

## PRECIOUSNESS OF PREACHING

Because of some limitations, I have approached this assignment with timorousness. However, “on the other hand” (as said so entertainingly by Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*) because of my all-consuming love for preaching, and because of my knowledge of your commitment to that holy ministry with its prerequisite compassion and tolerance, I proceed with some degree of intrepidity and even relish. Please bear with and pray for me this week.

Let me express my gratitude to Abilene Christian College for arranging these programs, for honoring me with an invitation, and most of all, for forcing me to do the reading and thinking that I have had to in preparation. I have had to organize and appraise so many of those ideas and attitudes that have gradually developed through the years of my ministry. All of that activity has been interesting and helpful. Some of it has been somewhat painful! It certainly has made me the greatest beneficiary here. If sharing that experience is in any way stimulating or edifying to you, I shall be very happy.

My whole life now is passionately consumed with dedication to the task of inspiring and preparing men to preach the gospel, to realize that there is no nobler use of one’s life and talents, to resolve not to allow any discouragement, diversion, or other wile of the devil to cause them to swerve even momentarily from complete surrender to that ministry. In this first address, I shall seek to honor and elevate the minister and the ministry in a generation that inclines to deprecate them as second or third rate. I shall seek to inspire and expand within you those noble motives that should cause every truly converted man of God to want above everything else to shout from the mountaintops the gospel of his Savior, those motives that must undergird one’s choice of the ministry, not as an avocation or even as his life’s work, but as his very life itself. Hence, we call your attention to the subject “The Preciousness of Preaching.”

In preaching God’s Word, you and I are engaged in the highest calling into which mortal man can enter. There is no other profession half so important, so challenging, so sacred, so thrilling! It is hard for me to imagine one more interested in the physical sciences than in the heavenly sciences! Or more fascinated with the animal and vegetable life than with the life of the spirit! Or more concerned with the academic development of the brain than with the culture of the soul! Or more intrigued by the mathematics than men! Or more dedicated to the promotion of the social reforms than to Christian fellowship and brotherhood in Christ! Or more preoccupied with the laws of the land than with the laws of God! Or more challenged by the diagnosis and cure of some physical disease than by the isolation and destruction of the deadly viruses that separate men from God and drag them into the horrors of the second death!

Somehow I must make you see that in choosing to be a gospel preacher, one chooses the very best. He may not make as much money--he may not win as much fame--he may not luxuriate in as much leisure--but still, he chooses the very best! Recently I read of an incident in the life of Billy Graham that illustrates too well the thinking that typifies our generation--and sadly, even our own brotherhood. Several years ago, before Mr. Graham became so famous, he spoke to a large dinner meeting. A lady sitting next to his wife, quite captivated by the speaker's talent, exclaimed, "Oh, I think he's wonderful! Isn't it too bad he's not in politics?" There are far too many like that among us, thinking that preaching is a fine sideline, a useful vestibule through which to pass to something bigger, or even a very desirable and respectable compromise if one fails to "make the grade" as a doctor, lawyer, or college professor. I don't like to that kind of thinking. It's wrong! It's hurting the church! Please believe me when I say that these remarks are not the yield of sour grapes, either.

***Let us look at the preciousness of preaching in the light of Biblical history.*** In Romans 10:15 Paul quoted and applied to his day a statement of Isaiah that was powerful and applicable also in the generation hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus.

How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of those who bring good news,  
    who proclaim peace,  
    who bring good tidings,  
who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion,  
    "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

Turn to the history of any dispensation--open your Bible to any page--and everywhere you see emblazoned the preciousness of preaching. Moses, with his stammering tongue, was a great preacher, as was his more eloquent brother, Aaron. Samuel, the last to judge Israel, was a great preacher whose whole life was dedicated to declaring the will of God and rebuking sin whether in the masses (I Samuel 8:10-18) or in the life of the king (II Samuel 12). Elijah was a great preacher who "troubled Israel" by charging them with having forsaken the commandments of Jehovah, and by humiliating and mocking the false prophets of his day (I Kings 18). Elisha was a great preacher whose life whose cry was. "...""Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the LORD..." (II Kings 7:1), and who even operated a school for the training of preachers! You may think of Solomon as the wealthy king of Israel, but I choose to think of him as the proclaimer of Proverbs, and as one who began his climactic valedictory address by saying, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity." (Ecclesiastes 1:1-2) He wanted to be remembered more as the preacher than the king.

The prophets of the Old Testament were preachers. The English word "prophet" is from a Greek term indicating "one who speaks in behalf of another". As you walk

through the centuries of Biblical history, you hear at every turn the sermons of the prophets, and you realize that God's great men in all ages have been those who dared to make the proclamation of His will the very heartbeat of their lives. Listen to Isaiah as he eloquently describes the suffering Servant and scathingly pronounces God's woes upon the infidel nations of his day; to Jeremiah as he tearfully pleads with his people to seek the old paths and warns them of the impending doom; to Ezekiel who sat in astonishment where the people sat and who went forth as a watchman unto the house of Israel, realizing that if he failed to speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, his blood would be required at Ezekiel's hand (Ezekiel 3:15-21); to righteous, courageous Daniel defying the mightiest monarch of the world and painting a picture of the Son of man coming in the clouds unto the Ancient of days to receive a kingdom that would never be destroyed; to Hosea with his touching discourse on love; to Joel whose favorite sermon was "The Day of the Lord;" to Amos, the typical "country poacher" who left his herds and sycamore trees to deliver threatening speeches, particularly condemning the worldliness and luxury of his day; to Obadiah, singing of the Lord's providential care of His people and of the certainty of punishment for those who persecute them; to Jonah, walking the streets of the city of Nineveh crying, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" and pleading with the people to repent; to Micah, echoing forcefully the same sermons preached by his contemporary Isaiah, to the poetic and dramatic utterances of Nahum; to Habakkuk, philosophically explaining the mysteries of the Lord's providence; to Zephaniah, with his somber pronouncements of the searching judgments of God and his oratorical descriptions of the coming of a glad day; to Haggai, sharply rebuking those negligent in their duty and cheerfully exhorting those who sought to rebuild the temple of God; to Zechariah, the preacher of the "long vision" who delighted to speak of the dawning of a brighter day; to Malachi, the lecturer, calling for the great reforms that were necessary to prepare for the coming Messiah. Call them "prophets" if you please, or "seers" or "men of God" or "Servants of Yahweh", or "interpreters"-call them what you will--in today's world, they would simply be "gospel preachers!" Walk through the Old Testament's hall of fame, and every wall is covered with portraits of those men who decided that nothing in this life was as important as being God's mouthpiece, who were willing to make any sacrifice and suffer any indignity in order to preach the Word of God. I'm glad to attempt to walk in such company. I'm glad that I'm a preacher, and I wouldn't trade places with any man in the world.

In the New Testament, the music continues in the same key. That precious volume opens with the account of the coming of the one in the wilderness of Judea preaching, "Repent; the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:1-2). In the very next chapter, we read that Jesus learned that John was delivered up and "From that time Jesus began to preach..." (4:17). God had one Son and that Son became a gospel preacher. I, too, have only one son and perhaps the greatest joy of my life has come

with the knowledge of his decision to be a minister of the gospel. Perhaps in at least that one way, I may bear some resemblance to my heavenly Father! Jesus chose twelve men and said to them, "As ye go, preach..." (Matthew 10:7 KJV). The apostles were preachers. In Luke 10, we read of our Lord's sending out seventy disciples, two by two. He prefaced his charge to them with this comment, "And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (v2). As I read the Gospel, I get the distinct impression that Jesus tried to make a preacher of every disciple whom He could influence. I made this comment at a meeting in Texas at a University, and met with some students afterward. One of them came to me and said very caustically, "I get the impression that you think that anybody who doesn't preach is going to hell!" I said to him, "Young man, I'll assure you that may not be true, but it is true of Eldred Stevens, and it might be true of you!" Jesus tried to make a preacher out of every disciple whom He could influence.

Again, as you think of the "greats" who stand out on the pages of the sacred New Testament history, what names come to mind? Peter? Paul? Barnabas? Timothy? Silas? Titus? Luke? Mark? Apollos? Who were these men? What were they? What had they chosen as their life's work? Preachers! Ministers of the Word of God!

Even the Holy Spirit is primarily a preacher. In the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> Chapters of John, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, and that when He came, He would "teach all things" (14:26). That's preaching. He would "bring to remembrance all things" that Jesus had said unto them (v. 26). That's preaching. He would "convict the world in respect of sin (16:8); He would "guide ...unto all truth...speak...declare things to come..." (v.13). All of that is preaching. He would glorify Jesus, taking the things of Christ that He might declare them to the world (v. 14). Is that not precisely what preaching is all about. You may think of the Holy Spirit as the source of miracles, wonders, and signs. You may think of Him more as the agent of God's providence. I choose to think of Him rather as one of who's most primary and basic mission is that of preaching.

Thus the Biblical history of both Old and New Testament proclaim the preciousness of preaching. It's great to be a prominent, just, Christian attorney, or an encyclopedic Christian school teacher, or successful and unselfish Christian businessman, or a capable and compassionate Christian physician--but my reading of Biblical history convinces me that it is far greater to be one of God's preachers.

***The preciousness of preaching is also pointed up by the choice that God made of it.*** This thought is suggested to me by the words of Paul in I Corinthians 1:18-21:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,  
"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

Haven't you often wondered why God chose preaching for such prominence in his scheme? Were there not more direct, less human, more dependable media for the accomplishment of His purposes? His choice and arrangement were regarded as somewhat foolish by first century scholars, and that appraisal persists even to our day. Whatever the specific explanation of His choice of preaching may or may not be, the preciousness of preaching is undeniably emphasized.

God chose preaching for the ***communication of His will*** to the minds of men and women. He could go directly to men, but He doesn't. He could speak loudly out of the clouds, but he doesn't. He could make revelations in visions and dreams, but He doesn't. He could make disclosures through mysterious direction of human intuition or through excitement of pleasant or unpleasant emotional experiences, but He doesn't. For some strange reason, He chose preaching. He commissioned the two best preachers in heaven, His Son and the Holy Spirit, to come to the earth and to use common, plain, understandable human language to explain to mankind His will. They in turn selected trained and commissioned a host of preachers to proclaim that will and to preserve it for all future generations by recording it as inspired scripture. (I Corinthians 2:11-13; II Timothy 3: 16-17; II Peter 1: 20-21). Then they in turn demanded that faithful preachers commit those recorded truths to other faithful preachers who would be able to teach them to the next generation of faithful preachers and thus on and on to the end of the age, continuing the proclamation of the will of God through this succession of preaching.

God chose preaching as the ***instrument of His power*** in the salvation of the sinner. As were just mentioned in connection with the revelation of His will, we note again the strangeness of His choice of instruments. Why did the omnipotent One select preaching with its indirectness and its admixture of humanity as the implement with which to exercise and demonstrate His power? Who can answer? Again, whatever the answer, we must be impressed with the preciousness of preaching. Thus, Paul speaks of the "power of God unto salvation" in Romans 1:16 and of God's saving men through the "foolishness of preaching" in I Corinthians 1:21. James alludes to the preaching of the word which "is able to save your souls" in James 1:21. In Luke 8, Jesus said in explaining a parable that "the seed is the word of God" (vs. 11) and compared

preaching to a sower planting precious life-giving seed. Peter obviously expanded a point made by Jesus regarding the “new birth” (John 3:5) when he suggested in I Peter 1:22-23 that preaching the living and abiding word of God is parallel to the begettal process in procreation, initiating the conception of life itself. The writer of Hebrews compared preaching to the wielding of a two-edged sword that pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit. What vitality! What power there is in preaching!

Are you fascinated by power? Power that can propel through the air at supersonic speeds a plane carrying hundreds of passengers? Power that can hurl man bearing rockets into outer space even to the moon? Do you thrill at holding in your fingers the throttle of a powerful engine? Then how intrigued you should be at the privilege of preaching.

***The preciousness of preaching is magnified by its relationship to the world's most serious problem.*** That problem is not the threat of World War III, as bad as it is which perhaps may be solved by wise statesmanship. It is not the problem of pollution that may be solved by proper legislation. It is not cancer that may someday soon, hopefully, be solved by medical research. Those problems are really quite trivial compared with the world's *real* problem--that of *sin*--which can be solved only by preaching.

Brethren the world is lost! Literally billions of our contemporaries are without God, without Christ, and without hope in this world. I've *heard* this all my life, and it ran off me, as it does off most people. Last year I made a trip into Egypt and other places, and I think really for the first time in my life, I literally broke down. I think I know now what it is, a little at least, to look over a city the way Jesus did, and to completely lose control of one's emotions.

Truly, “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” (I John 5:19).

“...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18)

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) The people of the world are not just depressed. They are not merely maladjusted personalities. They are not just poor, unhappy, and underprivileged. ***Brethren, they are lost!*** What does that mean to you? What sort of reaction does that announcement stir within your heart? Do you feel anything akin to what you feel at seeing a picture of a sobbing war-orphaned waif in Vietnam? Or a deformed, rickety, starving baby in India? Are you as incensed as you are at learning of the loss of political freedom in a country overridden by Communism? Or at learning of some cruel, criminal abuse of a minority group? What do you think are the world's greatest problems? They are found in the bleeding fact that billions are dying in their sins, unable to go where Jesus is (John 8:21), racing toward

the horrors of an eternal punishment in hell (Matthew 25:46). Your work as preachers is the only thing that can change that! Oh, the preciousness of preaching!

The proportions of this problem, quantitatively as well as qualitatively, are staggering. World population stands at approximately 3,500,000,000. The number of New Testament Christians who have learned and accepted the Lord's way is, comparatively, virtually negligible. Recently I figured that if we could keep our auditorium at Preston Road church in Dallas packed full, twenty-four hours per day, instantaneously completely replacing the audience every sixty minutes with a new audience, we could thus preach to 12,000 per day and 4,200,000 every year. At that rate, it would take 833 years to preach to the people who are living in 1972. We wouldn't get around until the year 2805 A.D. As if that did not sound hopeless enough, the matter is further complicated by the geometric progression of population growth. Each baby born is not merely a unit to be added but a multiplication factor. It is estimated that the population will double in the next thirty years, and that it will approach twenty-five billion within the next hundred years, during the lifetime of our grandchildren. We hear statements indicating great pride in our great record of growth as we baptize perhaps 20,000 per year. We choose to close our eyes to the rate at which we are losing ground in that every year 75,000,000 new babies are born. For every one we baptize 3,750 more new people are added to the population of the world. Forty nations still have no one in them to preach the saving gospel of Jesus. Thirty-five million people will die this year without ever having heard even one time the name of Jesus. In dedicating yourselves to preaching, you are committing your lives to the solving of mankind's most serious problems, to the meeting of the world's greatest need.

***The preciousness of preaching is highlighted by the preacher's ministry within the church.*** May we preface these remarks by recalling the words of Paul to the preacher Titus in Titus 2:15: "Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you."? Here Paul emphasizes the authority and the dignity of the office occupied by the minister or preacher in the church of Christ. He is saying, "Titus, as a preacher, you have authority! You have authority to speak, to reprove, to demand a hearing. Don't let anybody discount, belittle, or look down on the position you fill as a gospel preacher!"

The reason that I stress this point as I do is that we have a much more serious problem here than we realize. God forbid that you should interpret my remarks as the advocating of a pastor system or as a rebellion against the authority of the local eldership. However, we have gotten so touchy about power politics in church government, about who is "over" whom, about who appoints and/or discharges whom, about who gets to say where the money goes, about the vertical structure of delegated authority, that we can hardly discuss calmly and intelligently the role of the preacher in the life and work of the church. In recent years, the "office" of the preacher among us has taken a terrific beating. The image that I developed as a young man, the image that inspired me to commit my life to preaching (and incidentally, an image that is as

Biblically sound as immersion for baptism) has lost its glow in our brotherhood. Don't think that we are not paying the price for allowing that to happen. Our most talented young men are not drawn as they once were to the ministry. It's not at all surprising to me that we have the preacher shortage that we do. The preacher has rapidly moved from being somebody to being little more than a "hired hand."

What is the explanation for this change of stature? Why has the "parson" (the person) become "just the preacher?" First to bear the blame is the materialism of our generation. Our society puts a higher premium on physical than on spiritual achievement. Second, the entertainment media have aggravated the matter by presenting the typical preacher as either an ineffectual, insipid milquetoast bumpkin, to be tolerated with a chuckle, or as an Elmer Gantry, hypocritically using religion for self-indulgence and as a weapon for browbeating gullible souls. Third, there is the understandable, but hardly pardonable, tension that we have just mentioned between the eldership and the preachiership in churches of Christ. That tension, coupled with its necessary emphasis on the scriptural authority and oversight of the elders, and colored by our western culture, has resulted in an unfortunately distorted concept of the role of the preacher. In the minds of too many, his service in the church is roughly comparable to that of the office secretary or the building custodian-not exactly a scriptural office, but a permissible and practical expedient that the elders may employ for the execution of their work. He becomes something of a new figure in the church, a new employee.

Brethren, I strongly believe that preachers in the church of our Lord today should occupy the same position that was occupied by Timothy and Titus in the church of the first century. Some time ago, I had an interesting conversation with an elder who felt that the authority and security of the eldership are threatened whenever the preacher sits in a business meeting or whenever his opinion is asked on any question. When I suggested some doubt that Timothy would have been shown so little respect and treated so suspiciously, that elder very warmly asserted that we don't have any Timothys or Tituses in the church today! It didn't help when I pointed that the cessation of a spiritual gifts in an evangelists (II Timothy 1:6) did not terminate his office any more than passing of an elder's gift of miraculous healing (James 5:14) meant that the church is no longer to have the office of elders.

Regarding the preacher's meeting with the elders for discussions and decisions, relating to work, let me digress long enough to share with you a classic comment made recently by one of our best men. He said, "Brethren, if I'm going to have to carry the ball, I just must be in the huddle!" That's great!

