

# **THE LIFE AND WORK OF A GOSPEL PREACHER**

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# INTRODUCTION

## I. THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS.

- A. This course of study is designed to acquaint young men who aspire to preach the gospel of Christ with what a preacher is and should be, and what all is involved in working for our Lord within the framework of a local congregation of the church.
- B. First of all, I want each student to see the life and work of a gospel preacher from the Biblical perspective. Thus, much emphasis will be given to insights gained from the Scriptures. Especially so with the books of 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. One of your main assignments in this class is to read and study these three books thoroughly. You need to *know* those three books! I expect you to study them and learn them. And, for the sake of simplicity and uniformity in study and testing, I am asking you to use the American Standard Version. (Your tests will be based upon the text of that translation, so if you do not have a copy you must acquire one.)
- C. Secondly, each student needs to be informed, as well as possible, concerning what to expect once you get out in the field as a gospel preacher and face the day to day problems which arise in the life and work of a preacher in today's world. One of the primary objectives I have as the teacher of this course is to equip you as best I can to cope with reality as you will face it. You need to know what to expect . . . you *deserve* to know!
- D. You need to know from the beginning that in making the decision to preach, you have chosen a life of service to your Lord and to your fellow man that requires sacrifices on your part. It is not an easy life! It is not smooth sailing! If you are looking for the proverbial "bed of roses" without any thorns, it is best you decide now to do something other than preaching.
  - 1. The attrition rate is high in preaching. Many young men who start out preaching do not last too long. In exploring problems preachers face we will learn why there are many who fall by the wayside. Again, I am being realistic. I am just telling you the facts. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.
  - 2. I certainly do not want you to ever give up . . . I want you to study hard to become a preacher and preach the good news all of your

life. While informing you of the difficulties, the problems, the discouragements, etc., I also will be stressing the positive side and the joy and satisfaction of being a preacher! While it is true things are not always “peaches and cream,” still there are many wonderful benefits and rewards in preaching the gospel. We need to accentuate these and intend to do so.

## II. FURTHER REFLECTIONS:

- A. The Bible is our text book. It is “thee Book!” It is God’s revelation to mankind. You need to read and memorize 2 Timothy 3:14-17. (In this instance, the KJV is preferable to the ASV in the first part of verse 16; thus, memorize that opening phrase of verse 16 from the KJV). The Bible gives us the “instruction in righteousness” we need for salvation, for proper conduct of life and for doctrine. We can indeed “know the truth” and understand what the will of the Lord is (John 8:31,32; Ephesians 5:15-17).
- B. But in all honesty, with all our human limitations and frailties, we confront many difficulties and knotty problems with which to cope that are extremely challenging. Coming up with a clear-cut answer as to how to deal with every given situation is not so easy. In fact, may I make it perfectly clear from the outset that I do not claim to have all the answers to all the problematic situations you may face, or to all the questions you may have. I am but a fellow servant with you, limited as we all are, trying to do the best I can. But because of many years of experience as a gospel preacher (40 plus) and having gone through hundreds of “complicated situations,” perhaps I am in a position to help you some . . . and I will certainly try.
- C. Actually, no one has all the answers to all the complexities we face in life. I do not, neither do you, nor does anyone else. True, there are those who know more than others, but it would take all the “wisdom of Solomon” to cope with all we confront in this day and age of complexity. We need to learn to be humble. (See Luke 14:11; 1 Peter 5:5,6; James 4:6, 10 etc.)
- D. I do not want to see you someday graduate from here, leave Brown Trail, and go out into the harvest field as a “know it all,” and with an arrogant attitude. Instead, I want to see you someday go forth with confidence and self-assurance in what you have learned from God’s word, and in your abilities, *but* with humility of heart.

