalm 9:1).
15. The preacher must allow God to inspect his heart (Psalm 26:2).

These are only a few of the heart verses that should be taught, learned and applied in the life of a man preparing to preach. It all starts with the heart. The challenge is to intentionally work on applying these verses in the will, intellect, conscious, emotions and mind. A preacher may be prepared in 101 things but if his heart is not prepared he is not pleasing to God; no matter how great the brethren think he is.

PREACH THE WORD! Not about, around, under or close to the word—**THE WORD!** This can only flow from a **PURE HEART.**