Although the elders have the primary responsibility of feeding the flock (Acts 20:28), exercising the oversight (I Peter 5:2), and taking the lead (I Timothy 5:17), the preacher is a wonderfully important cog in the machinery. His office must not be minimized or despised. He is almost, if not altogether, indispensable to the effective work of the church. Usually in preaching on the mission of the church, we discuss evangelism, edification, and benevolence. Please note the preciousness of preaching in two of those areas. The preacher is primarily involved in that which is the primary

mission of the church, evangelism, saving sinners, carrying the gospel into all the world. Actually, here is the most significant distinction to be made in the relationship of elders and preachers. It is not so much a vertical distribution of authority as it is a horizontal distribution of responsibility. Their primary duties and concerns are different. Preachers should be primarily concerned about converting non-Christians; elders should be primarily concerned about nurturing those who have been converted. This is not to be restrictive, to draw sharp lines. It must be quickly admitted that there will be much overlapping, that elders certainly don't have to send every inquiring non-Christian to the preacher, and that preachers don't have to send to the elders every brother who asks a question about Christian growth! It is to argue that this difference exists in the primary preoccupation of the two. By the way, here is one of those anomalies that call us to a re-examination of ourselves. Today, churches send elders to mission fields and leave preachers at home to watch after the local work! There's something about that that seems a bit strange to me, in light of what we know the activities of the New Testament church. Let me repeat here my principal point. The primary work of the church is evangelism, and that is the primary responsibility of the preacher. Behold the preciousness of preaching in the structure of the church.

The same sort of emphasis can be made regarding the second area, that of edification. While the preacher's primary efforts are to reach the lost, he also is to minister to the church. When Paul told Titus to speak with authority (2:15), he was talking about instructions to old and young men and women, and servants within the church. The bulk of what Paul told Timothy to teach and preach involved the conduct of the converted. It involved problems within the church. It involved "pastoral" duties, if you please. We don't know a lot about Timothy's work in Ephesus. We do know that he lived and worked there following the martyrdom of Paul. Tradition maintains that he was the "local preacher" (!), caring for the church at Ephesus until he was beaten to death during the reign of either Nerva or Domitian. If so, he ministered to a congregation that not only had in its membership some bishops (Acts 20:17-28), but also an apostle, John. We assume that preaching is not only precious in reaching the lost, but in the life of the church. We certainly know, whether we wish to admit it or not, that one can determine the character, or lack of it, of any congregation by looking at the men who stand in its pulpit. Our brother Leroy Brownlow wisely observed, "No church ever did outgrow its parking lot or its pulpit."

In conclusion, brethren, let me candidly confess my failure adequately to portray the preciousness of preaching. That preciousness is like so many of those values that are entwined with the human heart. You may listen to many fine lectures on the subject, but you will never know the preciousness of preaching until you watch on the faces of an audience of human souls the impact of the gospel you preach, until you hold in the palm of your hand through the power of God a crowd of precious people, until you see the happy tears of a wife watching you baptize her husband into Jesus Christ, until you observe upon entering a hospital room the hopeful sparkle brightening the eyes of a young mother dying of cancer, until you feel the warm handclasp of the ill with whom you have knelt to pray, until you pose amidst the orange blossoms for a picture with the excited newlyweds, until you know that you are now a beloved member of family that

you have comforted in the valley of the shadow of death. If you want to be where life is, if you want to make footprints in the sands of time, if you want your lives to have purpose and direction, if you want eventually to be able to say triumphantly, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness ...” (II Timothy 4:7-8), then brethren, by all means, preach the gospel! We wonder how a talented, devout Christian man could think for even a moment of choosing another vocation!



## PREPARATION FOR PREACHING

May I address your attention to the subject "Preparation for Preaching?" In our consideration of it, we shall look first at the preacher's *call* and second, at his *training*. This outline would thus cover both divine and human elements involved in the preparation of a gospel preacher.

***The preparation of a preacher begins with a call to preach.*** No man should begin preparing himself to preach unless he feels that God has called him to preach. Although I am appropriating a text somewhat out of context, please hear Romans 10:14-15:

"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Let me explain first more directly what Paul was saying in that reference. He had established the universality of sin and guilt; he had shown that anybody, Jew or Gentile, should be saved by calling on the name of the Lord; he argued that nobody would call on the name of the Lord without first having that faith which comes by hearing the word of God; and therefore, he wanted them to realize that the Lord had sent him and others like him to preach the gospel of peace to both Jews and Gentiles. Who was he to withstand the Lord? And who were they to criticize him for doing what the Lord had called and sent him to do? His ministry was not to be interpreted as an abandonment of his own people, but rather as a necessary surrender to heaven's call. He loved his kinsmen enough even to wish himself accursed for their good, but God wanted the Gentiles saved also and had called him to be a chosen vessel unto them (Acts 26:16-17). The text in Romans 10 then refers to the Lord's selecting, qualifying, and dispatching His apostles as inspired witnesses. It had to do with the original proclamation of a message that came not from man but through revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12). No one preaches now in the same sense. No one is called or sent now in the same sense, either. However, there are other senses in which a man must be "called to preach."

How can one know that it is the will of God for him to devote himself to the ministry of the Word rather than to medicine, engineering, or education? Perhaps every one of you has wrestled with difficult questions like these: "Shall I point toward the life of a gospel preacher, or are there other pursuits in which I can render even greater service

to God and to my fellowmen? Shall I preach or shall I point toward being an influential elder whose professional or business success enables him to make large weekly contributions and perhaps ultimately to bequeath to the church or to a Christian college a large estate?" These questions are more practical than academic. They have dug deeply into your consciences.

I agree with the great Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, "As well be a professor without conversion, as a pastor without calling. In both cases there is a name and nothing more." Incidentally, let me recommend to you the reading of Mr. Spurgeon's lecture on "The Call to Ministry." Of course, any Christian who has the ability to communicate gospel truth has not only the right, but also the duty to do just that. However, this does not force the conclusion that all men are preachers. In our efforts to establish the common priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5) and to destroy the "clergy concept," we may well be going too far, I suspect that all men are no more called to preach than all men are called to be elders. Only certain providentially blessed men, with specific qualifications, are made bishops by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). Similarly, there are qualifications, calls, ordinations connected with the office of evangelist or preacher. He who barges in without credentials may be playing the role of thief and robber and may hear what the Lord scathingly said of some in the days of Jeremiah, "'I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.'" (Jeremiah 23:21). We frequently hear sermons on the qualifications, selection, and ordination of elders. How long has it been since you have heard a sermon on the qualification and appointments of preachers? Surely you realize that is a proper and Biblical subject.

The difficulty comes in knowing what constitutes that call today. There certainly is no indication that any man today will see a burning bush as did Moses (Exodus 3:2), or have his lips touched with a live coal by one of the seraphim as did Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8), or have the Lord put forth His hand to touch his mouth as happened to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-10), or be smitten blind by a bright light as was Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:3), or see and hear what John saw and heard on Patmos. However, I incline to believe that the Lord still calls men into His service and that that call involves providential acts as well as accidents of human circumstances.

In *The heart of the Yale Lectures*, Batsell Barrett Baxter recalls various views expressed by lecturers regarding the two elements, natural and supernatural, that enter into the call. Although some left little if any room for the supernatural element, others did give it considerable emphasis. However, it is interesting to note that even those who stressed the supernatural interpreted it in terms of Providential direction of natural circumstances rather than such miraculous phenomena as encountered by Saul on the road to Damascus. For instance, Matthew Simpson suggested that the preacher-to-be "simply follows the indications of Providence manifested in his own nature and in the world around him." He added that the call did not bring any extraordinary external

circumstances but was a spiritual message that he who received it **ought** to preach and that God requires him to do this work at the peril of his soul. When asked what constitutes a proper call to the ministry, Henry Ward Beecher replied, "...good sense, good nature, good health, and downright moral earnestness," involving no supernatural element.

In explaining how a young man may know whether he is called to preach, Mr. Spurgeon listed four evidences: 1) an intense, thoughtful, disinterested, continuing, all absorbing desire for the work, 2) aptness to teach, 3) zeal for souls, demonstrated in efforts to convert the lost, and 4) preaching that is acceptable to the people of God. I was even more impressed by Mr. Spurgeon's negative approach to the question. He explained the basis for rejecting the applications of many who wished to enroll in his college. He told a man that he should return to his trowel, that he should avoid the pulpit, and that he definitely had not been called to preach if he noted any of one or more of the following:

1. Ambitious desire to shine among men
2. Readiness to embrace strange doctrine
3. Inability to endure hardness
4. Conspicuous lack of brains
5. Physical infirmities
6. Failure in everything else
7. Conceit
8. No definite beliefs or convictions

John Newton wrote to a troubled friend listing three identifying marks of a proper call to the ministry. They were: 1) A warm, earnest desire to be employed in this service, 2) Some competent sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance, and 3) A correspondent opening in providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place, of actually entering upon the work.

It's hard to prepare a man for the ministry unless he feels called and sent. Although men today are not sent as inspired revealers of new truth, there is a sense in which the Lord sends preachers today even as He sent Paul and Peter. That call comes in the commands of the Great Commission to go, teach, baptize. That commission is world-wide and time-spanning. There never has been a generation upon which that commission did not rest as heavily as it did upon those apostles. God calls men today by placing within their souls the pulse beat of divine commission, the feeling that the Lord is depending upon us specifically to get a job done for Him. Do you hear the Lord calling **you** in the words of the great commission? He **is** calling.

There's a big difference between that preacher who feels "called" and "sent" and that one who does not. The called preacher is he who preaches whether he has financial support or not-even if it means "in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." (II Corinthians 11:27). He goes and he preaches even though he must labor at some secular craft (Acts 18:3) and with his own hands minister to his necessities (Acts 20:34). He goes and preaches because he knows that the Lord has sent him, even if his brethren will give him no

support. His mouth cannot be stopped because he feels that he is a “Working together with Him,” (II Corinthians 6:1) even if not one other human creature will help hold up his hands.

We have ridiculed the “divine call” of sectarian preachers until our people, and unfortunately, our preachers, have no sense of divine compulsion, of heavenly calling. We do not hear in any sense the voice of Jesus calling. We do not feel in any sense His hands upon our heads, ordaining us to speak the oracles of God. We do not have in any sense running down upon our beards the precious oil of divine unction. As a consequence, our ministry is shot through with professionalism, with coldness, with light-heartedness, and with the deadening shafts of practicality. We have become job-hunters instead of soul-seekers. We are ministers of churches rather than “called” men of God. We strive for proficiency in executive management of organizations rather than total involvement in the scheme of redemption.

God needs more men upon this earth today who feel called and sent of heaven. He needs more Jeremiahs to exclaim, “...There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.” (Jeremiah 20:9) He needs more Isaiahs whose scorched lips respond eagerly “...Here am I, send me” (Isaiah 6:8). He needs more disciples who defiantly challenge the world with, “...Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20). He needs more sons who will weep over cities of lost men and women (Matthew 23:37), whose bowels yearn for the fainting scattered multitudes that are like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36) and whose constant cry is “...therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:38) He needs more Pauls who more than readily admit, “For if I preach the gospel that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (I Corinthians 9:16) or, “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel ...” (Romans 1:14-15). These illustrate the spirit of a man who feels called to preach and it is upon that spirit as a foundation that the preparation of a gospel preacher must begin.

### ***Role of the Family***

After having touched on the role of heaven in the preparation of a gospel preacher, let us consider the role of the family. Several years ago, in preparation for leading a discussion group during “Preacher’s Day” activities at ACC, I circulated a questionnaire among Dallas area preachers. Among the questions that I asked were: “Who or what was primarily responsible for your deciding to be a minister of the gospel? And “Who or what was the single most significant factor in preparing you for your work?” Although I do not have the tabulation of those responses, I do recall my amazement at the indication from an overwhelming majority that the decision to preach traced back to the influence of godly parents, and that the instruction and spiritual guidance received in their homes had done far more to prepare them for the ministry than any teacher or curriculum in any church or college. The purpose of the questions was to learn the

identity of those schools and professors that were having the greatest impact in our community of preachers. However, instead of getting a list of the most outstanding Bible departments and Bible professors, we ended up with mothers and fathers as those noble souls who recruit and train for the church its preachers.

Presently much is being said about the shortage of preachers. It is true that we have only two-thirds enough preachers, perhaps, to fill the existing pulpits within our comparatively small membership, to say nothing of the staff needed for reaching out to convert more than three billions who need to be converted. We need more preachers. To get them and prepare them, we must begin with the home. We need more Hannahs who will frequently pray, "O God, if You will bless me with a little boy, then there will be a prophet in Israel!" We need more Marys who will sing, "My soul magnifies the Lord ...for He who is mighty has done great things for me..." (Luke 1:46-49) upon knowing that within the womb there is developing a potential savior of men. We need Lois's and Eunices who determine above all things else to put an unfeigned faith into the heart of a little boy and to give to God a wholly committed servant.

Let me inject here a word of tribute to two very special people who not only were responsible for my physical existence but also everything I am or hope to be. Several years ago we laid to rest my father who carried within his heart perhaps the greatest love for the church of the Lord and for the Word of God that I have ever known. Seven days before his death, he managed somehow to get out of his sick bed, slip out of the hospital, hail a taxi, and walk with a smile on his face into the church auditorium to worship God. I shall carry to my own grave the opinion that he slipped away in the early morning of the next Sunday because he knew he had reached the Lord's Day physically unable to assemble with the brethren whom he loved, to praise the God whom he adored. Some time before that I received a letter from an unlettered, unsophisticated but wonderfully beautiful mother who never wrote much, but who on that particular Lord's Day was determined to try to express in words the indescribable joy of a mother of gospel preachers. What precious memories flood my soul-memories of the depressed "thirties" when there was literally no food for the table, but always some funds for driving a boy-filled Ford to every gospel meeting within fifty miles! Oh, I went to college. I even studied Bible in a Christian college-but my preparation for preaching began much earlier, in a poor rural home in south Texas. I hope that it doesn't sound too presumptuous for me to say that we desperately need more moms and dads like mine.

### ***Role of the College***

This certainly is not to minimize the role of the Christian college in the preparation of preachers. There is hardly any way to exaggerate the impact that such schools as Abilene Christian College have had on the church and on the world through preparing men to preach. Christian colleges do not pretend to be "preacher factories" rather, liberal arts schools in which young people may be taught academics by faithful Christian teachers in a wholesome Christian environment. They do not, (and in my opinion **must** not) consider themselves as part of the organizational structure of the church to do the work of the church; rather, as adjunct to the home to assist Christian

parents in the education of their sons and daughters. Still, even as a good Christian home which was not set up primarily to produce preachers does inspire and prepare young men to preach as just discussed, similarly the Christian college plays an exceedingly significant role in such preparation. It is impossible for many of our young men to study the Word of God daily as they do in our Christian schools, to sit at the feet of some of the greatest men of God and proclaimers of His Word, without being inspired and prepared for lives dedicated to preaching. As I think of the number and stature of some of those spiritual giants who have come from the halls of Nashville Bible School, Harding College, Abilene Christian College, Freed-Hardeman College and others, my heart almost bursts with joy. We commend our Christian Colleges of yesteryear for giving to us such a glorious heritage of preachers, and we plead with our colleges of today to preserve such precious traditions.

May I express here an anxiety or two? First, reports indicate that the ratio of ministerial students to the size of the entire student body is declining at a significant rate. Doubtless, this is a reflection of the secularism and skepticism that has pervaded our entire society. Realizing this, I hurl no blame at our colleges. However, I do fervently pray that they will meet the challenge to change the trend. We do so desperately need for our colleges to give us more great preachers as they have done in the past.

Second, there exists among our brethren a significant amount of fear that our colleges will drift in the same directions typical of similar institutions of higher learning among the larger denominational groups in our country—that the pressures of dominantly irreligious academic hierarchies, aided some by perhaps prideful hunger for acceptance and recognition, would sweep our schools from their earlier Biblical and spiritual moorings. That this has been the general rule, with very few exceptions, among denominational and theological schools cannot be denied. To you brethren who determine so much what the religious profile of this college is today, and what it will be tomorrow, let me plead fervently that you say deeply within your heart and with muscles in your arms, stubbornness in your souls, “It will not happen here!”

In preparing students to preach, our colleges must put the study of Bible at the heart of the curriculum. One may take an impressive battery of courses in religion, philosophy, and theology, and still be shockingly unprepared to do what churches of Christ ought to be trying to do—lacking completely that distinctive power that should characterize a gospel preacher! No man has been prepared to preach, regardless of his academic credentials, until he really knows God’s book. Recently, the head of the Bible department in one of our Christian colleges was telling me of a disagreement he had with the college president. He had proposed the addition of various courses to the curriculum in the Bible department, and his proposal had been rejected by the president. The latter rather firmly insisted that Bible students continue to study primarily the text of the Bible, with excursions into Christian ethics, comparative religions, the philosophy of religion, and other such fields, whenever and however the textual study might open a door. Frankly, I strongly agree with that viewpoint. In all probability, human philosophy (Colossians 2:8), the wisdom of this world (I Corinthians 2:1-5), and

intellectual pride constitute the most deceptive of all Satan's temptations and the most powerful and deadly of his weapons. Run from them, brethren, like you would run from the plague! Be not hypnotized with the words and thoughts of men. Rather, be infatuated with the words and thoughts of God, disclosed only in inspired revelation of scripture.

Please note that I am not saying that all that one needs to know is the Bible. The preparation of a preacher must include, in one way or another, knowledge in **many** fields. Probably no other profession requires the breadth of study and understanding in so many fields. While the preacher is primarily a man of "The Book," he must also be an insatiable student of many books. I gather that Paul and Timothy were. Paul was a man of "much learning" (Acts 26:24; 22:3). He was a student to the end. Approaching the finish of his course, he requested in a letter to Timothy, "When you come, bring ... the books, and above all the parchments." (II Timothy 4: 13). Spurgeon was impressed with that request and exclaimed:

"He is inspired, and yet he wants books! He has been preaching at least for thirty years, and yet he wants books! He has seen the Lord and yet he wants books! He had had a wider experience than most men, and yet he wants books! He had been caught up into the third heaven, and had heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, yet he wants books! He had written the major part of the New Testament, and yet he wants books! The apostle says to Timothy and so he says to every preacher, "Give thyself unto reading." The man who never reads will never be quoted. He who will not use the thoughts of other men's brains proves that he has no brains of his own. Brethren, what is true of ministers is true of all our people. You need to read."

