



The Reflector

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As congregations are being made up of Christians who are better educated than past generations, it seems that certain brethren are more and more feeling the need to get men with higher academic credentials to hold their meetings and do their regular preaching and to emphasize those credentials in their advertising and web pages. It is not at all unusual any more to visit web sites of churches (even those who think of themselves as quite conservative) and find a list of higher education degrees following the names of their speakers. I guess this is supposed to make them better able to relate to our better educated audiences of today.

Contrast this with what Paul said about his preaching. Unlike the other apostles, who were “uneducated and untrained” (cf. Acts 4:13), he had outstanding educational credentials having been brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of a the renowned doctor of the law, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Of his fleshly credentials, he said he counted them as rubbish (Phil. 3:4-8). He determined to present himself and to preach in such a way that his hearers’ “faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:1-4).

Paul wrote thirteen epistles in the New Testament and likely another one not bearing his name (Hebrews). In the thirteen he identifies himself by name and states his relationship to Jesus Christ. Not once did he list any of his fleshly credentials following his name. He was determined that people’s faith would stand in the gospel he preached and not his fleshly pedigree or accomplishments or any worldly wisdom he might

have gained. I know men who, either do not have or do not advertise higher academic degrees, who can, when it comes to effectively presenting the gospel of Christ, preach circles around most of those whose academic accomplishments and credentials are prominently displayed. If one is of the mind-set to be more receptive to gospel preaching coming from one whose academic credentials he knows, than he would from one without these credentials, then his faith will not really stand in the power of the gospel message but in the messenger.

Faithful brethren have for sometime warned against trying to draw people to the Lord and his church and keeping them by “carnal incentives” rather than by the power of the gospel. By this, we usually have meant drawing them by recreational and social activities. We have rightly preached that the gospel is God’s drawing and keeping power. The practice that I have been writing about in this piece is just as much a carnal incentive as any recreational or social program.

Is it wrong for one who preaches the gospel to have one or more academic degrees? No. A thousand times no! There are many good uses he can put them to in fulfilling responsibilities he has to his various relationships of life on earth. But, when it comes to preaching the gospel he needs to forget that he has them and immerse himself in educating himself in God’s word, how to handle it aright, and how to effectively use it to “reprove, rebuke and exhort with all long suffering and teaching” in a way that his hearers’ faith will stand in the power of God and not in the wisdom of men.

Someone has said that if one knows the Scriptures then all the degrees he needs to preach is 98 when he is normal. Amen. ■

Pride of Preachers and Problems

H. E. Phillips

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).

“For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself” (Gal. 6:3).

“He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings” (1 Tim. 6:4).

“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6).

What preacher of minimal experience has not read and preached from these verses? Yet some of them have never learned how to be humble in preaching, and even in personal conversation they can not hide their pride and arrogance. It shows in their countenance and language. Their preaching reflects pomposity that hinders reception of the gospel by the hearers.

I have heard some preachers in general conversation boast and brag about their expertise as a preacher. These could not resist telling how “churches continually call them for counsel and wisdom,” and “many friends and brethren” constantly urged them to publish a sermon or series which were “the best they had ever heard.” They eagerly tell of their prowess in meeting the strongest and bravest false teachers and how they totally crushed them with their ability and strength.

The spirit of pride is sure to set preachers against one another. Since “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble,” those who want to walk with God must also resist pride. Conceit must protect itself against every challenge.

A conceited man is self deceived: “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself” (Gal. 6:3). A self deceived preacher is an envious man, and envy is the main root to the problems between preachers. “He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings” (1 Tim. 6:4). The fires of hate and alienation begin right here.

If young preachers could learn that they are not powerful in themselves. If they could know that all the education they could get in America will not make them one wit greater in the pulpit, they would be more successful in eliminating pride and envy from their hearts. They would be much more effective as gospel preachers. If they could always remember that the power to convert men and women to Christ is in the gospel (Rom. 1:16), not in their personalities, articulate speeches or college degrees. They should preach only the gospel, plain and simple! Do not seek to preach anything new in order to build a reputation . If it is new, it is not true; if it is true, it is not new. The revelation of the New Testament began on Pentecost following the ascension of Christ into heaven, nearly two thousand years ago. The truth is at least that old. Young men, do not let your egotism drive you to preach “another gospel” (Gal. 1:6-7).

Pride and envy seek a glorious personal reputation. It is the spirit of covetousness that pursues every advantage to promote self and selfish interests. Whatever formula that can achieve these goals will be used by the conceited preacher, young or old.

Reputation is what the public thinks of the character of the person. His character is what he really is: what God knows him to be. Since one who is interested largely in his personal reputation for job security, money and power, he will proceed to preach and promote that which will enhance the people's estimation of himself. Of course, the people will look at different standards by which to measure the preacher. Some are impressed by wealth, some by education, some by his promotional ability, some by looks, some by youth,

and others by his speaking ability. If the people to whom he preaches want these qualities, he will have the personal reputation he wants if he succumbs to their demands, but it will not be good. In the course of time, and in the final analysis of his reputation, it will not be what God wants.

