

Preaching the Gospel

A monthly magazine for preachers and those who want to preach.

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Comment: Professionalism in Preachers

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(Underlining by PKW)

Paul,

I happened to have read this (PTG Mag July 2008) just after you left our house for dinner. The first article (*Professionalism in Preachers Today* by Bobby Graham) kind of hit a chord with me and I thought I would give you some of my thoughts on the subject.

One of the big problems I see with "preaching" is that in many of the off-handed ways in which we talk about it we reveal that we see it as a job. A man who gets all of his support from congregations is a "preacher". A man who gets some of his support from congregations and keeps a part time job to make ends meet is a "part-time preacher". And, a man who makes a living on the side and preaches is "filling in until the congregation can get a preacher." From our use of the language, a man is a preacher based on the status of his pay and not the amount of work that he does.

Depending on the era in which one lives, a 40 hour work week could easily be considered part time work. I know my grandfather worked 12x6 in the coal mines while my mother was growing up. That is 72 hours a week. A 40 hour week is certainly part time by comparison. Most of us have a significant amount of time to devote to farming, social clubs, golf, camping, and assorted hobbies (if we can afford them). For the past year I was the president of a school organization. No one referred to me as the "part-time President". I was just the president.

That is not how it is with preachers. It is as if there has to be a distinction made based on the amount of time a preacher has to devote to making a living. In the way we use the language, in Acts 18 Paul starts out as a "part time preacher" and then shifts to "full time" when Timothy and Silas show up! Yet, that hides what really happens. He was preaching both before and after Timothy and Silas arrived. There is no indication that Paul did all the preaching and Silas and Timothy just "sat around in their off time". Paul constantly referred to them in his letters as fellow servants and laborers (Romans 16:21, Philippians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1). Three men together could arrange it so that two could work secular jobs and one could devote himself to preaching. When it came time to leave, Timothy and Silas stayed behind to get things in order. They were key people in the church and there is no indication that they got "promotions" when Paul left. There was nothing to be promoted to. They were all preaching; one was doing it full time. The amount of time devoted overall to preaching is based almost solely on what was left

after doing the minimum work necessary to live.

Part of our problem, also, is that we see preaching the gospel as a single man occupation and not a team effort. If there are two preachers in a congregation, then the second one has to get paid in order to be a "preacher", and even then there is no guarantee. The second one is an intern, trainee, "youth minister", former preacher or some other designation (most often just ignored). Evidently no one else in the congregation can be a preacher—just the one who makes most of his living from preaching. Again it doesn't seem to matter how the duties are split up. The second one could do just as much work as the first, but we talk in ways as if only one can be "the" preacher.

When Jesus sent out his disciples in Luke 10, he sent them out in pairs. When the early Christians sent out men to new areas, they sent them in teams of two to five. Occasionally we find someone in a lone position, but it was usually for some limited time while the companions were catching up. An argument I have heard is that preachers are a limited resource and two men can cover more territory if they are split up—however, that is not the way the gospel was preached in the New Testament time. Two men may be able to cover more ground independently, but I would argue that two together can more effectively cover the area they work together.

What needs to happen is that we need to quit putting "getting paid for preaching" on a pedestal.

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We need to recognize that everyone who is contributing time and effort to spreading the gospel is a preacher. We also need to quit insisting that men go it alone. No one really goes it alone anyway. There is almost always someone who is at least the chief understudy no matter how remote the location. If that were not so, then congregations would often collapse whenever the preacher left without a replacement in hand. Yet, such is rarely the case.

Since I have almost always been one to earn my living from other sources, I have watched how people think of us "fill ins". Over the years I have been blessed to have been involved with many small congregations. In a couple of places I have done all the preaching, most of the Bible classes and I studied with people in the evenings. I will grant that I have always been a poor one to visit the sick and I know my prayer life could have been a lot better. Yet, I was not acknowledged as the preacher (which is fine by me because I dislike the title anyway).

Often when people hear that all three of my brothers are "supported" preachers, I get asked why I don't preach. I've even had people say that as they left the services where I had just preached the sermon and the Bible class! I have to wonder if they happened to notice who was doing the teaching that morning. The implied question really is, "why don't you give up your secular job and preach the gospel, being fully dependent on congregations to support you?"

There are many reasons for wanting to remain a "fill-in".

1. People have a built-in excuse that dismisses the preacher's superior knowledge by believing that his knowledge is required for his "job". They believe that if they don't have the job, then

they really don't have to study all that hard. I like showing people that even the "average member" can and should be a student of the Bible and the preacher is not the standard for "enough knowledge". I've noticed that it really throws people for a loop if the designated preacher has less experience and knowledge than me. It challenges him to keep studying and it shows everyone else that there is no limit to what everyone is expected to learn.