Yes, indeed in order to be greatly effective, a preacher needs breadth of preparation. My anxiety here involves the matter of **balance** and the fear that the secondary may overshadow the primary. There must be firsts and seconds. The **first** book to master is the Bible. The **first** authority to quote is that man who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God.

Anxiety in these matters, more than anything else, has caused the emergence, or perhaps "restoration," of another type of preparation for preaching, and so we turn attention to

### ***The Role of Schools of Preaching***

Since I am so completely absorbed with the work of one of the oldest and best (!) of the schools of preaching, that of Preston Road church in Dallas, Texas, you should expect me to discuss the history, philosophy, objectives, and contributions of such schools.

We should all rejoice that churches, “as such” if you please, are becoming active in preparing their preachers to preach. It is unthinkable that the Lord would so inadequately design His church that it would have to go outside its own framework and boundaries for the training of its ministers and servants. The church has the same responsibility to train its evangelists under the oversight of its bishops that the army has to equip and train its recruits. Paul suggested that apt analogy in I Corinthians 9:7 and II Timothy 2:2-4. The army does not ask a young man to go elsewhere for his uniform, weapons, physical training, and study of military science, offering the promise that later, when he returns after training, they might “employ” him if impressed. No, sir, they assume the responsibility of training him as well as using him after training. Frankly, the greatest of all anomalies is seen in the number of years it took for our churches to wake up to that fact!

Our school began in September of 1965 with the enrollment of thirteen full-time students. We have admitted two classes each year since that beginning and have graduated two classes each year since 1967, a total of 129 graduates. In those first eleven graduating classes, we had a student mortality rate of 21%, with eighteen dropouts, nine dismissals, and seven academic failures. Of those graduates, we know of only eleven or twelve who are not engaged in full-time preaching, and six of those are preaching every Sunday but supporting themselves at least partially by secular employment. Almost half of those graduates have gone into mission fields. The reports of the number of souls baptized and churches established are excitingly gratifying. We feel that the records clearly establish the effectiveness of this work.<sup>1</sup>

The academic program is designed to be a two-year accelerated and concentrated study involving 108 semester hours of college-level work plus as much as sixteen additional hours of practical help in communication and church music. The heavy load is possible because of the maturity of the students, who average about 28 years of age, and most of whom are married. The standards established for credits are those used by most colleges; viz., eighteen class hours matched by at least an equivalent amount of outside study for each semester hour of credit.

The faculty is composed of five full-time teachers, all of whom are fully supported by the Preston Road church. All of them have at least one graduate degree beyond the baccalaureate. All have had experience both in local preaching and in mission work. All have taught in colleges.

The typical day in the school of preaching begins with thirty minutes of worship, followed by five or six hours of classroom study. Research and writing extend the length of the day's work to perhaps twelve to sixteen hours.

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<sup>1</sup> In January 1979 new statistics indicated the Preston Road School of Preaching had admitted 364 students and graduated 281, or 77%. Of the 83 who did not finish, 48 were “dropouts” and 35 were terminated. Of the graduates, 222 continue to preach full-time and 20 part-time, for a total of 242 (86%). From field reports, it is estimated that well over 4,000 were baptized by graduates during the year 1978.

Sister congregations in the area offer much encouragement and also financial support for the men during their period of Bible study and preparation. They regard this as a part of their budget for evangelism, and they consider it as a direct investment in the preaching of the gospel. I might add that studies have shown that from any point of view, the investment is the most productive one in terms of returns on the invested mission dollar!

The typical student who attends the school of preaching is a man near thirty years of age, married, and the father of two children. In all probability, he had obeyed the gospel at an early age, and at the time, decided he wanted to be a preacher. Later, the social pressures of adolescence pushed him in other directions. After vainly seeking fulfillment in professional or business achievement, in marriage, in parenthood, in pleasure and possessions, it has suddenly dawned on him that for years, deep inside, he has resisted a desire and commitment made long ago. He feels that he must begin making tracks in the lives of men that his life must count for something more abiding than the satisfaction of his and his family's physical needs. He wants to preach more than anything in the world. What can he do? It is difficult, if not impossible, for him now to enroll in a Christian college for years of conventional preparation. He realizes that it isn't best for him to begin the work without preparation that he needs preparations as much as the young man starting out at nineteen. That is the man that we seek and that we have in the school of preaching.

Please note that we do not encourage the young high school graduate to think that he will find adequate preparation in the school of preaching. Rather, we seek to convince him that he should attend a Christian college, that he lacks maturity, and that he needs a better academic base upon which to build. This is not to be interpreted, however, as a great emphasis on academics. The school of preaching seeks to produce soul-seekers for Jesus, not scholars for graduate schools of theology. Some of our greatest graduates have not been impressive academicians. We wonder sometimes what the actual correlation is between academic skills and effectiveness in reaching the souls of men with the gospel!

With God calling men, with dedicated mothers and fathers starting boys in the right direction, and with Christian colleges and Schools of preaching rounding out that which they have begun, surely we can prepare an army of men to batter down the forces and ramparts of evil, and to hoist over all nations the blood-stained banner of our Lord!



## **PERTINENCE IN PREACHING**

We continue our alliterative play on words by considering now “Pertinence in Preaching.” The word pertinence is properly defined as “...Quality or fact of being pertinent; fitness; appositeness; relevancy; timeliness; applicability to the present...” the message of the moment is that our preaching must be relevant. Many warm arguments have occurred in the last few years regarding what constitutes relevant preaching. It has been charged that much of our preaching deals with problems that do not exist and answer questions that nobody is asking. Of course, the counter-charges suggest that the accusers are more guilty than the accused! Everybody judges the forest by the clump of trees in which he sits! Running through all of this, however, is the stubborn fact that if preaching is to be effective, it must be relevant. It must deal with the real needs of those to whom it is addressed.

In his recently published and practical textbook entitled *Preaching: Man and Method*, brother R. Stafford North says:

“How foolish it would be for the captain of a sinking ship to stand on the deck with the water washing over the sides and explain to the panic-filled passengers how to excel at chess. Still more foolish, however, is it for a preacher to speak to lost souls held briefly in dying bodies only to declare to them the beauties of literature or to entertain them with his wit.”

Your preaching will not be pertinent and will not be addressed to the needs the people unless you know what those needs are. Consequently, in this address, we hope to enable you to understand better: 1) the basic needs of all human beings, 2) the problems that are peculiar to our generation, 3) the conditions that exist within the brotherhood that you seek to edify.

The basic problem of mankind is sin, rebellion against the laws of God. As indicated in an earlier lecture, we tend to become preoccupied with human frustrations, maladjusted personalities, social injustices, unhappiness—all of which are **fruits** of sin—and ignore the tap root. A great warfare of varying intensity is raging within every human heart. Every man has within him the conflict between the physical and the spiritual, a conflict that has been with us since Adam. Paul described well the struggles, not merely of one man, but of the entire human race, when he said,

“...For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that

nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin..." (Romans 7:14-25)

Men are allowing sin to reign in their mortal bodies and are obeying the lusts thereof (Romans 6:12) and are bondservants of sin. They constantly have to make choices, as did Adam, Moses, David, Judas and Saul of Tarsus. Brethren, never lose your consciousness of sin. Never forget that your primary objective as gospel preachers is to expose the deceitfulness of sin, to remove its guilt from the souls of your auditors, and to strengthen them for the ultimate victory through Jesus Christ. Any preaching that actually deals with sin and the victory over sin is relevant preaching. Sin is the parent of every other malady of man.

So much of the inner struggle in man issues from misunderstanding of certain inborn desires that surge constantly through every human being and that scream for fulfillment. In order to be an effective preacher, you must understand well those natural desires. You must, like Jesus, know what is in man (John 2:25) so that you can properly relate the gospel message to his particular needs. What are those basic, demanding drives within man? First, there is ***desire for love***, the desire to love and to be loved, so common to us all. How much sin can be traced to perverted, misdirected love! How impoverished are lives because of unrequited love! How many lives can be completely re-made by coming to know the love of a heavenly father and a savior! Next, there is the ***sex-drive***. What a dominant element it becomes in our lives. Although intended by the Creator to be something beautiful and holy as an expression of pure love between two people whom God hath joined together (Matthew 19:6), it has become cheap, dirty, and guilt-ridden in so many lives. Our society has so commercialized it, and Satan has so exploited it, that it has become a champion in damning souls and wrecking happiness and homes. How mankind is crying for your help in dealing with its sexual drives, in placing them in proper perspective.

***Another of those needs is for self-respect.*** You will be preaching to people who need so much not to be too ashamed of what they see in a mirror, not too disgusted with themselves. Your task will be to lead them to view themselves as children of the King, twice created after the likeness of the Lord, secure in the grace of God, noble souls because of their relationship to Jesus. What skill you must exercise to accomplish that without winking at sin and without ministering to base pride.

***The desire for social acceptance*** is another of those powerful drives. Everyone craves that sense of belonging that makes him a part of the social group. He

fears rejection and isolation. As preachers you will be contacting so many lives that are lonely, that desperately need help in overcoming those attitudes and sins which cause others to push them out into the cold.

We list next ***the instinct of self-preservation***, the passionate desire to live, and the morbid fear of physical harm. The preacher's challenge is in guiding that drive within proper channels so that it does not degenerate into base selfishness and so that it does not in any way damage the lives of others.

The man that God made and to whom you will be preaching ***longs for possessions*** of his own. Again, properly channeled, this longing becomes the fuel for diligence and achievement; abused, it breeds insatiable greed and chains man to a treadmill of dissatisfaction. Oh, how your fellowman needs your help as a preacher in controlling that longing.

Man also has an instinctive ***hunger for power***. He has a strong ***appetite for pleasure***, enjoying so much that which pleases his physical senses. The man whom you as a preacher will seek to help desperately needs ***something in which to believe***. That drive is so strong within one that I do not hesitate to say that there is no one without belief. There are those whose faith is in unworthy objects or causes, in sin and unhappiness, but it must be admitted that they believe in something. The same point may be made with reference to man's ***instinctive inclination to worship***. He always sought, and still seeks, to worship beyond himself.

Perhaps this list of the inherent needs and drives within every human being will help you to make your preaching pertinent. Perhaps it will help you to understand human nature. Can you see within those very basic longings of the human heart the potential for richness of life, climaxed by heaven's glory, and yet see lurking within precisely those same desires the miseries of sin, leading to the horrors of hell? Ah, man is marvelously made, and you must understand him if you are to help and save him. There is just not any way for me to over-emphasize the importance of this empathy with and compassion for people as they fight their lonely battles with their own peculiar lusts and temptations. Without it, your preaching is almost as worthless as savorless salt, regardless of the profundity of its philosophy, the perfection of its organization, and the beauty of its delivery. A preacher has to know people. A preacher has to be concerned about people. A preacher has to love people.

One preacher of whom I read developed an interesting practice in order to give pertinence to his preaching. At the beginning of each week, he would jot down the names of twelve people with whom he had visited, or who had come to him with problems during the preceding seven days. Beside each name, he would jot down a phrase to identify what he thought to be that person's greatest spiritual need. Feeling that this would give him a good cross-section of his next Sunday's audience, he would plan his sermons, either directly or indirectly, to help those twelve. Is that not the spirit that Paul was describing when he said,

“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some.” (I Corinthians 9:19-22)

In order to make one's preaching pertinent, he not only must understand well the inner struggles and complexities of human nature, but he also needs to see them in the contemporary setting. Many of the teachings of Jesus and many of the writings of Paul seem a bit strange until they are viewed in the actual setting of the contemporary situation. I feel reasonably safe in saying that if Jesus or Paul were in the United States in 1972, they would teach precisely the same truth they taught in the first century, but would not use exactly the same illustrations, or perhaps the same approaches. An understanding of the contemporary culture will not only help in a general way, but it will also aid specifically in dealing with the needs of different individuals.

What kind of society do we have today in America? What kind of philosophical and moral forces are at work? Is our country really as morally bankrupt as it appears, with its lawlessness, its hippy communes, its campus revolts, its relativism, its situation ethics, its fascination with narcotics, its nudity (and worse) on the stage, its X-rated sex movies, its sky-rocketing divorce rate, its savage music, its disdain for conventions and for cleanliness, its godlessness, *ad infinitum*? If it is that morally bankrupt, what are the causes? How are Christians in general and gospel preachers in particular going to communicate with this generation?

Merrill R. Abbey suggests in his *Preaching to the Contemporary Mind* that the interpreter of the gospel must develop a perceptive understanding of the five underlying moods which are typical of our times. The first is what he calls “salvation by survey,” the tendency in business, dress, sexual morality, and everything else, to accept something as right if “everybody is doing it.” A second mood is that of “retreat from idealism.” Dorothy Parker described it well in “The Veteran:”

“When I was young and bold and strong,  
Oh, right was right, and wrong was wrong  
My plume on high, my flag unfurled  
I rode away to right the world  
‘Come out, you dogs, and fight,’ said I,  
And wept there was but once to die.  
But I am old; and good and bad  
Are woven in a crazy plaid.  
I sit and say, ‘The world is so;  
And he is wise who lets it go,  
A battle lost, a battle won-  
The difference is small, my son.’  
Inertia rides, and riddles me;  
The which is called Philosophy.”

The third “typical mood” listed by Mr. Abbey is accepting as evident, as axiomatic, that “the end justifies the means.” The fourth mood is fear. A few years ago, Alonzo Welch said in a lectureship address here on campus that where past ages have been labeled “Stone Age,” “Industrial Age,” “Atomic Age,” ours must forever be remembered as the “The Age of Anxiety!” Our society is really tormented by nameless fears. The last of those moods noted was “the painful sense of having lost our identity.” Too many in our day feel that they have become nothing more than a social security number; having lost that individuality and dignity that makes every life something special and precious.

Some time ago, a study as prepared under the auspices of the World Council of Churches, and it contained what was called “Axioms form America”

1. Truth is established only by proof and ultimate truth is unknowable.
2. Look out for number one. If you don’t, nobody else will.
3. Human nature is fundamentally sound, but needs guidance and correction to its fulfillment. “Sin” is just another name for ignorance and correctable imperfection, or biological lag.
4. There is progress in history, but society may yet destroy itself if the discoveries of science are not controlled.
5. There always have been wars and there always will be. You can’t change human nature.
6. “God” is really a projection of man’s ideals.
7. A man’s religion is his own business and every man has a right to his own belief.
8. Other-worldliness is dangerous because it distracts attention from the effort to gain freedom, security, and justice in this life; and anyway, we know nothing about what happens after death.
9. Jesus was a good man. What we need are a lot more people like Him. Now take Lincoln...
10. Do a good turn when you can-but don’t be a sucker.

Doesn’t that sound familiar? Don’t you agree that it gives a good profile of the generation that you and I are trying to save?

A similar list of identifying marks of our present culture was prepared by students at Garrett Theological Seminary:

1. It’s the surroundings that give life its meaning.
2. Religion’s all right in its place, but that isn’t in politics.
3. Immortality is just your influence going on in the world.
4. These days you have to become a martyr to make the Christian religion real-and I don’t have a martyr complex.
5. We must do what’s right-to keep other people on our side.
6. You deserve the best; you owe yourself easy-chair comfort. Forget the discomfort of others and live it up. Take care of number one.

7. Is it right? We'll take a vote and see.
8. Certainly we need it; they have one next door.
9. What's new must be good, what's old can't be.
10. Who is God, that we are mindful of Him?

A few years back, James S. Stewart delivered the Warwick Lectures at the University of Edinburgh and at St. Andrews. They were published in a small volume that probably was the most inspiring thing that I read in preparation of these addresses. In a chapter on "The Preacher's World" he described our modern mood as one of unresolved tension between opposing forces. In mentioning the three great tensions, he said that he touched the very nerve of the preacher's problem. Those three tensions he listed as: 1) the tension between Disillusionment and Hope, 2) the tension between Escapism and Reality, and 3) the tension between Skepticism and Faith. It seems to me that that is a good summary of the situation, an accurate identification of the battles royal that are raging within the people of our age. Our task is so to present the Word of God that we may lead disillusioned souls out of their cynical despair into that hope which is an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast (Hebrews 6:18-19), out of the tendency to fearfully flee from life into that quality of Christian strength and courage that shouts, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13), out of doubts into a faith that confidently proclaims, "I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me." (II Timothy 1:12).

Our generation is in the middle of one of the hottest battles of a warfare that has been going on a long time. It's the age-old conflict concerning *who* is going to control our lives, God or man? We are having a difficult time learning a truth that was declared long ago by God's prophet Jeremiah, "I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps." (Jeremiah 10:23). Man's pride does not want to admit that, though. It rather fancies itself sufficient.

The problem has long been a philosophical problem. One of the most stimulating studies in which I have recently participated was an effort to trace through the centuries that philosophical debate, and then to see the effects of those arguments as they filtered gradually into the morals and culture of the immediate and succeeding generations. The moral character of every age, it seems, is the outgrowth of ideas (sometimes seemingly extremely preposterous and far-out) held at first by only a few philosophers, theologians, and artists-then adopted by the lower classes in the slums-and finally accepted by the large middle classes. Francis Schaeffer has done some excellent writing in this field. I am thinking principally of his books *Escape from Reason* and *The God Who Is There*.

