



CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR LEADERS

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On a recent plane trip I was seated next to a man who was busy reading and writing. During the refreshment break we engaged in conversation. He was a physician returning from a special training program required for continual certification in his medical practice. I thought after our conversation that his patients were very fortunate to have a physician who was always up to date on the latest techniques, medicines and what was new in his field.

Almost all professions from plumbers to mechanics; from doctors to lawyers, require some form of continuing education on an annual basis. Policemen must go through annual training; nurses must acquire continuing education units. Millions of American are involved in continuing education on an annual basis. The reasons and motivation for such studies are varied. Some do it to keep their jobs, others to acquire new knowledge, skills, etc. Continuing education plays a vital role in the economical, social, educational, technological and political areas of our lives.

Continuing education is also a vital force in most religious groups. Many denominational groups have developed programs for the in-service training of workers, especially their ministers. Many of these programs come from special institutions designed for the specific purpose of meeting continuing educational needs and



requirements. Most of these groups encourage, highly recommend, or even require their ministers to participate in continuing educational programs on an annual basis. Leadership training is an ongoing focus.

When we come to continuing education as a point of focus among leaders in the Churches of Christ, it is easy to see that in most cases it doesn't exist on a required, professional or planned scale. Where it does exist participation is small. Why? The answers are many and vary from leader to leader. I do, however, believe that many leaders neglect to participate in an organized or institutional directed continuing educational program for some of the following reasons.

First, some leaders are satisfied with educational accomplishments in the past. Thus, they seem to think that because they finished school or college five, ten or fifteen years ago, that this is sufficient for the rest of their lives. And, yet, these leaders will readily admit that they have retained very little of the knowledge gained in those past education years. We live in a world that is constantly changing and challenging leaders relative to how to take the changeless Gospel and word of God to our generation.

Second, many leaders are too busy to accept the challenge of involvement in continuing educational opportunities. At least this is what they offer as an excuse when questioned about their lack of involvement. We find time to do what we believe is important. The command to "study to show ourselves approved unto God" (2 Timothy



2:15), has no termination date or amount of knowledge one needs to acquire to end the pursuit of studying God's word.

Third, some leaders, sad to say, are too lazy to accept the challenge of continuing their education; especially in the area of special leadership skills needed to lead the church in the twenty-first century. Coasting may be a good exercise for a bike going downhill but not for leadership that is to remove mountains, fight Satan and preach the Gospel to the world (Mark 16:15, 16).

Fourth, some leaders shun involvement in continuing education because of pride. They seem to think that if they enroll or attend they will be admitting they are ignorant. And yet, by their own admittance and lack of proficiency they declare their lack of knowledge in many areas. Only a foolish leader will say he knows it all and has no need to learn additional information.

Fifth, numerous leaders aren't involved in continuing education on an advanced level because they have no personal goals and aren't leading the congregation in a result oriented manner. It is difficult for such leaders to see themselves doing much more than they are doing now, five, ten or fifteen years from now. Biblically this is near-sighted leadership (2 Peter 1:5-11).

Sixth, leaders aren't encouraged to continue their education on an advanced level. Members don't encourage elders and deacons to continue their education. Elders don't



encourage preachers to continue their education. Thus, the leaders stay in their ruts while the world is changing faster than the second hand on their watches.

Seventh, many leaders aren't continuing their education on an advanced level because they don't know about the opportunities that are available. They want to study on a deeper or advanced level but have no idea where to go in order to do so. Many are out of touch with what is available in the brotherhood. They are unaware of programs offered by colleges, schools of preaching, special seminars, online studies, reading, DVD studies, written courses, and so forth.

Leaders in the churches of today face challenges no other generation of church leaders have faced. No, the doctrine of the Bible must not be tampered with (2 Timothy 3:15-17); the worship of the church must remain "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24) but in areas of methodology and expediencies leaders must know the times and needs in which they are leading. This is where continuing education comes in.

The lingering question is how do we encourage and promote continuing education for church leaders? From our brief discussion it should be obvious that a number of incentives must be present before a leader will become involved in a continuing education program. Some of these incentives are: (1) the need for knowledge is a field or subject; (2) obeying the command to study and grow in knowledge; (3) personal satisfaction and pleasure; (4) attaining goals; (5) being a better equipped leader; (6) handling problems in changing times; (7) being a positive example to others; (8) it is a



good habit; (9) it demonstrates concern and wisdom; and (10) it will lead to accomplishing more for the Lord (Ephesians 3:21).

There is a clarion voice that comes to us from out of the past. It is the words of Hosea the prophet in his description of the reasons God is bringing judgment on Israel: "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee..."(Hosea 4:6).

While the primary focus of a leader's study must be in the word of God, he must not neglect those subjects that will help him lead and serve in effective ways. Knowledge of human behavior, culture, history, contemporary political issues, the economy, and so forth, will help him understand the issues followers are facing.

Every Christian must be a "continual learner", and especially if he is a leader. It is estimated that the average man spends over \$350 and 150 hours each year in caring for the outside of his head, e.g. haircuts, shaves, cologne, after shave lotions, facials, etc. Surely a leader can spend this much time and money taking care of the knowledge bank inside his head by filling it with good, biblical and usable knowledge for leading God's people.

May we as Christians and leaders in the local church accept the challenge of being lifelong learners?