2. While it is true that the designated preacher of a congregation can go places and do things that unofficial preachers can't, it is also true that unrecognized preachers can say and do things that the designated preacher can only wish he could do. In Acts 17:14, Paul had to get out of town, but Timothy and Silas could stay behind. Sometimes being the recognized preacher is a handicap. The less known preachers are able to complete much-needed aid to a congregation.

3. Paul rarely went to new towns on his own. Men who were highly qualified teachers in their own right accompanied him. That made his position far more effective. That is still true in our day. No matter how much experience a preacher has, he still needs someone to discuss things with, who can rally to his side when things get tough and who can keep him in check when egos get inflated. A devoted wife can do a lot of that, but a companion preacher can do it far more effectively.

Well, I'm sure there are many more, but these will do.

MY COMMENT: Well said, Darrell. PKW

[More About Personal Work](#)

There are many different ways to teach people what to do to be saved. I have used Maurice Tisdell's charts (five lessons), the Jule Miller film strips (five lessons), a one-lesson approach, and my favorite—my own lessons drawn out on blank sheets of paper as I teach. Right now I am excited about the one-lesson, flip chart method which Ken Craig calls, "The Big Picture." Every method which the teacher is comfortable with is a good way to teach, as long as you are teaching what the Bible says.

However, the bigger problem is finding people who are willing to let you teach them. I have observed that this has become more difficult as society has become more materialistic. It is here that what I wrote about last week comes in.

What we need is much preaching—and Christians who truly live as Christians should. When there is radio preaching, tent meeting preaching, gospel meeting preaching, etc. we are helping people understand that there is a people who really are trying to follow the Bible, and the Bible only. When we live like Jesus, we attract those people who have tender consciences. *"You wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior."* (1 Peter 3:1-2) Then we find people who will ask questions and be happy to listen when we teach.

Yesterday (August 17) a 20-yr.-old man was baptized in Eshowe. His heart was opened by the radio preaching of Mzwandile Gazu. He contacted Mzwandile and told him that he had stopped going to his denomination. It was then easy for Mzwandile to teach him what he needed to do to be saved. And now he is a child of God.

How do we find people who will let us teach them? Public preaching, advertising, and above all, the godly lives of Christians will open doors and hearts. We should also be praying and seeking opportunities to teach—all of the time. God will bless our efforts.

Starting Over From Scratch

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Jeremiah had become very disillusioned at his job of delivering God's message. He had become the most unpopular preacher in town. At this point he is disillusioned with God. "*You induced me*" to preach this very unpopular message, he said to God. Then he decided that he would quit preaching. What was the use? Nobody liked his message. Nobody wanted to hear what he had to say. God was the only reason he had been preaching this message anyway, and right now, God did not seem to be so near when all was going so wrong with his life.

He tried to be silent, and quit preaching, but the word was the only hope for a dark world, and what would happen if nobody preached it? Was it worth it to let himself and the next generation down by letting them hear only the lies that the false teachers were spinning? Who wins when conscientious preachers decide to quit preaching the word, and let the false teachers be the only voice that is heard?

Jeremiah had that smoldering fire of truth that he could not hold in, because his love for God, for the nation, and for the generations to come, became a hot burning fire of passion raging within and he could no longer be silent. If you think that the word of God needs to be popular before it needs to be preached, then please don't preach. If you think that you need to be popular when you preach, then please don't preach. But if you believe that the word of God must be preached because the truth is the only thing that will set anybody free from the shackles of sin and condemnation, then preach the word and never let yourself become ashamed of it, and never let some hypocritical brother steal your fire!

God will break the vessel that has inclined itself to self-serving ways, and God has ways of delivering the godly out of temptation and severe trial. Jeremiah will need to stand. Shame would eventually come to the story of Judah, but the name of Jeremiah would be highly honored in time. Look what a legacy he left behind! No one thinks Jeremiah preached in vain, but we all know that the false prophets went down in shame. **Read Jeremiah 18-20** and be strengthened to stand up for the truth like Jeremiah. Find ways to get the truth out. Only the truth will set us free from the wrath to come. We can go down in shame and leave a legacy of shame for not standing up for the truth, but if we stand for the truth, truth-seekers and truth-finders will know that we exercised faith in the Lord and did not labor in vain. They will honor us, but more importantly GOD will honor us. Whose honor do we seek?

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