The Sophists of ancient times, perhaps the first real "relativists" of history, said, "Man is the measure of all things." That still is our problem. The great Greek philosophers, Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, all thought that the answer to life's big questions are within man. That still is our problem. Man will not admit that he must turn to God and, more specifically, to God's divine revelation in the Bible to find the answers

to his questions and the directions for his life. For some reason, he desperately wants to find the- answers in his own wisdom, in philosophy, rather than in God. This was one of the most serious problems at Corinth as indicated by Paul in I Corinthians 1:19-21,

"For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. "

Here was the heart of the Colossian heresy that caused Paul to warn, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ..." (Colossians 2:8). Here were the roots of the Gnostic heresy that ate like a cancer at early Christianity and that brought forth so many of the writings of John at Ephesus. The conflict has always been between human philosophy and divine revelation. The conditions that exist in our twentieth century once more are the fruits of that conflict, and though the masses are not active, conscious participants in that debate, they are the victims of it nonetheless.

Few men have influenced human thought like Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). His thinking marked the end of medieval thought and paved the way for the Renaissance. Aquinas gave undue prominence to reason and human intellect. He could not forsake his traditional theology enough to deny the fall of man in Adam; however, he maintained that although the human race became hereditarily depraved, man's intellect was not affected. His spirit and soul were affected, but not his mind! With this as a base, he sought to develop some sort of marriage between human philosophy and divine revelation. He said that man is related to two basic realms: nature and grace. Nature is the realm of the material, the natural, the mundane, and in connection with these things, **reason** is supreme. **Grace** is the realm of the spiritual, supernatural, and the religious, and in that realm, **revelation** (the Bible) is supreme. With this distinction he concluded that reason is thus autonomous, that it can discover truth (even some religious truth) independent of revelation. You can see how this would lay the foundation for the free inquiry, exaltation of human reason, and humanism of the Renaissance. During the Middle Ages, it was the realm of grace and divine revelation completely dominating and virtually denying nature and reason. The Renaissance brought a reversal, with **nature** dominating and virtually denying grace and divine revelation. Actually, that is an overstatement, the Renaissance man did not abandon religion, but the exaltation of human reason did start a trend toward materialism that has grown into an overwhelming flood –that has grown like the stone of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, until it filled the whole earth. Aquinas really injected the wedge with his influential suggestion that man's intellect could and should be trusted.

With that beginning, it was an easy step to eighteenth century Deism in England, Rationalism in Germany, and Atheism in France. In Deism, reason became supreme. While admitting that God created everything, Deism maintained that He then left it to be run by natural law, with no need for divine revelation, miracles, or prayer, that there is

nothing in the Bible that cannot be figured out by human reason. John Locke (1632-1704) inadvertently fathered Deistic thinking by teaching that all knowledge comes through the senses alone. He was followed by the great English philosopher George Berkley (1685-1776) who also accepted the supremacy of reason, who said that all that we know for sure about the sensations is what the mind says about them-therefore, all is *mind*. You can see here the forerunner of such philosophers as Christian Science. David Hume then really took this reliance all the way to complete skepticism, reminiscent of the conditions Paul found and described in Athens (Acts 17:23).

Reacting to Hume's skepticism, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) offered a different approach in an effort to save science, philosophy, and religion. The influence of that philosopher on subsequent thought and on religion was staggering. Instead of championing reason over revelation or revelation over reason, he separated them, saying that reason operated only in the material realm of nature and that religious truth is in the realm of the unknowable. He suggested that another means for coming to know the realm of grace would have to be found.

That new means for coming to know the realm of grace was presumably discovered by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who became the father of modern existentialism. This little bird's eye view of philosophy is to help you see the antecedents of existentialism which we are hearing so much about these days and which, frankly, is having a tremendous impact on the society which we are trying to convert. Kierkegaard tolerated reason in nature, but maintained that the realm of spiritual things is known only through existentialism, and that reason and existentialism are mutually exclusive. Existentialism is an irrational approach to religion, suggesting that one comes to know God only through a "leap of faith" as opposed to reason and usually involving a deep religious experience precipitated by a crisis in one's life. That existentialism with its irrationalism and stress on personal experience completely dominates modern thinking, both within and without the religious world. Unfortunately, it has become a serious problem even within the church of Christ.

Secular existentialism is represented by the nihilistic philosophies of men like Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, and Aldous Huxley. In various ways, they have produced a generation believing that nothing is real except what you feel, that the use of drugs in order to achieve some kind of existential experience is permissible and desirable. As a consequence, our society is shot through with narcotics addiction, irrational acts of crime, revolutions, hippyism, etc.

Existentialism is supposed to be rejection of Rationalism; however, it makes the same mistakes as the Rationalism it rejects. It still has man as the authority rather than God, and we are back to Jeremiah 10:23. Rationalism would have man as the authority through reason, and existentialism would have man as the authority through his own subjective experience.

Religious existentialism may be further divided into two branches, religious subjectivism and the secularization of Christianity. Religious subjectivism includes in its

refined quarters the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. In its less dignified manifestations it became the “Holy Spiritism” and “Jesus Movement” of our own day. While neo-orthodoxy claimed to reject rationalism and to return to the fundamentals, in fact, is still clung to most of the liberal conclusions of rationalism (e.g. higher criticism, denial of inspiration of scriptures, rejection of miracles, rejection of Bible as “paper pope,” accepting it only as a “witness” to the word of God). The important thing was to take the big “leap of faith,” independent of reason and independent of the Bible, and to have an experience with God.

Can you see in that kind of thought what lies behind the problems that exist in modern church life? Even in our own brotherhood? It’s not a religious or Biblical controversy so much as a philosophical controversy. In my opinion, it is an effort of Satan to make spoil of us through philosophy and vain deceit.

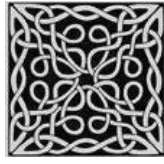
The other branch of religious existentialism is what we called the secularism of Christianity which has led to the modern “god is dead” theology. It can be traced through the following theologians:

- 1) Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “There is no longer any need for God as a working hypothesis, whether in morals, politics or science. Nor is there any need for such a God in religion or philosophy...”
- 2) Paul Tillich: “Perhaps...you must forget everything traditional that you have learned about God, perhaps even that word itself.”
- 3) John A.T. Robinson: “We shall eventually be no more able to convince men of the existence of a God out ‘out there’ whom they must call in to order their lives than persuade them to take seriously the gods of Olympus.”
- 4) Paul M. Van Buren: “The religious man, however, who can come to terms with life quite apart from this non-sensical entity called ‘God.’...The empiricist in us finds the heart of the difficulty not in what is said about God, but in the very talking about God at all.”
- 5) Thomas J.J. Altizer: “...The death to which theology is called is the death of God. Nor will it suffice for theology to merely accept the death of God...it must will the death of God, must will the death of Christendom...”

You can see that this thinking results in the disappearance of God, religion, and the church, leaving nothing but a totally human Jesus who somehow is supposed to symbolize the ideals of the modern secular man. That is the arena into which you men go as preachers of the gospel. Those are some of the problems that are challenging you to pertinence in your preaching.

It is a mixed-up world in which we preachers are attempting to serve God and save men. It will take a lot of study, a lot of prayer, in order to understand something of the conditions that exists and in order to make our preaching pertinent. But mark it down brethren, he who knows the Bible, he who understands the Bible, he who preaches the

Bible, will in some mysteriously, marvelous way; always be preaching relevant and pertinent sermons. May God give us the wisdom we need!



## **PERSONALITY OF THE PREACHER**

The most-quoted definition of preaching is probably that of Phillip Brooks of the Yale Lectures. Although given in 1877 what could be more accurate and impressive than these words:

“Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching the truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God’s will, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth. Suppose it written on the sky, suppose it embodied in a book which has been so long held in reverence as the direct utterance of God that the vivid personality of the man who wrote its pages has well-nigh faded out of it; in neither of these cases is there any preaching. And on the other hand if men speak to other men that which they do not claim for truth, if they use their powers of persuasion or of entertainment to make other men listen to their speculations, or to their will, or applaud their cleverness, that is not preaching either, the second lack truth. The first lacks personality. The second lacks truth. And preaching is the bringing of truth through personality. It must have both elements.”

That quotation emphasizes an obvious and important truth; *viz.*, the personality of the preacher is a part of his preaching. The man and his message, the preacher and his preaching cannot be separated. In preaching, God has joined them together, and man cannot put them asunder regardless of how much he may want and try to do so.

When I think of the influence of one’s personality on what he speaks, it almost terrifies me. Two men may deliver an identical address to an audience, with each saying the very same words as the other, with each performing equally well with reference to literary and oratorical excellence, and yet the audience may react quite differently, perhaps being inspired by one and even antagonized by the other. I have actually tested that and seen it happen. What was the difference? It was not in the message. It was in the men. It was not in the preaching. It was in the personalities of the preachers!

The force of this can be seen even in the reading of the scripture. One man may read a passage with great skill, flawless diction, proper inflection-and yet not greatly impress an audience. Another reads the same passage, perhaps even haltingly, and people sit enthralled, in rapt reverence, swallowing a lump, and blinking away a tear. What is the difference? It is the same Word of God, but in the presentation of it, it always, invariably, will be colored by the personality of the one who presents it. Doesn’t

it make you tremble to realize how much attention you must give to the development of your personality, along with your study of *what* to say? An illustration that has been over-worked, but understandably so, recalls the recitation of the twenty-third Psalm at a social gathering by a professional actor and by an old and unprofessional saint. The first performance brought polite applause: the second left the audience in speechless awe. The actor summarized the situation quite well when he said to the old saint, "Sir, I know the psalm, but you know the Shepherd of the psalm!" That does make a difference, you know!

We would like to be more detached than that. We would like to remove the personal and subjective elements altogether. We would like to deliver spiritual truth just about like we would a sack of groceries, or like we might put an expensive gem on display in a showcase, or like we might deliver a paper explaining a mathematical equation or a chemical formula. We would like it to say, "There's the truth. Take it or leave it. Don't look at me or pay any attention to who I am or how I present the truth. Just accept it for what it is!" We would like to say that perhaps, but we cannot- not about preaching the gospel of our Lord. The famous radio preacher Ralph Sockman said, "Preaching and personality are inextricably intertwined." George Wharton Pepper said, "The message invariably comes to the man in the pew tinged with the personality of the man in the pulpit." David H. Greer wrote, "The distinctive power of the pulpit is its personality. Not primarily what it says, though that, of course, is important, but who says it; otherwise a photograph or a telephone would do." There is magic and magnetism in the impact of personality upon personality, and it cannot be denied that the Lord had that in mind in setting up the scheme of redemption as He did, in choosing to save men through the foolishness of preaching (I Corinthians 1:21).

In discussing the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ upon earth, we stress not only the impact of His words, but also, and perhaps, even more, the impact of His person upon the people of His day. God forbid that I should imply that I as a preacher today stand in the same relationship to my hearers that Jesus occupied with His; however, there is enough aptness in the analogy to emphasize the point that I am trying to emphasize. On one occasion, a young man watched Jesus taking little children in His arms, blessing them, and laying His hands on them. As He moved away, the young man ran to Him, kneeled and said, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). Jesus rebuked him for calling Him good, told him there is only One who is good, and proceeded to preach to him the commandments of God. In a very similar way, we are charged today with winning the respect, if not the admiration, of our fellowmen, who see the graces of Christian personality in us, who are sufficiently impressed to come to us with open minds and hungry hearts to ask, "Teacher, what must I do...?" We too must seek them to divert attention away from us and toward the Lord alone, *but* that power of personality must be there.

Don't you see that same power at work in the lives of Peter and John as recorded in Acts 4:13 (one of my favorite passages for perhaps obvious reasons!); "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."

They didn't impress those priests and scribes with their academic credentials or with their scholarly carriage, but there was something about those men that was powerful; and magnetic. It lay in personalities that had apparently become magnificent through fellowship with Jesus. Men, don't you ever forget that there is nothing about you and your lives as preachers as important as that! I don't care how much you fill your sermons with quotations from scholars- I don't care how perfectly those sermons may be prepared and delivered homiletically- I don't care how many degrees you may have acquired- I don't care how artistic your imagination or how eloquent your phrases- If people who hear you do not really feel that they are listening to a man who has been with Jesus, you are a sorry preacher. That simply means that your personality must be a Christian personality and it must shine through your speeches.

We constantly tell our students at the Preston Road School of Preaching that we are far more interested in their attitudes, character, and dedication than we in their scholarship. We have terminated many more students there because of weak, negative, or even bad personalities than because of academic failure. Some of the most productive men that we have graduated have been men who barely got by with passing grades, but who had faces and hearts aglow with Jesus. Conversely, many of the least effective graduates were among our best scholars –our “A” students! This is not to argue that there is a positive correlation between ignorance and effectiveness in preaching (although sometimes I really do wonder what a good study might reveal!), but it is to stress that Christian personality will gain an audience and a response even for a man of limited abilities, and that the absence of it will shut doors in the face of the most accomplished lecturer. Behold the power of personality in preaching. Our word therefore to you is that of Paul in I Timothy 4:16 “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” I like the way that Spurgeon put it in one of his letters to his students:

“We are in a certain sense, our own tools, and therefore, must keep ourselves in order. If I want to preach the gospel, I only use my own voice; therefore, I must train my vocal powers. I can only think with my own brain, and feel with my own heart, and therefore, I must educate my intellectual and emotional faculties. I can only weep and agonize for souls in my own renewed nature, therefore must I watchfully maintain the tenderness which was in Christ Jesus. It will be in vain for me to stock my library, or organize societies, or project schemes, if I neglect the culture of myself, for books, and agencies, and systems, are only remotely the instruments of my holy calling; my own spirit, soul, and body, are my nearest machinery for sacred service; my spiritual faculties, and my inner life, are my battle axe and weapons of war.”

What are those personal qualities that combine to form a powerful personality in a preacher? Many lists have been composed. William M. Taylor said, “It requires a lively imagination; a calm, unbiased judgment; a correct scholarship; and a true homiletic instinct, to lay everything under tribute for purposes of instruction and edification.” Henry Sloane Coffin suggested, “First vision...Second, moral

intuition...Third, sympathy...Fourth, daring and that brings us to the chief characteristic which must be his- faith."

After having considered the suggestions of those who are supposed to be authorities, in the field, and after having given considerable thought to those men who have achieved greatest effectiveness among us, I have compiled a list to share with you. Of course, you will be able to name great preachers who may be lacking one or more of the qualities stressed. All rules have exceptions. However, it must be admitted that the combination of these ten elements would certainly be ideal.

The first qualification to be considered is **righteousness**. A preacher must be a man who has been born again, who is a new creature, who knows what it means to be saved from sin by the grace of God, translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Moreover, he must be one whose life radiates not only the experience of conversion, but also the development of those marks of spiritual maturity, moral purity, irreproachable piety, and Christian character that makes him truly blameless. In the words of Paul, "...Keep yourself pure." (I Timothy 5:22), and "...set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." (I Timothy 4:12). If one is not a good man and yea even more than a good man in his own personal life he should not dare to pose as a preacher. At Sinai the Lord said to Moses, "Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them." (Exodus 19:22). Even the people dared not approach or touch the mount until they had washed their garments and sanctified themselves. If that sort of personal holiness was required of those of that day, do you think that the Lord would favor the presence of unrighteous men in the pulpit today? Do you think that He would tolerate the placing of His treasure in vessels (II Corinthians 4:7) that are dirty and cracked? A preacher must exemplify that which He preaches. Otherwise he is as out of place as a blind man lecturing on the fine properties of light or a mole teaching an eagle to fly! Gregory said, "The hand that means to make another clean, must not itself be dirty."

We well know that no church dares to put into its eldership a man who is not blameless, without reproach. To ordain one at whom the accusing finger of shame may be justifiably pointed is to invite disaster. Do you think it any less dangerous to have preachers with anything less than blameless characters? This is not to suggest that one must be perfect to be a preacher, any more than such perfection is required in the eldership. It does mean that he must command the respect of all, without and within, for exercising every power at his command to live life as pure as that of Jesus. Sermons that come from the lips of a man like that are much more readily received and understood. Some sermons may be a bit hard to understand, but few people indeed fail to understand and appreciate the beauty of holy and devout living. Someone has well remarked that Satan has no greater power for destruction than an unconverted or unholy minister, with an expensive organ, a choir of ungodly singers, and an aristocratic congregation meeting in a big cathedral!

If I may borrow and adapt some words of Peter, I close this division of our study by saying "Seeing that personality is so vital to your preaching, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy living and godliness."

Second, I would stress **compassion**. We should include in this first a deep appreciation for humanity in general, for the dignity of the human being. A preacher should see in every human individual some of the image and handiwork of the God whom he adores. People sense that kind of respect. Without it, a wall is built between a preacher and his audience. Phillip Brooks told of a preacher who spoke on the necessary cooperation of the clergy and the laity and chose as his text (Job 1:14 KJV) "The oxen were plowing and the asses feeding beside them." A preacher who has that evaluation of his audience is not apt to be very effective.

The preacher especially must have a passion for lost souls. He must feel toward them as did Jesus. "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matthew 9:36). His bowels literally yearned for the lost. In Luke 19:10 He said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." This was the pulse beat with which our Lord awoke early in the morning and with which He closed His eyes late at night. The religious leaders of His day were amazed at the compassion that He showed for a woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11) and toward the sinful woman in Simon's house (Luke 7:36-50). They murmured because of His willingness to receive and eat with sinners (Luke 15). Jesus identified with people, loved people, wanted to save people. The effective preacher thus realizes the value of one soul (Matthew 16:26) and the eternal destiny of that soul unredeemed (Matthew 10:28). As a consequence, there is an urgency about his work and within every sermon that he preaches. A few years ago, when my son was about four years of age, I took my family to see the Grand Canyon. While we were viewing that vast chasm from a building that was almost overhanging it, my son disappeared. For almost half an hour I frantically ran, searched, and prayed before discovering that little boy had made his way back to our parked car, a long distance away. What urgency and fervor were produced by my love for that boy and my concern for his welfare! There just must be some of that quality in the personality of the preacher, and in the presentation of his sermons.

