

So You Want a Preacher?

H.E. Phillips

A number of churches, large and small, are now looking for preachers to work with them. Through the years I have read many appeals, and have received a number of requests to help find preachers to fill the vacant pulpits across the nation. Brethren are learning that it is much more difficult to find a good preacher than it was a few years ago. The preacher shortage is becoming more acute every day. I do not know all the reasons for this condition, but at least two seem evident: 1) many young preachers have become discouraged because of the general attitude of brethren toward preaching and preachers and have turned to other labors; 2) the present standard required for preachers and the many extra demands made of them that will not allow time for study and plain preaching.

The extreme demands upon preachers by some brethren sometimes grow out of their experiences with lazy, unprepared, self-centered, fun-loving men who have called themselves preachers of the gospel for the *easy money* they think is in it. They give about four hours or less each week to pulpit preaching and class teaching, and the rest of the time they loaf and play. But these poor excuses for preachers of the gospel should not cause brethren to set unscriptural standards for "the right man" to work with them. But who is "the right man?" What kind of preacher do brethren generally want? I have heard some amazing qualities and strange standards for "the right man."

One brother asked that I help find a preacher "between 35 and 40 years old, with a friendly wife and not more than three children, who has a good disposition to get along with all kinds of people, and who can get his sermon across in not more than 30 minutes." This man must have been a novice or very naive, but I guess he was speaking for the church who wanted this kind of preacher. The apostle Paul would not fit the demands of this brother. He would not have come within the age limits, he did not have a wife or children, his disposition did not keep him from spiritual conflicts with false brethren, and he preached until midnight and then talked to the brethren until break of day on at least one occasion (Acts 20:7). Paul "was long preaching" (Acts 20:9). I doubt that Peter, James, John, Timothy, Titus or any of the first century preachers of truth would have measured to the standard required by this brother.

Another brother wrote: "Will you help us get a preacher who will really do the work of the church?" I wondered what this church intended to do when they found a man "to do the work of the church." This is one reason there are so many dead churches across the nation today. They hire a preacher to do all the work and the members do little more than warm the pews once a week, or maybe twice, while this preacher goes in all directions at once promoting his social gospel activities.

An elder asked if I knew of a preacher who was about ready to move. "Our preacher is moving in three months. He has been with us two years and we think that is long enough for a preacher to stay at one place. He gets too close to the members if he stays longer." He may mean that the preacher learns enough about some of the members to preach what they really need. When I suggested a preacher who might want to move, this elder asked: "Where did he go to school and how many degrees does he have?" I told him I did not know, he would have to ask the man.

And there was the appeal for a preacher who had the tact and diplomacy to preach without offending people, and not to call names or debate with the sects. This preacher must have the political skill to "preach the gospel" without those in error knowing that they are sinners and lost. Teachers of this sort can be found for the right price, who will tickle the itching ears of those who have turned from the truth and have turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

These are typical requirements for preachers today. Have you noticed that there is not one single scriptural requirement in any of these? Apollos was "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures," "instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord," but he lacked something to be the kind of preacher God wants.

"Knowing only the baptism of John," he needed to be taught the truth before he could do the work of an evangelist (Acts 18:24-26). If a man does not know the truth, of course he can not preach it, all else makes little difference.

If you want a preacher who pleases God and will do you good, why not look for one who loves the truth and will preach the word in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:2)? Who will declare all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27)? Who will do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5)? Who will fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12)? Who will do nothing by partiality (1 Tim. 5:21)? Who will reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2)? Who will not hold back anything that is profitable but will teach publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20)? Who will give no place by subjection to false brethren (Gal. 2:4-5)? Who will preach to please God and persuade men (Gal. 1:6)? If one does all this, what difference does his age, looks, family, education, personality, popularity, and background make? If he preaches and practices the faith once delivered he will do any church good.

But then after "the right man" is found and employed to work with a congregation in preaching the word, there are always some carnal minded "church-goers" who can criticize and find fault until the preacher leaves or a squabble starts through the long and loose tongues of these "experts" on what a preacher should be. The spiritual babies, who have not grown one inch spiritually in 20 years, never learn anything from a sermon or Bible class. They are too busy looking for the faults of the man doing the preaching to hear the message which he proclaims. This is exactly the attitude of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who found fault with Christ but never learned anything from his doctrine.

What difference does it make how fat or skinny the preacher is? How does the color of his suit, tie or shirt affect the message he proclaims from the word of God? John the Baptist would not have rated in any fashion contest, but he moved a lot of people with his message. What if he is "too young" or "too old" (whatever that may be), how does that hinder the truth of the gospel? What if he does foul up the "King's English" a few times during the discourse, does this destroy the power of the gospel?

Brethren, when we come to fully realize that men are lost in sin, and that the gospel is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16), we will be concerned, not about all these unimportant characteristics of the man, but the message which will convict men of sin, bring them to repentance and obedience to the gospel of Christ. The man or woman who stresses the rich dress, good speech, impressive

personality, financial standing, crowd pleasing, soft-soaping and entertaining qualities of the man, will never know very much about the saving power of God because they are really not listening to learn. These are the self-appointed experts on preachers and preaching technique, but they know nothing about the message. They really know nothing about preachers either, because one must know the message to know what God requires of preachers.

If you are looking for a preacher, do not consider anything before you know of his knowledge of the gospel, his love for the truth, his courage to preach it fully, and his determination to please God and persuade men. Other matters are secondary and unimportant.

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