### III. THE AIM AND PURPOSE OF THIS COURSE:

- A. To try our best to inform you as to what God expects of you as a gospel preacher . . . to teach you what the Bible has to say on the matter.
- B. To honestly and objectively deal with the issues and problems you will face. It is only fair that someone tell you what to expect so you will be better equipped to deal with these matters as you confront them.
- C. In order to accomplish objective #2 above, it will be needful to speak candidly, without sugar-coating reality. My purpose in doing this is not to dissuade you and cause you to think you may have made a mistake in deciding to preach, but to help you to survive the challenges of the battles of our warfare with Satan and his cohorts. (See 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-17; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3; etc.)
- D. To help you to be assured, that though there are many problems awaiting you, yet for certain you have made the right decision, and that if you will be faithful and enduring in your service to Christ the crown of life awaits you (see such passages as 1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:7,10b,11, 17, 26-28; 3:5,12, 21; James 1:2-4,12; 2 Timothy 4:7,8).
- E. Can you imagine the ecstasy that will pervade one's heart if he should someday hear the Savior say to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21,23).
- F. Hopefully, by the conclusion of this course, you will have a good understanding of what the Bible teaches you concerning how you should live, and the work you are to do as a gospel preacher. What you do with that information will be up to you . . . God has made us free moral agents and you are accountable to Him for what you do (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10b-12).





## LEARNING ESSENTIALS FROM THE BIBLE

### I. THE BASICS.

- A. Why did God send His Son into this world? Read and study such Scriptures as John 3:16,17; 1 John 4:9,10; Romans 3:21-24; 5:6-11; and Ephesians 2:4-9.
- B. Yes, to save mankind from sin . . . that is why God sent Christ, and that is why Christ was willing to come: read and study such Scriptures as Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 1:15; Luke 19:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 8:9; Hebrews 7:26,27; 9:23-26,28; 10:12; 1 John 3: 16a; Acts 13:23-38; etc.
- C. Thus, our Lord gave the apostles the great commission to go preach the gospel to every creature. You need to learn Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16; and Luke 24:46, 47.
- D. The very “heart of the gospel” is Christ crucified for our sins, and raised for our justification! Read Acts 2:22-36; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 2:1-5; 15:1-4; Romans 4:25; 5:8; 1 Peter 1:18,19; 2:24; Galatians 1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; etc.

### II. A BRIEF LOOK AT PAUL’S COMMITMENT.

- A. Converted from being a staunch opponent of Jesus: read Acts 7:54-58; 8:1; 9:1-30; 22:1-21; etc. What a transformation he made! Read Galatians 1:11-16; Acts 26:2-17.
- B. Given a great assignment by the Lord, Acts 26:17,18, he began *immediately* to fulfill it, Acts 26:19,20 and Acts 9:20.
- C. Being convinced beyond any doubt whatsoever in the truthfulness and power of the gospel, he felt himself indebted to reach out to others: Romans 1:14- 17.
- D. Paul got his priorities straight and pressed on! Read Philippians 3:7-14.
- E. The dedication and commitment to the Lord seen in his life and writings is amazing! Read Philippians 1:3-30; Acts 20:18-37; 21:7-14; Galatians 2:20; 6.14; etc.

## **CONCLUSION.**

- A. We, too, need to be truly converted!
- B. In like manner, we must understand what is really important.
- C. We must understand what human redemption is all about, and realize the importance of the gospel.
- D. Also, we need to feel a sense of indebtedness to the Lord. First for rescuing us from sin and death, and also to those about us who are groping in darkness and know not the Way (note again Romans 1:14-16). We must be truly dedicated and committed to sharing the gospel with as many people as possible during our lifetimes!