In connection with compassion, let me mention also the sympathy that a preacher should manifest for Christians whose lives are troubled. There are so many people in this world whose lives are blighted by tragedies, people who are looking for a helping hand, a sympathetic ear. That preacher who is responsive to such cries has a quality enriches his personality and his usefulness.

Third, we mention the need for **humility** in a gospel preacher. Recalling the occasion of our Lord's girding Himself with a towel and washing the disciple's feet, Peter said, "...Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another..." (1 Peter 5:5). The first of the beatitudes says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3). "I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." (Romans 12:3). There is no subject emphasized more in the Bible yet, who can name a more prevalent sin than pride? It was pride that caused the angels to sin. Pride existed even among the apostles of our Lord. In Mark 10:35-37, we learn of James and John asking that they be given seats at the right and left hand of

Jesus. They seemed to be bickering constantly over which of them was the greatest, forcing our Lord again and again patiently to remind them that the standard of greatness in the kingdom is not position but service and that he who would be great must be servant of all.

We wonder if preachers are not front runners in guilt here. It seems that there may be some correlation between the presence of pride and the desire to preach. After all, the preacher is the one on whom most eyes are fixed: he is the one who gets to talk while others must listen; he is the one who gets to stand up while others are sitting! He does enjoy great prominence. Many a man in whose heart a spark of pride wishes to burst into flame thinks, "That's for me!" and looks upon the ministry as an opportunity to shine among men and upon the pulpit as a platform upon which to display his admirable beauties and talents. He is like the Pharisees of Matthew 23:5-6 "They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues." Don't tell me that that malady doesn't exist among many of us who preach. You might well ask yourself some questions: "Am I 'hurt' when my presence is not noted or announced in an assembly?" "Or when I am not called on to lead prayer?" No man whose eyes are always on himself will be very sensitive to the needs of others. Neither will he have a personality that wins the ears and hearts of his audience. May I add a word of warning here also about a feigned and false humility which is disgusting and quite easily recognized? If you are truly humble, you will not have to announce it or communicate it by some unnatural change of voice.

This leads to the fourth element of personality that must be cultivated that of **sincerity**. Paul urged the young preacher Titus to be a pattern of good works, showing "incorruptness, gravity, sincerity." (Titus 2:7) In contrasting his own ministry with that of the false apostles at Corinth, he indicated that the most important difference was in sincerity (II Corinthians 2:17) Paul urged Timothy to cultivate and manifest an "unfeigned" faith (I Timothy 1:5) Nothing "turns off" an audience quicker than the impression that a preacher is a hypocrite, and conversely, nothing makes them more receptive and tolerant than the impression that the preacher is genuinely earnest. I have preached for two "college churches" where college students and professors had the reputation of rather deliberately taking the preacher and his sermon apart with critical analysis. I was told that college students were the most critical and vicious of audiences. My experiences led me to think the opposite, that college students were the most receptive and responsive of audiences- *except* when they suspected the preacher of either insincerity or pride. In that event, it is true that he is lucky to escape with his hide! That points up the importance of sincerity in the preacher's personality.

Of sincerity, Edwin D. Mouzon said that the preacher's "...convictions pass in some strange way over into the minds of his hearers...The first requisite, then, is absolute honesty..." William DeWitt Hyde added, "...the confident assertion of a man who is transparently sincere with himself, carries weight with all who see and feel his sincerity." One of the most powerful preacher personalities of our day is that of Batsell Barrett Baxter, and in my judgment, the key to his power, far more than anything else, is

in that ring of earnest sincerity that one senses not only in his appearance, but in his voice.

Preachers, make reality your goal. Be real in worship. Don't bid others to lift their voices in worship and then fail to join your voice with theirs. Be real in the way you speak. Please, please avoid the "pulpit voice" or the "preacher's tone" that sounds so unnatural and hypocritical. Don't hurl at your audiences memorized religious oratory that first, they may have to translate, and second, they recognize as something borrowed rather than from your own heart. Popeye used to say, "I yam what I yam!" Adopt his philosophy and be what you are, and say what you mean. Don't put on a show that creates suspicion rather than trust.

Although this may involve some repetition, I urge next **selflessness**. Although a preacher must labor to be himself, he must take care not to preach himself, or let self get in the way. Paul said, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." (II Corinthians 4:5). In preparing or delivering a sermon, or in doing your other ministerial work, there are two questions that will constantly pop into your mind: "How effectively am I doing this for the glory of the Lord and the good of others?" and "How favorably is this reflecting on my reputation and my ministry?" Get the latter question out of your life as early as possible. Try your best to "hide" behind the cross, as we often say. One of the most notorious evils in modern denominational religions is the presence of so many dynamic religious leaders who have built little empires with themselves as lords, or at least the Lord's vicegerents. Paul really abased himself that disciples would not place their faith in him (I Corinthians 2:5) and rejoiced when Christians were more faithful in his absence than in his presence (Philippians 2:12)

Michelangelo used to carry a candle stuck in a cap on his forehead so that his own shadow might not be cast on his work. You must work hard to keep your own shadow off your work. Rid yourself of self-consciousness.

Also, cultivate spiritual and mental unselfishness, James Stewart told of the great musician Sir Walford Davies who had the same inner struggle that plague all people of exceptional taste and talent and creative genius, "Shall I shut myself up from the world and follow the dictates of my artistic conscience, or shall I go down to the world of men and show them what I have learnt about eternity and beauty?" Some men are interested in probing for truth as a glorious personal experience; others never learn a spiritual truth without thinking of how they might share it with others. Cultivate selflessness; always "consider others better than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3).

The sixth facet of the ideal personality that we preachers seek to enhance our sermons is **enthusiasm**. I thought of several other words here (e.g. fervor, effervescence, optimism, magnetism), but surely they are all covered by the word enthusiasm. Etymologically, the word suggests being filled with God. A similar word that has become quite popular in recent times is the word "charisma" which again suggests the dynamism of a divine indwelling. You have seen men who have an

infectious excitement about them, who almost magically can move audiences because they themselves are so effervescent about their message. The great Augustine wrote, "It is more by the Christian fervor of his sermons than by any endowment of his intellect that the minister must hope to inform the understanding, catch the affections, and bend the will of his hearers." Henry Ward Beecher said, "...enthusiasm stands before everything else in moving popular assemblies. A preacher who is enthusiastic in everything he does ...will generally carry the people with him."

How can one be phlegmatic in discussing the revelation of God's will to man? How can one be indifferent in addressing an audience of souls that he may point upward to heaven or downward to hell? It must be admitted that some are by nature, by inheritance, slow physically and deliberate mentally. While I certainly would not advocate a sudden, affected, theatrical display of excitement, I would urge you to pray, study and give diligence that you might develop a little sparkle. It makes so much difference. One man may deliver a lecture filled with priceless truth yet not reach a heart, while another speaks with comparatively little content and stirs an audience with spiritual excitement. The difference is the preacher's enthusiasm. Brethren, our churches don't want cold lectures, regardless of the scholarship involved. They want men who are on fire with God!

Lest you misunderstand this last point, I hasten to add my next necessary element of effective personality which is **mental competence**. Stafford North well argued that just as a high jumper must have strong legs and a violinist nimble fingers, a preacher must have a good mind with a "ready grasp of ideas and a long retention of them." Paul told Timothy to, "...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture..." (I Timothy 4:13) and to "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." (II Timothy 2:15). A preacher does not have to have a certain amount of brains. As Martin Luther said, "He should have a good head." Certainly, he should love to study, to read. Just the other day, a young man who had completed three-fourths of his studies in our school was called in for a conference with our staff. He admitted that while he was not lazy and enjoyed working with his hands, study was a most distasteful shore for him. Although he was making passing grades, it was mutually agreed that he did not have the head for preaching and that he should return to his secular trade.

Spurgeon spoke of those who had "a conspicuous absence of brains; brethren who would talk forever and ever upon nothing- who would stamp and thump the Bible, and get nothing out of it...who are not capable of conceiving or uttering five consecutive thoughts... [these] hammer, and bawl, and rave, and tear, and rage, but the noise all arises from the hollowness of the drum." If one is to be a teacher of others, if he is to capture their respect as a leader, if he is to challenge their thoughts as a speaker- surely he must have intellectual competence. Doubtless this is often over-stressed, but I certainly would be misunderstood as occupying the opposite extreme. A preacher's mental competence manifests itself in his knowledge, imagination, and originality.

Eighth, a preacher needs **gravity**. Elders must be sober-minded (I Timothy 3:2); deacons must be grave (v. 8); the wives of officers of the church must be grave (v. 11); aged men, aged women, young men, young women must sober minded (Titus 2:1-8); and Paul recommended that Titus' ensample include "gravity" (Titus 2:7). I agree with Phillip Brooks who said, "There are passages in the Bible which are soiled forever by the touches which the hands of ministers who delight in cheap and easy jokes have left upon them." We are dealing with souls and with eternal destinies; we are handling the Word of God; we are on holy ground; and we dare not act like giddy monkeys. I really wonder about the motives and judgments of that preacher who feels compelled to be a "clown prince" and the "church jester." I am not advocating long-faced gloominess, either. One of my favorite sermons is an analysis of our Lord's keen sense of humor. There's a great difference between the fine quality of His humor and the frivolity and silliness that we sometimes see on the part of pulpit entertainers. We wonder if anybody ever would take them seriously.

Ninth, it is very helpful for the preacher to have **physical fitness**. Sometimes this may not be possible, but it is a tremendous asset for him who has it or cultivates it. I remember how impressed I was reading about Thomas Campbell's delight when he detected certain signs of physical prowess in Alexander as he worked on the farm. I remember also the tribute Moses Lard paid to Alexander Campbell in which he implied that much of the greatness of Campbell lay in the tremendous physical frame that he had, the strength of his body. The Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and God should be glorified in it (I Corinthians 6:19-20). The weight of a preacher's work is heavy, his responsibilities are many, and he needs a strong healthy body. Furthermore, he needs to command the respect of men and women alike as a real man, a man of God. It is my opinion that God has always wanted His men to be masculine and strong. This is so strongly emphasized in I Corinthians 11. Because of lack of physically strenuous toil, a preacher must carefully guard against becoming soft and effeminate. Because of his many invitations to dine, he must carefully guard against becoming obese. Spurgeon said a mouthful when he preached "He is too delicate a teacher who persuadeth others to fast with a full belly!" Again he said,

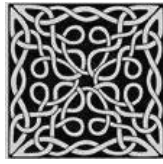
"You may think it odd, but still I feel very well assured, that when a man has a contracted chest, with no distance between his shoulders, the all-wise Creator did not intend him habitually to preach...When the Lord means a creature to run, he gives it nimble legs, and if he means another creature to preach, he will give it suitable lungs. A brother who has to pause in the middle of a sentence and work his air pump should ask himself whether there is some other occupation for which he is better adapted."

"A man of physical vigor," said George Wharton Pepper, "has a natural advantage in the pulpit, just as he does at the bar of the court."

We conclude our list of these most significant elements of a powerful personality by mentioning tenth the matter of **courage**. Again, we happily cite Acts 4:13 "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, ... they were astonished..." Courage is admirable

anywhere, but it is quite necessary in the life and work of a gospel preacher. Think of Stephen before the council of Jerusalem! Think of Paul's encounter with Elymas (Acts 13:9-10) and his clash with Peter (Galatians 2:11-14). There are too many foes to fight, too many battles to win, too many errors to expose, too much sin to rebuke, for the timid and cowardly soul. History reveals precious few, if any, great leaders who were not brave, daring, strong men. Gospel preachers need courage.

In summary, bend all efforts toward growth in all ten of these areas. They are the basic ingredients of the personality that radiates a power far beyond that of the words of a sermon. They, of course, are ideal, and perhaps no one can have all of them in perfection, but try hard to acquire them. Ask the Lord for help. If he could change a cowardly, profane personality into the preacher of Pentecost, who knows what He might do with you??



## **POWER IN PREACHING**

Has the pulpit lost its power? Is preaching a relic of the past? Our generation is answering these questions in the affirmative, and this is deplorable. Preaching is not taken as seriously by the public as it once was and as it ought to be. Oh, don't misunderstand and think that our society wants no preachers around; it just doesn't want to take them very seriously. Preachers are somewhat benign, perhaps even a little helpful when there's a wedding or a funeral in the family. In some churches the sermon time has been whittled down to as little as ten minutes, and the people led to feel that even those ten minutes are not particularly important. In preaching, there is "just a man talking" and that doesn't compare in seriousness with prayer, or praise, or especially with the communion memorial! Just a man talking! Indeed! Somehow disappeared is the picture of the preacher as a herald from God, with words not his own, but those of Jehovah. We incline to blame the secularism of our times for this low concept of preaching. However, much of the blame must be borne by preachers themselves.

Preachers are to blame because they have changed the emphasis in their preaching. They have moved away from the fundamentals of the gospel and moved into peripheral matters. In urging preachers to "keep to centralities," W.E. Sangster in *Power in Preaching* charged that a great deal of Protestant preaching for a generation past has been on "marginal things." An Oriental bishop investigated the message of the American pulpit and reported astonishment at its silence on deep theological issues. He said that he found social optimism and an "appeal to goodness" but no affirmations about "ultimate matters." He concluded that most preachers either did not believe these matters or else thought them to be relatively unimportant. Sangster admitted that the situation was as bad or worse in England and accused preachers of "toying with trifles." The pulpit does not pulsate with the heartbeat of God nor echo the sound of His voice. Rather, it offers political views, social suggestions, psychological "pep talks," travelogues, human speculations, and entertainment. Frankly, one can find better entertainment at a theatre or country club, and he can find much more professional help with politics, sociology, and mental illness.

Why have we allowed the pulpit thus to degenerate? There are many possible explanations that have been offered.

1. We have probably absorbed more of current skepticism than we dare to admit. I refer to the inward doubt concerning the "fundamentals" and the inclination to feel that the church's major contribution is in social improvement.
2. We think that the people already know the fundamental doctrines of Christianity and consequently are more interested in other matters. We are wrong on both counts.

3. We find it easier to talk about current events than to make the necessary preparations to preach the deeper things of God.
4. We have become fascinated with the new. Again the spirit of our age is affecting the pulpit almost to the point of thinking that if something is new, it must be true, and that a preacher must be original and different at all costs.

If our preaching is to regain its lost prestige and renew its power to move mountains and shake the earth, we must get back to four basic sources of power in preaching: 1) Preach Christ, 2) Preach the Cross, 3) Preach the Resurrection, and 4) Preach the Word.

### ***Preach Christ***

The preaching that Phillip did in Samaria was powerful Acts 8:5 says that he "...proclaimed to them the Christ." In Acts 8:35 we read of his efforts to convert the Ethiopian eunuch, how he "...beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus." The effectiveness of Paul's preaching which shook the Roman Empire is explained in his own words: "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (I Corinthians 2:1-2) To preach with power, preach Christ!

What does it mean to preach Christ? Doubtless, you have heard Acts 8:5 explained in the light of its context, especially verse 12, which reads "But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Preaching Jesus then necessarily included preaching about His kingdom or church, His authority and baptism. Preaching Jesus to the eunuch involved explaining His fulfillment of Messianic prophecies, and it involved baptism because it provoked in the eunuch the desire to be baptized (v. 37).

Although this is not my principal point under this heading, may I speak a word on behalf of preaching Jesus in His relationship to the Kingdom of God which is the Church of God. There are some wonderfully strange notions extant today regarding these matters, and they have weakened the force of our preaching. Some would think of the church and the kingdom as two different things. Some regard the kingdom of God as a New Jerusalem for men to build. Some have postponed its coming to some future date for which we must simply wait. Others fear to mention the kingdom of the church lest they appear to be church-conscious rather than Christ-conscious, traditional rather than spiritual. The preachers of apostolic times were convinced that the long awaited kingdom had been ushered in with power in the building of the Lord's church- that that church was not only the promised kingdom, but the house of God (I Timothy 3:15) and the very body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). They were excited about it! Excited not only about Jesus but about the church that He built. I agree with the statement of James Stewart in discussing precisely that same point. "Until we recapture and restore this apostolic perspective and emphasis, our preaching will be maimed and

crippled.” It grieves me that so many of our brethren have drifted so far from the apostolic concept of what the church of Christ is, that they are joining the denominational chorus, “Preach Jesus and don’t say anything about the church!” That sentiment is weakening our preaching just as it destroyed that of the sects. Preach Jesus in His organic relationship with the church.

My principal emphasis here, though, is the need to preach Christ so that our listeners will develop a strong emotional attachment to Him, so that they will really love Him. We need more Christocentric preaching, more exaltation of the life and person of Jesus. We preachers need to devote more time to playing Cupid, promoting a real romance between our hearers and Jesus. There’s power in preaching that accomplishes that. This is a large part of the power of Mr. Billy Graham. Although he does not preach a full and true gospel, he does powerfully promote love for Jesus. The only time that I ever saw him in person was at the Baptist seminary in Fort Worth a few years ago. One of your teachers was doing graduate work there, had two tickets to a service where Mr. Graham was to address a limited number of seminary students, and invited me to go as his guest. Although I was not a great admirer of Mr. Graham, although his sermon was not particularly well structured, and although he rather awkwardly used notes written on green index cards, he made me feel a love for the Lord that was quite wonderful. As he talked about Jesus, and particularly about His agonies in Gethsemane, he moved more than a thousand hearts, including mine, as they had seldom been moved and as hearts *ought* to be moved. It was not a theatrical exhibition, either, designed to stimulate maudlin sentimentality. It was just a thoughtful, earnest presentation of a precious part of the gospel. It was preaching that was powerful because at its heart was Jesus. Brethren, pray that you may so present your Jesus that your audience will be like Mary sitting at His feet in Bethany, catching every word (Luke 10)- like the woman of Luke 7 who washed His feet with her tears and anointed them with kisses- like the former doubter who exclaimed “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). In order to have power in our preaching, Jesus must be at its center. In ancient times, it was said, “All roads lead to Rome.” From all over the empire, spoke-like trails and roads guided the traveler to the imperial city of seven hills, mistress of the world, hub of the universe. In the same way, every sermon that we preach should in some way point and guide people to Jesus, truly the central figure of the Bible and the entire redemptive scheme. Preach Jesus. Present Him as the fulfillment of prophecy, as the Son of God, as the One without whom nothing was made that hath been made, as the son of a virgin mother, as the One in whom there is no guile, as the sacrifice for our sins, as the world’s greatest teacher, as our high priest, as our mediator, as King over His kingdom, head of the church, as the husband of a spotless bride, as the judge sitting on a great white throne- Preach Jesus!