Look at the reputation of the apostle Paul: he was in prison, nearly always in controversy with the Jews, scribes and Pharisees who challenged him every where he went. Some indicated that his speech was contemptible. They said he was a law breaker and a blasphemer. But what do people now think of him? He has the reputation of a godly man who reached the pinnacle of preaching power. He probably converted more people to Christ in his lifetime and by his writing than any other man. Of course, Peter, James and John rank with him.

There have been great men of God, in my judgment, who now sleep with their fathers, who have fought the battles of faith in years gone by. These men earned the reputation as giants in the faith; "Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:26); men of humble spirits, who walked close to God day by day. They are not remembered as wealthy men, great promoters, educated men, pleasers of men, who built great institutions. They are remembered for one thing: they preached Christ and him crucified year after year, sometimes without the abundance of life's comforts; sometimes in extreme adversity. They did not compromise truth for any consideration. They walked humbly before God in righteousness. They have fought a good fight, have finished their course, and have kept the faith. That is their reputation. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). And so did they.

There are great old preachers of the gospel now living who have the same reputation, and if they maintain their course, there is laid up for them that crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give them at that day: and unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim.

4:8).

There are many great, dedicated young preachers, whose reputation as Christians and proclaimers of the gospel of Christ is impeccable. They are humble, industrious, kind and honorable workers in the kingdom of Christ. They know and love the truth, and are not afraid nor ashamed to declare it at every opportunity. I love and hold in high esteem every young preacher of the gospel who humbly yet boldly preaches the truth in love. May God increase their number in this day when the harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few.

Love, Truth and Peace

Love is absolutely essential to successfully preach the gospel. That is firmly established by the inspired Paul. He said: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3) ASV.

The love spoken of in these verses is described in these inspired words: "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7) ASV.

A preacher who does not possess in his heart this love, cannot successfully preach the gospel of Christ. He must love God with all his heart, love Christ and his word, love the church, love the souls of lost men and women. He must love preaching Christ; his heart must be filled with the burning desire to tell people the greatest story ever told. He must be honest and sincere with himself. One must have "an honest and good heart" to "bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). He must be absolutely honest with himself in all things. He

must examine his motives for preaching God's word. He must patiently analyze his attitude toward lost people, the church, sin, money, himself and the book of God. He must search for any jealousy and envy that might reside deep in some corner of his heart, and eliminate it completely. He must be propelled in preaching by love and a desire to please God at all cost.

I would urge every man who does not have this motive for preaching Christ to turn to something else for a livelihood and leave the preaching to men who are motivated by the attitudes and goals we have just discussed.

Preachers and brethren ought to "be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:13). "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Col. 3:15). To be a disciple of Christ, one must continue in his word, and he must know the truth to be free (John 8:31-32). This certainly applies to all preachers.

To the rest I say: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11) ASV. "Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (2 John 3) ASV. "Mercy unto you and peace and love be multiplied" (Jude 2) ASV. ■

Dealing with Relatives

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Most Bible students know that some instructions in the Bible use absolute terms and some use relative terms. In absolute terms there are no degrees. In relative terms there are degrees. For example, *baptize*, is absolute. There are no degrees of baptism. One cannot be a little or kinda or a lot or very baptized. He either is or he is not. On their other hand, *long*, as in the hair (1 Cor. 11) is relative. One can have kinda long hair or very long hair. *Modest* is another one of those relative terms. One can be more or less modest than another.

In application, the absolutes do not present much of a problem. You either do or have done

them or not – period. But the relatives do present a problem with many folks. One's attitude about doing right plays a big part in how he applies the relatives.

People often ask, "How long is long?" Or, "How modest is modest?" This question is calling for the yard stick approach to application. Just how many inches does hair have to be to be long? Just how many inches below the waist line must a garment be or how many inches below the neck? This is asking for the exact point where short become long or modest becomes immodest. As a boy on a farm, we had pigs that became shoats and shoats that became hogs without our knowing the exact line of demarcation, we knew when one was unmistakably a pig, a shoat, and hog.

The idea is, that since no measurement is given then it is left open and no one really has a right to see any garment as immodest or any hair as long. This is like saying, though most would deny it, there is really no such thing as immodest apparel or long hair. But here is the problem. The Bible explicitly says that women are to dress in "modest apparel," so, some must be immodest. Also, the Bible explicitly says a man should not and a woman should have "long" hair, so some must be long and some short. Admittedly, this poses a problem for one who wants to do what is right.

It seems to me, that a Christian who wants to obey God in all things will do his best to be unmistakably obedient. Some seem to have the attitude of seeing how far they can push the envelope by seeing how close they can get to that "evasive" line without going over. They like to see how close to the edge they can get without falling over the cliff. There are others who try to keep a safe distance from where the dividing line might be by keeping themselves to where any reasonable spiritual person would consider it safe. Of, course there are always and always have been extreme views in relation to relative things. But this is no excuse for not doing one's best to exercise caution that he or she stays on the safe side. Who knows, this may be God's way to testing us to see how determined we are to obey him in all things? ■