## THINGS TO LEARN FROM 1 & 2 TIMOTHY & TITUS

### I. 1 TIMOTHY.

- A. It is believed by most scholars that 1 Timothy was written by the apostle Paul to Timothy sometime around A.D. 64 or 65. Further, we surmise he was in Macedonia (the northern province of Greece . . . note 1 Timothy 1:3) when he wrote the letter. Timothy had been asked of Paul to stay in Ephesus, and is believed to have been there upon receiving the letter.
- B. The purpose for Paul exhorting Timothy to stay in Ephesus was that he might charge “certain men not to teach a different doctrine . . .” (1 Timothy 1:3). Gospel preachers today have the same kind of responsibility. We must be set for “the defense of the gospel” (Philippians 1:16).
- C. Those brethren Timothy was to teach needed to learn NOT to major in little nit-picking things but to understand what is really important is “love out of pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned . . .” (1 Timothy 1:4,5). And young men, we, too, need to learn also not to “major in minors” while leaving undone the “weightier matters” (Matthew 23:23, 24). I have seen the Cause of Christ hurt immeasurably by brethren, including preachers, “going to seed” on some “hobby-horse.” Why brethren will allow themselves sometimes to get hung up on some little matter or another and lose sight of what is really important is beyond me! It reminds me of lawyers arguing over some minute technicality while justice goes begging.
- D. These whom Timothy was to charge fancied themselves as being “teachers of the law” when in reality they did not understand it themselves. Thus, they were misleading others by teaching things contrary to sound doctrine and the pure gospel (1 Timothy 1:6-11). As we think about this, we should certainly sense the importance of knowing the truth and leading people in the right way.
- E. The context of 1 Timothy 1:12-17 is obviously important, and every young preacher should acquaint himself with it. Paul was thankful to the Lord for giving him the opportunity to serve. What a wonderful outlook! Before obtaining mercy in Christ Paul, in unbelieving ignorance, said that he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious. Verse 15 is worth memorizing. And what a beautiful tribute to the Lord in verse 17!

- F. 1 Timothy 1:18 certainly teaches that we are in war! Obviously, in war with Satan and his kingdom of darkness. (Compare chapter 6:12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-17; 2 Timothy 2:3,4.)
- G. From verse 19 we learn that we are to hold “faith and a good conscience.” Some did not, and those who did not had made “shipwreck concerning the faith.” Paul named two such individuals . . . Hymenaeus and Alexander. He “delivered” them unto Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme. (Compare 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 9-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14,15; Romans 16: 17,18; Titus 3:10,11.)
- H. The importance of prayer is taught in 1 Timothy 2:1,2, and also in verse 8. Verse 4 informs us that God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Verse 5 declares that there is but one mediator between God and man, “himself man, Christ Jesus.”
- I. Important information concerning women in the church is given in verses 9-15. By inspiration, women were forbidden “to teach, nor to have dominion over a man . . .” (Compare 1 Corinthians 11:1-16; 14:33-37; Titus 2:1-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7.)
- J. In 1 Timothy 3:1-13, the qualifications of elders and deacons are given. (Compare Titus 1:5-9.) While everything pertaining to elders, their qualifications and their work is very important, yet it is not necessarily pertinent to the aim of this class. However, familiarize yourself with it as we will be talking about the relationship of preachers and elders, etc., but I will not hold you responsible on tests concerning the qualifications of elders. That will be covered in another class.
- K. In 1 Timothy 3:15 we learn of the importance of proper behavior “in the house of God” which is described as “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The words “pillar” and “ground” signify the support, the foundation, “of the truth.” Notice, and remember, the truth is NOT dependent on the church for its veracity, but it is dependent upon the church for its support (yea, proclamation, and defense). Note such Scriptures as Jude 3 and Philippians 1:16 where Paul affirmed, “I am set for the defense of the gospel”, and Philippians 2:16 where Christians are depicted as “holding forth the word of life . . .”
- L. Verse 16 is a description of Christ and, though it is beautiful and you need to be familiar with it, it is not directly relevant to the thrust of our class.
- M. You will need to know the 4th chapter well. The first 3 verses concern the impending apostasy as it loomed on the horizon in A.D. 65 when Paul wrote the letter. Notice “in later times some shall fall away from the faith,

giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons . . .” verse 1. There have been many departures from the faith throughout the history of the Lord’s church. The one described here would have two revealing identifying marks . . . (1) forbidding to marry; and (2) commanding to abstain from meats. This pin-points graphically two characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church. Though characteristics of apostasy movements might vary, yet, departure is departure, and God’s wrath shall surely come upon those who so apostatize. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.) Verses 4 and 5 are not particularly relevant to our class objectives.