In giving a basic outline of what it means to preach Jesus, Paul said,

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in

accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures..."(I Corinthians 15:1-4)

My study of the history of the New Testament church leads me to believe that we must keep at the heart of our preaching of Jesus two great historical acts of God: 1) Jesus died for our sins, and 2) He has been raised on the third day. This leads me to urge you to

### ***Preach the Cross***

In discussing the power of preaching Paul said, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (I Corinthians 1:18). Our preaching must constantly be pointing eyes to Golgotha, to the old rugged cross. The crucifixion of Jesus was the turning point, the pivot of human history. The cross of Christ is at the heart of the entire Christian system. It is amazing how much is said in the New Testament about the cross:

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."  
(John 12:32)

"And might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." (Ephesians 2:16)

"But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14)

"...By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." (Colossians 2:14)

Preaching the cross means much more than describing the events at Golgotha nineteen hundred years ago. Every vital and fundamental truth of Christian religion is represented by the cross and must be included in preaching the cross.

1. Preaching the cross means exposing the ugliness of sin. Powerful preaching is that which makes sinners see the depths of sin's depravity, see that it would even butcher the only begotten son of God, feel that their sins nailed Jesus to the cross. You must define, expose, and condemn sin in preaching the cross.
2. It also includes the doctrine of atonement, a doctrine that is held in ridicule by modernistic theology. However, the Book of God says:

"...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins..."  
(Hebrews 9:22)

"... For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."  
(Hebrews 10:4)

“Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many...” (Hebrews 9:28)

3. It must emphasize the universality of God’s mercy. Before the cross, there was a chosen nation, but the cross was the tearing down of national lines and the respect of persons (Ephesians 2:11-14).
4. Preaching the cross means proclaiming the inadequacy of the laws of Moses, the doing away of that system of law written and engraven on stones (II Corinthians 3), the “nailing it to the cross” of the laws and ordinances of the Old Testament (Colossians 2:14-16).
5. It includes pointing men to the obedience of baptism that they might join with Jesus in His redemptive act, thus in baptism die with Him, be buried with Him, be raised with Him, be cleansed by the blood of that cross (Romans 6:1-4).
6. It demands emphasis on the glory of the church which was purchased by the death of that cross (Acts 20:28) and the necessity of membership in that one church or one body in which one may be reconciled unto God by that cross (Ephesians 2:16).
7. Preaching the cross means declaring the justice of God, showing how that justice and mercy met and kissed at Golgotha, making it possible for God to both be “just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).
8. Perhaps above all, preaching the cross means proclaiming the boundless, mysterious, precious love of God. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16), "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5.8)

“Could I with ink the oceans fill;  
Were the earth of parchment made  
And every blade of grass a quill  
And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the oceans dry,  
The scroll would not contain the whole  
Though stretched from sky to sky.”

Those eight items are the planks in the platform of the Christian religion. Preach those eight items, but preach them in relationship to the cross of Christ. Jesus said that the story of Him “lifted up” on the cross would draw all men unto Him. There’s magnetism and power in Calvary. Preach the cross.

## ***Preach the Resurrection***

As I read the first chapter of Acts. I get the impression that the explosive dynamite in the preaching of the first century was the emphasis on the resurrection. Yet, for some reason, it is given little prominence in our pulpits today. In Peter's sermon on Pentecost, the one point that received most attention was, "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24). In his next great sermon, on Solomon's porch, again he reached a peak in exclaiming, "...whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. " (Acts 3:15). In the next chapter (4:2) we discover that the priests and other Jewish leaders came upon the apostles "...greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." When the door of the church was opened to the Gentiles, again the climax was reached as Peter declared, "...but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." (Acts 10:40-41). When Paul made his defense before Felix, he argued that the only thing that really had his enemies angry toward him was his preaching the resurrection. He said, "...Other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day'" (Acts 24:21). This was true everywhere. Do you remember Paul's classic address in Athens? His last sentence was, "Because He [God] has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead." Notice the next verse, "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this" (Acts 17:31, 32). The point of interest, of controversy, of excitement was the resurrection. The same emphasis is found in the epistles, particularly in the Corinthian and Thessalonian correspondences, Everybody's attention was captured by the preaching of the resurrection, the assertion that Jesus was raised and the promise that everybody will eventually be brought out of death and Hades to receive new bodies. That is either the most thrilling doctrine in human history or else the most brazen and ridiculous falsehood ever perpetrated. One can hardly remain neutral at the sound of *that* teaching. It either stirs him to indignation and mockery, or it makes his heart sing with hope.

In view of those rather obvious facts, it is not strange that our preaching so seldom appropriates that power? In most churches today, one may hear around Easter one rather traditional sermon on the resurrection of Christ, and if he happens to be one who attends funerals, he may hear the reading of a few passages dealing with the final resurrection of the dead. That's about it. We hear many speakers asking why our work in the twentieth century lacks the dynamism of first century Christianity. Perhaps this is it. People of our day have the same fears and concerns about death that existed then. Perhaps our preaching should be aimed more at that target.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (I Corinthians 15:14). If there had not been a resurrection, there never would have been a gospel preacher's voice in the land.

Without the resurrection, there is no gospel today. We agree with James Stewart again as he says, “there is no hope of revival in the church today until that basic, glorious truth is reasserted and comes back into its own.”

### ***Preach the Word***

My last, and really most significant, point of emphasis in this quest for power in preaching is suggested by two quotations almost too familiar and obvious to be cited:

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” (II Timothy 4:1-2)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

Preachers, regardless of how trite it may sound- don’t ever forget that the power in preaching is in the Word of God that is preached. Regardless of the striking illustrations that you may use, regardless of the personality with which you seek to enhance it, the power of your preaching will be in the gospel that is communicated. My fervent word to you is: Preach the Word! Fill your sermons with truths drawn from the Bible rather than any other sources- with exegeses and expositions of the sacred texts.

All vegetable life is in the seed. All spiritual life is in the Word of God which is the seed which produces fruit in the kingdom of God (Luke 8:11). All animal life, all power to beget in procreation, is in the seed. The incorruptible seed by which spiritual life is begotten and new creatures in Christ are produced is the Word of God (I Peter 1:23). Jesus and Peter said that the Word of God is to the soul what bread and milk are to the physical body (Matthew 4:4; I Peter 2:2). In emphasizing again the significance of the revealed Word, Jesus said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; ... The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” (John 6:63). The writer of Hebrews stated it in these words, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12).

The Bible teaches that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), the agency or medium used by the Holy Spirit in convicting sinners of sin (Acts 2:37), in producing the new birth (John 3:6; I Peter 1:23; James 1:18), in quickening or regenerating those who are spiritually dead (Psalm 119:50, 93), in converting (Psalm 19:7), in producing faith (Romans 10:17), in calling men out of the world (II Thessalonians 2:14), in sanctifying (John 17:17), in saving (James 1:21). It is my conviction that God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit dwell within the heart of a Christian by faith which comes from the acceptance of and trust in the word of God. The Bible

says that in so many words regarding the indwelling of God (II John 9) and the indwelling of Christ (Ephesians 3:17), and it certainly says it a dozen times in different ways regarding the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Note especially the parallel passages in Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16.

Yet in spite of all that these references say about the dynamics and vitality that are in the word of God, the inspired revelation of God's will, there is today, and there always has been, the tendency to minimize the scriptures. Perhaps the most classic example of this is in the story of the rich man in Hades. He begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to talk to his brothers. Abraham said that they had Moses and the prophets. Apparently the rich man thought as do multitudes today, "It will take more than the Bible. My brothers won't pay attention to the scriptures. They must have something more striking and vibrant." For some tragic reason, the Bible has never been enough for people. This was the source of the apostasy (II Timothy 4:3-4) and the heart of the religion of Rome- pushing the Bible into the background to make way for other authority and other revelations considered superior and more relevant. This has also been the heart and tragedy of most of Protestant denominational bodies, seeking for spiritual experiences and for leadership apart from the Bible as the Word of God. Even within our own brotherhood, some of these unfortunate trends have emerged. We are hearing from many quarters that Bible-filled preaching turns people off, that is not what our generation (even our congregations) wants. It is being ridiculed by many as out-dated, unscholarly, and legalistic. Just recently, I heard of a preacher being held in ridicule because he was of the "Bible-toting, scripture quoting" variety."

Brethren, don't be afraid to quote the scriptures. You are in mighty good company when you do. Have you ever counted the number of times that our Lord quoted reverently the scriptures, even citing the place from which He quoted? The apostle Paul quoted from the Old Testament 131 times and made many other allusions to the sacred scriptures. Peter quoted the scriptures 11 times and made 28 other allusions to them. In the book of Acts there are 26 Old Testament quotations and 16 other references to the sacred writings. Don't be ashamed to quote scripture. Study it; learn it; memorize it; quote it. It will give power to your preaching; and it really is what the people need and what they want.

In the last year's Fort Worth Christian College Lectures, Avon Malone delivered a fine address on "Preaching the Wonderful Word." With references to the message that we deliver when we preach the word, he stressed three points that I share with you. The Word of God is 1) a revealed message, 2) a redemptive message, and 3) a relevant message. Gentlemen, preach the Word of God as an inspired revelation of His will. In arguing that in fact, Paul said:

"For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this

in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” (I Corinthians 2:11-13)

The Bible is not a product of human mind. It is an inspired, inerrant revelation of the mind of the Lord. The Bible is not even written in words of man, rather, in words which the Spirit taught. Please do not allow the diversionary devices of the devil to destroy your reverence for the text of the Bible as the inspired revelation of the will of Jehovah.

Also, preach the word as a relevant message. One of the greatest marvels is its relevancy in every age. Don't present it as material that may have solved first-century problems but that only vaguely, at best, applies to our scientific age. The basic personal, social, domestic, and even national problems of man are unchanged, and if you preach the Word with exciting confidence in its solutions to today's ills, your preaching will have power.

In this twentieth century, let us as never before study, teach, and preach the Bible and speak as the oracles of God (I Peter 1:11). This is the heart of our task. This is the hub around which everything else turns. This is the foundation upon which everything else rests. This is the need of the hour. Too many in our age are abandoning reliance upon scripture. We are reading and talking about many books and forgetting the one Book that really matters. Too many sermons contain practically no Bible teaching- sometimes only one beginning text from which to appropriate a title and from which to depart. Many have soaked up so much sectarian seminarian slop about “legalists,” “Biblicists,” and the “paper pope,” that even among us, the Scripture has ceased to be the daily bread for human souls. It is truly ironical that at the very time that the Roman church is beginning to endorse Bible reading for its laity, we are hurling epithets such as “legalist!” at preachers who insist that preaching should be Bible-centered and Bible-filled. We are being told that we have been too legalistically Bible-conscious instead of Jesus-conscious, grace-conscious, and Spirit-conscious. All that you ever will know about Jesus Christ will come from the Bible. All the pricking of your heart by the Holy Spirit will be done through the Word found in the Bible.

The training of our preachers should concentrate first and foremost on filling their heads and hearts with the knowledge of the text of God's word. The sourcebook of Christianity is the Bible. We need to put aside secondary sources and teach people the Bible itself. What differences does it make what your opinions may be? What differences does it make what other men may have thought? The important matter is what God has said. Our pulpits need to ring again with, “Thus saith the Lord...”

It is strange that I should feel compelled to plead for Biblical emphasis. The roots of Protestantism developed in Biblical emphasis. The earliest seeds of the Restoration Movement were seeds of Biblical emphasis. Every solid step forward that churches of Christ have taken has been fueled by Biblical emphasis, by our speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where the Bible is silent, by our persistent cry, “this is what the Bible teaches!” We wonder if our hunger for being like the nations about us and for venturing into areas lacking in Bible authority do not account for current de-

emphasizing of the Bible. We need a much stronger faith in the inspiration, inerrancy, adequacy, and power of the scriptures. ***The man of God needs to stand once more with the Book in his hand.***

In summary, when you stand before an audience, preach Christ, preach the cross, preach the resurrection, preach the Word of God-and your message will throb with such power that your audience will never again be the same. May God multiply such experiences in your lives!



## **PRAYERFULNESS OF THE PREACHER**

My purpose in this address is to show how supremely important it is for a minister of the gospel to be a man of prayer. This is not to suggest that ministers have some sort of priestly monopoly on prayer or that they have prayer privileges and responsibilities that are not common to all Christians. It is to say that of all men on earth whose attitudes toward themselves, toward their work, and toward their God, drive them to their knees as poor, needy Christian creatures praying for the grace and help of the Lord, preachers would very naturally rank high. They should be most distinguished for their prayerfulness, their spirituality, their sense of constant communion and fellowship with God. In other connections, we have mentioned Acts 4:13 and its account of the reactions of the Jewish elders and scribes to the appearance and behavior of Peter and John, "And they recognized that they had been with Jesus." There was something about those men that shone through and that overshadowed completely everything else. They had been with Jesus! Do you think it is really very different today to recognize the preacher who "has been with Jesus"? To distinguish between that minister who is a "man of prayer" and that other one who isn't? An elder of a large church not far from here sadly remarked, "Our preacher is not a man of prayer." That sentence speaks volumes!

A church does well in investigating a preacher to find some indication of the amount of time that he spends on his knees. It is good to locate that man of handsome appearance, sparkling personality, and keen intellect. It is better to find that man of Bible knowledge, pulpit power, and sacrificial dedication. It is best to discover that man of prayer. His prayers will probably be the key to everything else the church seeks. After all, did not our Lord Himself say:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8).

Did He not promise His first century preachers, "whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you." (John 16:23).

Brethren, we are cheating ourselves by not praying more than we do, by not tapping those resources that are ours for the asking. We ought to be men of prayer.

"And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." (Luke 18:1)

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” (Romans 12:12)

“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:5-7)

“Pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17)

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ” (I Timothy 2:1-3)

Pray without ceasing! A true minister may not be found always on his knees uttering formal prayers, but he *will* be found always living in the spirit of prayer. His sincere love for God and his simple dependence upon God magnetically draw his thoughts heavenward every hour of his day. When he wakes in the morning, it is with a prayer for the day; when he sits to eat a meal, it is with a song of thanksgiving in his heart; when he shoulders a burden, it is with a plea for strength that he may bear it; when he makes a decision, it is with a petition for wisdom from above; when he lies down for a rest at night, it is with a committing of his soul into the keeping of his heavenly Father. Although distracted momentarily by the pressing demands of a necessary service, his thoughts fly again to God as soon as he is free. Thus, he continues steadfastly in prayer. One preacher wrote to a friend,

“...methinks, I am like a bird out of the nest. I am never quiet till I am in my old way of communion with God; like the needle in the compass, that is restless till it be turned towards the pole...My heart is early and late with God; 'tis the business and delight of my life to seek him.”

How, really, can a preacher lead others to a passionate faith and confident trust if he himself is not possessed of such spirit? We truly pity that church whose preacher is not a “man of prayer.”

There are many definitions of prayer. Webster says it is “...entreaty, earnest request; offering of adoration; confession, supplication, thanksgiving to God...” One intriguing definitive statement suggests that “prayer is the breath of the soul.” What beautifully apt analogies come into focus? Our bodies are surrounded by air- air which is so vital to life- air which seeks to enter- air which is admitted as the body opens the gates of respiration. Similarly, our souls are surrounded by God Whose presence in our hearts is so vital to spiritual life- Who seeks to enter, standing at the door and knocking- Whom our souls admit when they open the gates of prayer. One author said that prayer is “lying in the sunshine of his grace.” A poet wrote:

“Prayer is the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try;  
Prayer the divinest strains that reach the Majesty on high.”

### ***Great Men of God Have Always Been Men of Fervent and Powerful Prayer***

Recall the fervent, important prayers of Abraham for the people of Sodom in Genesis 18. The greatness of this “friend of God” in Biblical history is largely explained in vv. 22-23 “Abraham still stood before the LORD. Then Abraham drew near and said, ‘Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?’” Abraham humbly but stubbornly pleaded with God in behalf of those whom he loved. What a tremendous precedent and inspiration for you as ministers of the gospel. Abraham was powerful in prayer. We see symbolism involving prayer in Jacob’s wrestling all night with God “until the breaking of the day.” (Genesis 32:24).

One of the Old Testament heroes was Moses. The mention of his name brings instantly to mind the role of prayers in his ministry:

“So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin--but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.”  
(Exodus 32:31-32)

What a tremendous precedent and inspiration for those of you who are ministers of the gospel. You will find yourselves often, as preachers, joining Moses in pouring out unto God in prayer these sentiments:

“Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,’ to the land that you swore to give their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat.’ I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me.”  
(Numbers 11:12-15)

Moses was a man of prayer. His talks with God explain the greatness of his work.

We think of the saintly Samuel and of I Samuel 15:11 which says that “...he cried to the LORD all night.” Samuel was a man of prayer.

Why was David so much “the man after God’s own heart”? Is the answer not found in the Psalms where we see the hours he spent in prayer, and the depth of his feeling as he poured out his soul to God? He said, “Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice” (Psalm 55:17). David was a man of prayer.

Of Job, we read, " And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.." (Job 1:5) Job was a man of prayer,

The great man of God during Judah's captivity was Daniel. We see again the clue to his greatness in Daniel 6:10. "When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously." Daniel was a man of prayer.

We all marvel at the impact that the ministry of the apostle Paul had on the world of his day. Again, the secret of his power lay largely in his prayerfulness. Look at him kneeling and praying with the elders from Ephesus at Miletus (Acts 20:36) and kneeling on the beach at Tyre with a host of men, women and children (Acts 21:5). Learn something of his habits and attitudes as you read what he wrote to the Thessalonians, "As we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith..." (1 Thessalonians 3:10) Hear him glorying in the power of Christ that rested upon in response to his fervent prayers (II Corinthians 12:9). Paul was a man of prayer.

Of course, all of these examples pale in comparison with that of our Lord Jesus Christ, who really demonstrated in its fullness what prayer means in a life dedicated to doing the will of God. Although He was the Son of God, He was also human, and that touch of humanity kept Him constantly crying to God, weeping before God, expressing His dependence upon God. If our Lord felt helpless without prayer, if He had to depend upon His private visits with God for strength to fulfill His ministry, what sort of conceit must it be in you that might enable you to feel sufficient? Jesus, in the days of his flesh,"... offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." (Hebrews 5:7) There was nothing about Jesus that impressed His apostles more than His prayer life. So far as I know, they never did ask Him to teach them how to preach like He did- or to perform miracles like He did- but "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray,..." (Luke 11:1). They realized that prayer was the secret of His composure, the fountain from which He drank, the source of all of the other virtues that commanded their admiration.

Jesus prayed at all the great events of His life. He was praying at His baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 3:12-13). He spent an entire night in prayer to God before starting when it was day the selection of the twelve whom he named apostles (Luke 6:12-13). He was praying as He called for the "good confession" upon which to build the church (Luke 9:18-20). He had gone into the mountain to pray when He was transfigured (Luke 9:28-30). He prayed at the return of the seventy disciples (Luke 10:21). He slipped away to be alone with God when His enthusiastic followers tried to crown Him king (John 6:15). I've wondered about the contents of that prayer. He prayed at the raising of Lazarus (John 11:41-42). He prayed in His farewell

discourse (John 17). He prayed at institution of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-27). He prayed in Gethsemane, lying in the dirt, sweating as it were great drops of blood, as He faced the humiliation and pain of that last day (Matthew 26:36-39). He prayed for those who murdered Him, while pinned to the cross at Golgotha (Luke 23:34). The last sound that escaped His lips was a prayer (Luke 23:46).

Observe that He prayed often in secret (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:15-16). Brethren, please never let your prayer life be limited to those public exhibitions that so often are dominated by desire to impress an audience rather than honestly and earnestly to pour out the deep feelings of the soul. Observe that He went out early in the morning, a great while before day, to pray (Mark 1:35). Remember that God gets up early! This brings to mind the lines of a preacher's wife who penned this biographical note concerning her husband:

"...he did rise constantly at or before four of the clock, and would be much troubled if he heard smiths or other craftsmen at their trades before he was at communion with God, saying to me often, 'How this noise shames me. Does not my Master deserve more than theirs?' From four till eight he spent in prayer, holy contemplation, and singing of psalms..."

Observe that Jesus prayed for long periods of time, continuing even all night long (Luke 6:12). How that shames our little trite, ritualistic, repetitious two-minute exercises.

As you study the prayerfulness of the greatest Preacher of all, you realize that even though He was the Son of God, even though in Him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3), even though there was in Him power to still the storm and deliver the dead- He still could not have lived as He lived and done what He did without prayer. His soul overflowed with thanksgiving for the blessings and power of God in His life, so He prayed. He needed strength to resist temptation, so He prayed. He needed wisdom when making decisions, as in the selection of twelve men from His disciples, so He prayed. He fought lonely battles with disappointments, depression and despair, so He prayed. His life was filled with clouds as well as sunshine, with winters as well as summers, with dark valleys as well as mountain peaks, so He prayed. His heart was bursting with love for God, with yearning for God, with desiring to glorify God, so He prayed. Gentlemen, would you like to share Christ's great secret? The secret of His power? His peace? Here you have it! I love the comment of James Stewart who said, "It was the secret known to the mountain-tops where He out watched the stars, to the olive trees in the garden which heard His voice at midnight, to the winds and waves that were His shrine while He communed with God."

The ministries of so many of us are lackadaisical and impotent, if not utterly dead. Such failures are due most of the time not so much to lack of administrative skill, lack of training, lack of visiting, lack of study, as to lack of prayer.

## ***Why Is There So Little of That Kind of Prayerfulness among Us Today?***

With shame and self-incrimination written all over my face, I dare to charge that a shockingly small percentage of us preaching brethren spend as much time in daily prayerful communion with God as we spend watching entertainment on television or in reading newspapers. Then we wonder why we are not overwhelming the world with the power of the gospel I hope that I am too harsh in this criticism and that I am merely making the common error of using myself too much as a criterion for judgment. Still I must ask, "How many do you suppose there are among us here today who spend as much as an hour, or even thirty minutes a day upon their knees in fervent prayer?"

One reason for our lack of prayerfulness is the influence of our western culture, its emphasis on busyness, on action, on "practicality." Every hour must be crammed with activity that must be visibly and measurably productive. We are hyperactive. We are too busy for prayer! We just don't have enough time. There are not enough hours in the day. It has been my observation, however, that when two people really love each other, they *find* the time to be together, and, if necessarily separated, they still find the time for regular and extended communication.

"No time for God?  
What fools we are, to clutter up  
Our lives with common things  
And leave without heart's gate  
The Lord of life and Life itself-Our God.

No time for God?  
As soon to say, no time  
To eat or sleep or love or die.

Take time for God  
Or you shall dwarf your soul,  
And when the angel death  
Comes knocking at your door,  
A poor misshapen thing you'll be  
To step into eternity."

Another reason for slackness in prayer among us is our somewhat extreme, if not morbid, fear of emotionalism and sentimentality. Churches of Christ have been accused of reducing Christianity to a neat, orderly little set of legalistic forms and rituals, of stifling spontaneity and personal emotions, of dulling if not destroying spirituality. While I feel that many of the charges misrepresent and exaggerate it must be admitted that amidst all that smoke, there is some fire. In all probability, if the average congregation among us were to learn that its preacher was spending an entire night occasionally out in the hills shouting ecstatic praises and thanksgiving and sobbing over his weaknesses, an all-out investigation would be launched. The brethren would want to know what kind of fanatic group he had gotten mixed up with. They would want to get him some professional help. They certainly would feel that he needed some time off

for rest and recreation! The climate among churches of Christ actually does not give encouragement to the type of prayerfulness that I am here recommending as vital to your ministry.

Probably the most significant reason for our deficiency in prayerfulness is that we lack the two basic ingredients: genuine humility and strong faith. It usually results from having too much confidence in ourselves and too little real faith in the power of God. When one really feels weak and helpless, and at the same time has a strong faith in and love for the Lord, it's hard to keep him off his knees.

### ***Some Practical Suggestions***

Allow me now to make several practical suggestions to those of you who want to multiply your effectiveness and expand your spiritual experience.

First, ***cultivate the art of abstraction***. Learn to withdraw. Discipline your mind to recognize that certain activities must be sacrificed, that a certain amount of time must be rescued from the rush and roar of life. At first, it may be wise to choose short periods of only ten or fifteen minutes, but choose them, set minimum times, and don't let anything interfere.

Second, ***seek quiet surroundings***. It is regrettable that most of us have become so gregarious that we almost panic when not surrounded by the sight and sounds of human activity. A father, when dying, made as his last request a plea for his son to spend thirty minutes each day quietly alone in the best room of their house. He knew the spiritually, and intellectually-enriching influence of quietness and made a contribution to the development of greatness in his son. Possibly you have a room in your house where you can find undisturbed quietness. If not, perhaps there is a spot in the woods you can visit. Or a place in the church building.

Third, ***strive in prayer***. In Romans 15:30-31, Paul said, "I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf". Strive in your prayers. The word strive is from the root *agonidzomai* from which we get our English *agonize*. Prayer that is an effortless formality is blasphemous mockery. Blood, sweat, and tears are in the word that the Holy Spirit used to describe prayer. When you pray, put everything you have into it. Don't give up easily. Nothing is more clearly taught in the Bible than the necessity of importunity in prayer. In almost every other act of obedience, God expects us to acquiesce meekly without question or argument, but for some strange reason, He seems to respect determination and importunity in prayer. Strive not with God, but with yourself and with Satan. Resist the devil who will try to suggest a dozen reasons why you do not have time to pray, and who, when you pray will strive to distract your mind to prevent complete concentration and communion with God. Ah, he trembles when he sees a gospel preacher go to his knees in prayer.

Fourth, ***pray for spirituality***. Men must see in the gospel minister inspiring and exemplary spirituality. What is spirituality? Many sermons in recent years have sought to answer that question, Brother E.W. McMillan, in his book *The Minister's Spiritual Life*, illustrated the difference between the minister with spirituality and the one without it by comparing it to the difference between a statesman and a politician. The latter sits in a statesman's chair but is wholly dominated by political and personal interests. The former is enraptured with ideals and with dedication to the public interests. The same contrasts can be seen in two men who go through medical school and become physicians. One of them is driven by ambitions for wealth and fame; the other is starry-eyed about opportunities to help and to heal and perhaps wants to go to some underprivileged country with bare subsistence income. That same difference is prevalent and discernible among preachers. There are those who just "turn off" people despite their homiletical skill, and there are those who have that mysterious personal glow that warms and wins the hearts of all despite perhaps many "professional" deficiencies. There is a vast difference between that sermon or that life which is the fruit of intellectual superiority and that sermon or life which issues from a mellowed, spiritual heart that is consumed with love for God and longing for people. Brethren, pray for that kind of heart. It occurs to me that it is best pursued while on your knees. Repeat often the word of that tremendous prayer of David: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10). Take Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:14-19 and change the person of the pronouns from third to second and from second to first:

"So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

If you prevail on the Lord to answer that prayer for you, your ministry will take on new dimensions, let me assure you.

In your pursuit of deeper spirituality of "soul power," I would suggest also the use of the Beatitudes as a basis for your petitions. They lie at the very heart of spirituality. Beg the Father to grant unto you more poverty of spirit, more meekness, more hunger and thirst after righteousness, more mercifulness, more purity of heart, more love for peace, and more persecution for righteousness' sake. Yes, brethren, pray for spirituality. Prayer feeds spirituality and it is the reservoir from which everything in your ministry (your preaching, your visiting, and your influence) must draw.

Fifth, ***pray about your sermons***. As W.E. Sangster put it, “All Christian preaching must be steeped in prayer.” Steeping your preaching in prayer means a lot more than merely breathing a petition for God’s help as you step to the platform. It means that the choice of themes is the result of much prayer. You dare not trust your own judgment in so serious a matter as selecting a subject for a sermon. It means that you pray for light as insight in the use of every passage from the Word of God. Prayer will enable you to see sparkling new gems in a verse that you may have read dozens of times, and it will help to prevent you from lifting texts out of context and misapplying them. Someone said that God’s word is covered with a thin veil that is worn away only by prayer. Steeping your sermons in prayer means frequent petitions that your preaching may ever be pertinent, practical, plain, and powerful. It does mean, of course, dependence upon God for help in the actual delivery of the sermon. We frequently hear brethren pray that the preacher may have a “ready recollection” of what he has studied. I don’t know exactly how the Providence of the Lord moves in supplying us with alert minds, with poetic imagination, with recall, with the practical tools of preaching. I do know that there are times in preaching when I feel almost caught up into the third heaven, with the right words coming in torrents, and with every sentence charged with emotions flowing right out of my heart. Then there are other times when nothing seems to go right despite extensive preparation and laborious effort. I have decided that most frequently the explanation lay not so much in the occasion or the study as in the amount of prayer that went into the sermon.

Perhaps this is the secret to “unction” in preaching. I agree with Sangster:

“Unction is that mystic plus in preaching which no one can define and no one (with any spiritual sensitivity at all) can mistake. Men have it or they do not have it. It is a thing apart from good sermon outlines, helpful spiritual insights, wise understanding, or eloquent speech. It can use all these media- and dispense with them. It is rare, indefinable, and unspeakably precious.”

Whatever that mystic something is, it transfigures preaching from prose to poetry, from laborious works to exciting adventure. It does to a sermon what happened to the person of Jesus on the Mount before the eyes of Peter, James and John. It cannot be faked, and efforts to counterfeit it are not only obvious, but also disgusting. Most important here, it comes from prayer, sincere prayer, secret prayer, much prayer.

Sixth, ***pray for people***. Pray for those to whom you preach. A large measure of your responsibility as preacher lies in the realm of intercession for those whom you should save. Again, this is not to deny that there is one Mediator (I Timothy 2:5) or to argue that preachers have some sort of priestly monopoly. Still, of all Christians, who should be more active in pleading for souls of men than gospel preachers? Do not merely ask God to bless people collectively. Rather, pray for every family and for every individual by name. Why not take the church directory each day and select perhaps three families for whom to pray? Think of their circumstances, their responsibilities, their burdens, their weaknesses, their needs, and then really entreat the Lord in their behalf. There is no doubt in my mind but that the blessings upon those individuals will come as a response to your prayers. In addition, you will develop within your own heart

an attitude toward those people that will be quite valuable in your ministering to them. When you look into those faces in the audience on Sunday and begin preaching to them against the background of your prayers for them, your preaching will take on new dimensions. When you pray for others, you help yourself, Samuel Rutherford said long ago: "I seldom made an errand to God for another, but I got something for myself."

Seventh, **keep a prayer list**. Write down those things that you need to talk to God about, or you will probably forget many of them from day to day. I learned long ago that if I did not jot down ideas as they came to me and write myself notes about things I needed to do, more than half of it would get away from me. That same principle works in prayer. Go down your prayer list when you pray. When you get an answer, cross it off your list and write beside it, "Thank you, Lord!"

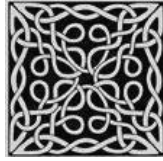
Eighth, **just worship God**. Spend some of your prayer time in simply adoring God. A little boy entered his preacher-father's study, pulled an ottoman near his dad's desk and just sat looking at him, "Well, what do you want, Son?" asked the father. The boy replied, "I don't want nothing. I was just looking at you and loving you." Imagine having a boy who comes in not to ask for a present, but to just to look and love. The heavenly Father wants His children also to come to Him not because they want something, but just to express reverence and devotion.

Ninth, **learn to pray some in silence**. You don't have to talk out loud to pray. People talk too much anyhow. Someone said that man should be classified as "homo loquax" because he always has to be talking or listening to somebody else talk. Sixteen hundred years ago, Clement of Alexandria said that men are too much like old shoes, all worn out but the tongue! You will pray a lot more if you learn to communicate with God in silence. Love has a mysterious way of making that possible. The silence in a room where sits a husband and wife who truly love one another may be more eloquent and vibrant than any verbal chatter. Probably among the greatest of all prayers are some that are too heavy for words, prayers that crush words, prayers that send a flood of thoughts and feelings heavenward without the accompaniment of a single word.

### **Conclusion**

Nothing enriches the preacher and preaching like prayerfulness. Some time ago, a doctor was amazed at the composure, patience and strength with which a dying patient bore his terminal illness and faced death. In examining the body after death had come, the doctor found the answer to his questions when he saw the callouses on the knees. If you ever become what you think now you wish to be, and what you can be, start developing some callouses on your knees. Although used here in slightly different setting, I close with these classic lines:

"Heaven's gates are not so highly arched as king's palaces  
They who enter there must go on their knees."



## **PERSERVERENCE OF THE PREACHER**

Brethren, there are several passages that I wish to impress upon your minds, particularly as they relate to your work and lives as gospel preachers. Hear Jesus in Luke 9:62:

"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Again, hear His words of Matthew 10:22:

"And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

Perhaps the only worthwhile thing that we have from King Ahab in the Bible is the exceedingly wise response that he sent to the threats of Syria's king, Benhadad:

"Let not him who straps on his armor boast himself as he who takes it off."  
(I Kings 20:11)

### ***The Real Test of Manhood***

The real tests of manhood and the most searching proofs of character are not found in pious profession but in plucky perseverance. We certainly see and appreciate that on the athletic field. Don't you thrill at seeing a football team fighting to the very last whistle even though virtually helpless in defeat? Or a distance runner completing his last laps by sheer grit, with no hope of winning a victory, but with a determination to run the very best race he could possibly deliver? In my high school and college years, I loved to play basketball. I have seen players who were impressively skillful in shooting baskets and in dribbling the ball but who never made the team because they lacked that most primary element of character, dogged determination never to admit defeat. Nobody admires a quitter. Everybody respects the man who keeps his composure, who will not let himself get panicky, who will not turn tail and run when things are not going as he wants them to go.

Who among us has not thrilled at reading the biography of Helen Keller, deprived of both sight and hearing, but determined not to wallow in self-pity but rather determined to build one of the most beautiful and influential lives of this century? Recently, the Dallas Morning News carried a wonderful story about Mike LeFan, crippled by polio, living in an iron lung, unable to move his hands but learning to type and paint with his toes, earning his high school diploma and college degree with scholastic honors, and winning independence, respect, and success in an honorable profession. Frankly, that

more than anything else, is the real proof of character, of manhood. Life is interested not merely in what you do, but in how much you can take. Achievement may reveal something great, but the ability not to whine but to smile in failure may well reveal something greater. It is much easier to handle gracefully prosperity than to meet gracefully adversity. The real man is one who, when his mainsail is blown away, rigs up a sheet and keeps sailing.

The reason that we stress these matters, brethren, is that no one's powers of endurance, of stick-to-itiveness, are taxed quite so much as those of the minister of the gospel. We must face the unhappy fact that...

### ***Too Many Preachers Are Quitting a Full-time Ministry***

It would be sad but interesting to know how many brethren in churches of Christ at one time in life committed themselves to the ministry, prepared themselves for a life of gospel preaching, worked as ministers for a season, and then changed direction, entering some secular vocation. Of course, these brethren will always argue that they are "making tents" as did Paul, that they have no intention of quitting the ministry, and that they are preaching as much (they will usually say more) as before. Most of that, in my judgment, is whistling in the dark and rationalizing in an effort to whitewash the fact that they let the problems of the preacher discourage and defeat them.