- N. Every gospel preacher needs to know 1 Timothy 4:6-16! Some of these verses are more significant than others for our purposes, and so while you should know them all, yet I require that you memorize only the first part of verse 6, and verses 12 and 16.
- O. While I expect you to read all of chapter 5, the verses you really need to know are 1,2,8,17 and 19-22.
- P. Again, while you should read all of chapter 6, the verses with which I really want you to be familiar are 6-17 and 20,21.

## II. 2 TIMOTHY.

- A. There admits of no doubt that the apostle Paul was imprisoned for the second time in Rome when he wrote the letter we know as 2 Timothy. The time of the writing was in either A.D. 67 or 68. It is believed that Timothy was most likely still in Ephesus when the letter was written to him. Nero was the emperor of Rome at the time. Later, in history, he is often referred to as “the infamous beast of the Roman Empire.” It is believed that he instigated the burning of parts of Rome so as to fabricate the charge against Christians that “they” did it. Pretending his innocence while blaming Christians gave rise to the famous quotation, “Nero fiddled while Rome burned.” It was he who commanded Paul’s beheading, and his order was carried out shortly after the apostle wrote this letter to Timothy.
- B. Every gospel preacher should serve God out of a pure conscience (1:3). Also, we sorely need to pray for each other, and be thankful for one another.
- C. Paul was aware of Timothy’s personal faith, and realized that much credit was due his mother, Eunice, and before her, his grandmother, Lois (1:5).
- D. In 1:6 the apostle undoubtedly is referring to a miraculous gift of the Spirit which he had imparted to Timothy. He urged him to “stir up” that gift . . .

to “stoke the fire” as it were, to use it fervently in service to God. We all understand that the miraculous gifts ceased with the death of the last apostle, but we can still learn a lesson from this. Though we do not have miraculous gifts, yet God has given all of us varying talents, capabilities, resources, and opportunities. Each of us should use our talents well to the Master’s good (Matthew 25:14 ff). I admonish you to “stir up” whatever talents you have . . . cultivate them NOW, and continue to do so . . . and use them to His glory throughout your lifetime.

- E. According to 1:7 God has not given His people a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and discipline (a sober or sound mind).
- F. We should never be ashamed of the gospel (“the testimony of our Lord”), and we must be willing to “suffer hardship with the gospel” as did Paul (1:8).
- G. In 1:9,10 Paul taught that God has saved us through Christ, who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. That is worth committing to memory.
- H. While Paul received a divine appointment (1:11) to preach (mentioned also in such Scriptures as Acts 9:15; 26:15-18; Galatians 1:11,12,15,16; 1 Corinthians 15:6-9; 1 Timothy 1:12-16; etc.) we ourselves, apart from any direct calling, have determined to preach the gospel because we know from the teachings of the New Testament this is what Christ wants done. And, even though “our calling” to preach differs from Paul’s, yet we can affirm with him what he penned in 1:12, and resolve to “hold the pattern of sound words . . .” (1: 13).
- I. According to 2:3 Timothy was urged by the apostle to suffer hardship with him “as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”
- J. No one in the Lord’s army should “entangle himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier” (2:4).
- K. Acquaint yourself with the content of 2:5-9, wherein some valuable information is given: (1) the importance of contending lawfully in order to receive a crown; (2) Jesus, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, according to the gospel; (3) while His servants may be placed in prison, the word of God cannot be kept in the confines of a cell.
- L. Paul was willing to sacrifice for others, that “they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2:10).
- M. Students need to memorize 2:11-13, and also verse 15.