With references to making tents, it occurs to me that Paul has been much misrepresented. He said in II Timothy 2:4 that "No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him." I believe he meant that. He constantly taught singleness of purpose and begged for undivided hearts. He even advised in his day against marriage because of conflicting demands on one's time and care. He said:

"I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband." (I Corinthians 7:32-34)

If you reply that he did make tents, I would call your attention to the fact that he did so only when he had to in order not to starve- or, when he felt compelled to in order to keep his enemies and immature Christians from accusing him of being a hireling. He apologized later for the one time he did that (II Corinthians 12:13). To leave the impression that Paul by either example or precept would have a preacher to settle down somewhere to ply a secular trade for material security and to discharge his evangelistic mission through an occasional cottage class and a monthly preaching appointment out in the country is, in my judgment, a gross perversion of facts. We know how wholeheartedly Paul gave himself to his ministry, how he drove himself, how he could not settle down anywhere for any length of time, how passionately he reached out for

distant areas where he would not build on another's foundation, how he begrudged every moment that took him away from that "necessity" that was laid upon him (I Corinthians 9:16). It irritates me a bit when some preacher (who has thrown in the towel) explains with a sheepish grin on his face that he hasn't really quit preaching- he has just gone to making tents like Paul(!) when he knows, the Lord knows, and I know that if Paul were in his circumstances, he would not be settling down to spend the bulk of the balance of his life selling insurance or dabbling in real estate. This is not to condemn vocational evangelists (every Christian ought to be one of those, and I pray for millions of them), but it is to encourage preachers to preach and not to flee the field when the going may get a little rough. To you faculty members here in this college, may I address a plea that you never influence a student either directly or indirectly away from a full dedication of his talents to the ministry of the gospel. The field is too large; the task is too difficult; the laborers are too few. It seems that we not only are training fewer and fewer men to be gospel preachers, but that more and more of those who are trained are turning away from that to which they committed themselves.

### ***Concerning Matthew 10:22***

Please note that Matthew 10:22 ("But the one who endures to the end will be saved.") was addressed by Jesus to the *apostles*. He knew that when they encountered what they would encounter, they would be powerfully tempted to quit. He knew that their lives would not be exactly what they fancied they would be. He knew that they were developing some high hopes, building some big air castles. After all, it was no small honor to be selected by the Messiah to sit on thrones to judge Israel (Matthew 19:28), to be the foundation upon which a holy temple of the Lord was to be built (Ephesians 2:19-22). He knew that He needed to say something to check them, something to bring them down to earth. Consequently, He reminded them that *commencing* their ministry would not win a reward that it required rather enduring to the end. It's not putting one's hand to the plow so much as resisting the temptation to look back (Luke 9:62). It is not professing faith so much as it is being faithful even unto death (Revelation 2:10). Young preachers of today need to be told exactly what Jesus told His young preachers of yesterday.

There is no way to estimate the damage that is done when a minister of the gospel quits the field. It is like the falling of a flag-bearer in the heat of battle. What hopes and rejoicing it excites within the ranks of the enemy! Doubtless Satan aims his arrows most at ministers of the gospel. He is like the king of Syria who said, "Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel." (I Kings 22:31). He knows that in persuading a preacher to quit, he wins far more than the one soul. It is like the cutting of the mighty oak. There is the destruction of the tree, but much more. No more found are those branches in which birds have built their nests, and no more is that shade in which animals have found refuge. When a preacher falls, perhaps the greatest tragedies are in the lives of those who have looked to him for comfort, who have found their inspiration in his example.

When Jesus gave to His preachers the admonition of Matthew 10:22, He was primarily concerned about their reaction to the fierce persecution they would face when:

"Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:21-22)

We wish to consider not only that trial but also the fact that

### ***The Minister Is Surrounded by a Multitude of Trials***

This is true from the inception of his ministry to its close. Each period in his life finds its peculiar temptations and forces that would drag him down and drive him to hang up his shoes. In his early ministry, during his young manhood, there are the subtler temptations that would turn his head, that would excite his selfish ambitions that would over-inflate his ego that would almost irresistibly demand the indulgence of his fleshly appetites. In his middle years, there come the forces of weariness in well-doing, discouragement, concern about responsibilities to his family. In the twilight years, he wrestles with economic insecurity, with resentment toward churches who prefer younger, handsomer, healthier men, with the absence of a place he can truly call home. There is no period in his life when the minister is not beset by trials that test his mettle, that tempt him to cry, "I've had enough!" that lure him to look for greener pastures.

Jesus was so strikingly straightforward and honest that He would not allow His chosen disciples to enter their apostleship without a clear understanding of the many problems that lay ahead of them. He told them that they would be delivered up for trials in court, that they would be imprisoned, that they would be whipped like animals, that they would have to depend upon the hospitality of those willing to set something to eat before them, that their families would reject them, that many of them would be killed by misguided zealots thinking they "offering service to God" (John 16:2). It is as if He were saying, "Brethren, please understand before you start that the road before you is no easy one, that your lives will be filled with sacrifices, suffering, and sorrow. If you are going to turn tail in the heat of battle or collapse under the weight of a burden, it is better for you not to pick up the sword. On the other hand, if you be men enough to stand the heat of the of the fight, to bear the gauntlet- if you are determined despite all the forces of hell to endure to the end- welcome to the ranks!" That is precisely my message of the hour to those of you who would preach. The church does not need half-hearted, uncommitted mercenaries.

Please do not make of these statements more than intended. I would not fill you with fear and have you think for one moment that the life of the preacher is one great tragedy. It is quite the contrary. Every life, Christian or non-Christian, is a mixture of the good and bad, of joy and sorrow, of prosperity and adversity, of health and sickness, of fulfilled dreams and bitter disappointments. In perspective, I can quickly and easily say that with all its trials, the life of a minister is the richest and happiest of all. It is the

most fulfilling, most abundant, not only in terms of future rewards but also in terms of present joys. The pluses outweigh the minuses far more in preaching than in any other line of work. In spite of that, many weakly and foolishly surrender and quit when some of the preacher's trials appear.

What are the specific problems that make quitters out of so many preachers? First, of course, is the type of *persecution* mentioned by Jesus. Fortunately we probably will not be killed, imprisoned, or even whipped, but we will be persecuted if we are truly men of God "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..." (II Timothy 3:12). Jesus suggested that we should be aware of that man who seems to suffer no persecution but always to bask in the warmth of popular approval. He said that if the people persecuted Him, they would also persecute those of us who try to walk in His steps and speak as He spoke (John 15:20). Dare you to presume that you will succeed where He failed? That you know more about how to do God's will and how to influence people than He? When you rebuke iniquity, expose hypocrisy, and warn sinners, you are going to make enemies. Satan and sinful, prejudiced people are no more docile now than they were then. They are just as antagonized by, and as antagonistic toward preachers. You will be persecuted if you do your work. There will be men and women after your scalp, endeavoring to make your life as miserable as possible within the limits of the law.

You will perhaps also be ill-treated by your own brethren. Paul spoke of his "danger from false brothers..." (II Corinthians 11:26). Persecution at the hands of your own brothers and sisters will probably be the most painful of all. Still, it must come, unless again, we presume to fancy ourselves more skillful than the inspired apostle. Brethren, too, don't like to be told their shortcomings. Brethren, too, are human enough to nurture antipathies and grudges. Brother Lawrence Smith has an article in this week's *Firm Foundation* saying "...a preacher's work with a congregation is often a three stage cycle, first idolized, second criticized, and then third, crucified." Surely, persecutions must come, but, brethren, don't let them get you down. Expect them. Be ready for them. Rejoice even in them as you contemplate the holy company in which they have placed you! (Matthew 5:10-12).

Second, some preachers are driven to quit by the sheer *weight of responsibility*, the same type of burden that prevents many good men from accepting appointments to the eldership and that causes many others to resign, a reluctance to be responsible for the souls of others. I wonder to what extent a preacher's changing jobs, or an elder's resigning removes such responsibility. Being an effective preacher is not an easy task. It is a twenty-four hour job. There is no field of work with which I am familiar that demands so much of time, of heart, of energy. It is sweaty, difficult labor continually to provide inspiring, fresh sermons, to seek out and teach potential converts, to weep with those that weep, to counsel and help bear the burdens of those with problems, to teach dozens of classes, to encourage new converts, to visit the hospitals, to restore backsliders, to rebuke hypocrites, to speak with authority (Titus 2:15). It is enough to make the preacher old while he is yet young. It was this sort of thing that caused Paul to climax his biological sketch of his sufferings for Jesus with,

“And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? (II Corinthians 11:28-29)

Yes, brethren, the burdens are great, but again; don't let them get you down. Expect them. Be ready for them. Bear them without complaint. Rejoice in the opportunity to demonstrate the depth of your commitment, your strength in Christ enabling you not even to stumble beneath the load. Join with Paul in not whining, but rather in glorying in such matters, knowing that they bring the power of Christ to rest upon you (II Corinthians 12:9).

A third problem that defeats some preachers is *insecurity*. This takes two forms, financial insecurity and job insecurity. The first involve a charge of inadequate financial support and especially inadequate retirement provisions, the second concerns the short life of the demand for a preacher's services, the difficulty of finding any remunerative positions after the appearance of a grey hair.

Preachers, doubtless you will encounter some financial crisis, but again let me plead with you not to exaggerate such problems out of proportion and not to allow them to drive you out of full-time preaching. Let me dare to suggest that there is too much whining about this and too much selfishness and lack of faith manifested by it. While I very obviously believe that preachers are worthy of their hire, that they who proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel, that they should be well supported (I Corinthians 9:4-14; I Timothy 5:18) (and I intend to continue preaching that), I still cannot erase from my mind the fact that when our Lord sent out His disciples, for some reason He told them take no wallet, no money in their purses, no bread, only one coat and a pair of sandals (Matthew 10:9-10; Mark 6:8-9). "And he said to them, 'When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?' They said, 'Nothing.'" (Luke 22:35). I still cannot close my eyes to some of His most precious words, those of Matthew 6:25-33:

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Brethren, that's not just pretty poetry. It's a precious promise in which the Lord expects us to manifest some trust. This admittedly is not to be abused and to encourage irresponsibility. There won't be quails covering the camp or a hoar frost of manna on the ground, but the Father will care for His children. If I didn't believe those words of Jesus any more than some of my preaching brethren do, I would not only quit preaching, but admit my loss of faith. Our preachers have little basis for complaint. Reports indicate that we are paid more than average among some religious groups. Reports show that we are paid more than the national average income in the richest country in the world. In most churches that I know, the preacher's income is certainly not below the average of the men in the church. Who are we of all people to murmur and cry for more than that? If you as preachers begin to fret because you note a few business and professional people, who seem to fare better financially, let me inform you that you have a much more serious problem in your heart than you have at the bank.

Quickly, let me add that the Lord expects you not to be slothful in business affairs and not to be wasteful. When He promises to give us daily bread, He expects us to help by planting some wheat. He will take care of you, but He expects you to exercise some wisdom in management. As preachers, you will not have a communistic state or an employer that will force you to provide for later years. God expects you to use some common sense and some financial responsibility. We rejoice at the appearance in the October 3, 1972, *Firm Foundation* of some wonderfully sound and practical advice concerning these problems. Wisely provide for your old age and retirement, but again exercise control over your appetites (pride and covetousness), and don't confuse necessities with luxuries.

Regarding the matter of job insecurity and the very prevalent search of most congregations for a preacher between thirty-one and thirty-nine (with twenty years of experience!), it must be admitted that we ministers have a very discouraging trial. It is one manifestation of many problems that are developing in our society because of an exaggerated and incidentally un-Biblical, youth emphasis. While God has always honored the "hoary head" (Proverbs 16:31 KJV) and wanted "elders" in Israel (Numbers 11:16) and in the church (Titus 1:5), for some reason in our culture, it has become calamitous for one, either male or female, to have to put forty candles on the cake. Of course, I resent that and shall do all that I can to educate (especially the brethren at Preston Road in Dallas!) to realize its folly. Still, in all probability, most of the discouragement that we encounter here will be the fruit of pride rather than real disaster. After preaching for three of our largest churches and drawing a good salary, I expect to receive a rather hard blow to my ego and my wishes when I confront the fact that the bigger churches and high-paying churches want a younger man than me. However, with God as my helper, I am determining not to let that test drive me to despair or from the pulpit. The world is too big the need is too great; and my God is too good.

There are other discouragements that cause men to quit preaching, but generally, they are extensions in one form or another of the ones discussed. In urging

you to enter the ministry with a determination to see it through to the end, we shall close this lecture and this series by pointing your hearts toward

### ***The Perseverance of Our Lord in His Ministry***

Men, when things are not working out right, when you get “down in the dumps,” when you are tempted to quit and try something else, please remember the example of our Lord. Of course, everything about Him was lovely and exemplary. We often quote I Peter 2:21, Peter’s reference to Christ’s “...leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps...” and apply it generally, suggesting that in all areas of life. Jesus is the pattern for us to follow. Have you examined the verse with careful attention to the context? Begin with verse 19:

“For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” (I Peter 2:19-21)

You see, the example of our Lord here was His patient perseverance under trial, the fact that He did not run from His ministry when it brought even severe suffering. You do not know the real character of Jesus until you examine His powers of endurance. If there ever was one with reason to throw up His hands in despair and admit defeat, it was He. But did He? My Lord was no quitter!

Look at some of the discouragements that He faced that would have made quitters of weaker men. First, there were the circumstances of His birth, and upbringing. There were probably some nasty rumors and stigmas connected with His conception. He was not born in a palace, but in a manger. He was reared not in the court of the king or even the home of the affluent, but in a carpenter shop. His home was not in Rome, the world’s political capital, or in Athens, the world’s cultural center, or in Jerusalem, the sacred city of the Jews but in despised Nazareth out of which no “good thing” could come. With such unfavorable and unadvantageous beginnings, most of us would have been whipped before we even got started.

Second, there was bitter disappointment with His helpers, His co-laborers, at every turn. He selected twelve men to help Him bear His load and usher in the kingdom. He kept them in His company and schooled them day and night. He taught them humility, yet they used cheap politics to capture the highest seats and even at the supper had a big contention to which “regarded as the greatest” (Luke 22:24). He taught them love, and they asked Him for permission to call down fire to consume the Samaritans (Luke 9:54). Toward the end, one of them betrayed Him to the enemy, one of His favorites denied Him with curses, another refused to believe that He was raised; they all ran like scared rabbits when danger threatened. There is real pathos in His words to Phillip, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?” (John

14:9), and in His response to the twelve when they questioned something He had just taught: "...Then are you also without understanding?" (Mark 7:18). When the helpers that one counts on to hold up His hands not only don't help, but cannot even seem to grasp what it is all about, it is quite discouraging. But did Jesus quit? Not my Lord!

Third, there was continual misunderstanding and misrepresentation. He was the most reverent man in the world, yet He was called a blasphemer (Matthew 9:3). He was the most truthful man in history, yet He was called a liar (John 7:12). He refused earthly kingdoms when offered to Him by Satan and ran away when the crowds tried to make Him king (John 6:15), yet He was accused of political ambitions. Nobody ever was so completely committed to doing the will of God, yet He was called a servant of Beelzebub (Matthew 12:24). Nobody ever so completely denied Himself the pleasures of this life or so completely exalted spirit over flesh, yet he was called a wine-bibber and a glutton (Matthew 11:19). Nobody was ever so filled with all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, yet His own friends thought he had become lunatic (Mark 3:21). Talk about misunderstanding! Misrepresentation! Slander! But did he give up? Not my Lord. Some are ready to quit preaching, quit their vocations, quit marriage- they feel sorry for themselves because they are not understood and appreciated. They can't bear that. I'm glad my Lord was more of a man.

Fourth, there was the necessary attendant loneliness. Having no one with whom to communicate- no one on whom to lean. Again what pathos are in His words, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." (John 16:12) How He longed for someone with whom to talk and share! But did He quit? Not my Lord!

Fifth, He had to face open, hostile opposition every day. He had enemies and they were after Him. They "...plotted how to entangle him in his words." (Matthew 22:15). They "...they made plans to put him to death." (John 11:53). His enemies were powerful, influential men, too. But did He quit?

Sixth, He must have been discouraged to know how much His family and friends would suffer because of Him. In spite of their inadequacies, He did love them very much (John 15:12-15; Luke 22:15), and He knew of the hatred, the trials, the whippings, the martyrdom that they faced because of Him (John 16:2). Many preachers quit because they don't want their loved ones to suffer. Jesus had that trial, too. Did he quit?

Seventh, before Him stood always a picture of what awaited Him as the climax and end of His ministry. Crucifixion was a horrible way to die, and Jesus knew that He would be lifted up, stripped, whipped, and mocked even in His death agonies. That is not a very pretty goal toward which to press. But did He quit? No, "...He set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) saying "...the Son of Man must suffer many things..." (Mark 8:31).

## ***Conclusion***

Lord Randolph Churchill once wrote to his wife:

“More than two-thirds, in all probability, of my life is over and I will not spend the remainder of my years in beating my head against a stone wall. There has been no consideration, no indulgence, no memory or gratitude- nothing but spite, malice and abuse. I am quite tired and dead sick of it all, and will not continue in political life any longer.”

That expresses well an understandable human reaction- and that of many men who leave the ministry. How we rejoice, though, that it was not the reaction of our Lord, that He never addressed a note like that to His Father.

Young men, we are not promising you rosy roads. Everybody, including the preacher, is called upon to live in less than ideal circumstances. As ministers, your air castles may crumble, brethren may disappoint you, friends may desert you, financial security may ever elude you, enemies may hate and harm you, families may suffer- but remember always the perseverance of the Prince of Princes. Remember that it is well worth the investment. When you put your hand to the plow, don't look back. As I speak these words, I know that there is somewhere a head once crowned with thorns that nods agreement and a voice that once loudly cried in death agonies but that now whispers, “Amen, and Amen!”