- N. Note the principle of verse 14 . . . we should NOT be “hobby-riders” or the kind of persons who “strain out the gnat, and swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:24). I have run into so many people in my 40 plus years of preaching who will get off on some little insignificant incidental and want to build a “capital case” around it while neglecting the really important lessons that should be emphasized.
- O. Similar in import to verse 14 is verse 16. We should avoid those things which are not profitable to the building up of the body of Christ.
- P. The two men named by Paul in 2:17,18, Hymenaeus and Philetus, have erred concerning the truth, saying the resurrection was already past. Though this was a falsehood, yet some evidently believed it and, in so doing, their faith was destroyed. As unbelievable as it is, a few (led by a preacher named Max King) in the brotherhood today are trying to teach the same thing that those two misguided men did so long ago. It is incredible to me that anyone would listen to that kind of nonsense, much less believe it, but it has in fact happened.
- Q. For the good of the student, I require that you memorize 2:19.
- R. In verses 20,21 Paul teaches that it is the individual’s responsibility to determine what sort of “vessel” he will be; whether of one unto honor or one unto dishonor. Obviously, we should all want to be vessels “meet (worthy, suitable) for the master’s use.”
- S. Students need to memorize verses 22 and 24.
- T. 2:23 needs to be considered with verses 14 and 16.
- U. When people need correcting, preachers must do so humbly and gently so that we might rescue them from “the snare of the devil” (read again 2:24, 25,26).
- V. In 3:1-11 Paul warns of the grievous times that would come and lists about eighteen different things which would characterize those times. While I do not require you to memorize these, I do think you need to be able to name at least half of them if I should ask you to do so on a test. In verse 7 Paul said these people were “ever learning” but seemingly “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Jannes and Jambres (verse 8) are named no where else in the Bible, but some have surmised they were immediate aides of Pharaoh when Moses went to deliver Israel from bondage. Their folly became evident, as also would be the case with those already referred to. Young preachers would do well to emulate the example of Paul verse 11, and 1 Corinthians 11:11.

- W. Without any desire to overburden you, yet with a deep desire for you to learn what you need to learn, I am assigning you the project of memorizing 3:12 through 4:8. You will be glad you did as this will serve you well throughout your preaching life.
- X. Paul knew that his time was short. He wanted to see Timothy one more time and, perhaps thinking his execution would be delayed for awhile, he was anxious that Timothy come to him as soon as possible, and certainly before winter set in, making travel extremely difficult. (Note 4:9,13,21a.)
- Y. Please familiarize yourselves with 4:9-22, for your own personal enrichment. Be assured the Lord will stand by you as He did Paul (verse 17).

### III. TITUS.

- A. This epistle to Titus was written by Paul in about A.D. 65 or 66. Paul had stationed Titus on the island of Crete, and that is where Titus was when the letter was written. Most scholars believe that Paul was probably in Athens or Corinth, or elsewhere in the region of Achaia when the letter was written . . . perhaps on his way to the city of Nicopolis where he planned to spend the winter (3:12).
- B. In his salutation Paul said of himself that he was “in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal” (1:2 ). One does not hope for something he already possesses in the absolute sense. Thus, while we have eternal life in prospect, and can be assured of receiving it, we do not yet in reality possess it. (Note such passages as John 6:40; 1 John 5:11,12; Romans 8:24,25; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:3,4; Revelation 2:7,10b,11: etc.)
- C. According to 1:5 Paul had left Titus in Crete that he might “set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city, as I gave thee charge . . . ” (Cf. Acts 14:23;20:17,28, etc.)
- D. As stated in the study guide for 1 Timothy, I have chosen not to require of you to know all the qualifications of elders given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 as that will be given in another class, but I do feel you should be able to list at least some of them after you have studied these books. And the sooner you learn them the better, because so much of your life will be spent in close association with elders (i.e., bishops/overseers, pastors/shepherds, elders/presbyters).
- E. From reading 1:9-14, we learn that the mouths of gainsayers, deceivers, and such like must be stopped. Who better to stop such as these than gospel preachers and knowledgeable elders? We who preach must be



able, ready, and willing, if needs be, to “reprove them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (verse 13).

- F. Paul taught concerning the importance of what we allow in our minds with these great words. “To the pure all things are pure; but to them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but both their mind and their conscience are defiled” (1:15).
- G. The ones disturbing the church on Crete are graphically described in 1:16. (This sounds very much like several I have encountered along the way!)
- H. In 2:1-9 the apostle gave instruction to Titus to speak the things which befit (or become) the sound doctrine and, thus, to teach the different groups (the aged men, the aged women, the younger women, the younger men, and those who were bondservants) how they ought to conduct their lives.
- I. In 2:10 Paul reveals why it is important that all Christians conduct their lives properly . . . “that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.” To “adorn” means to “dress “ to “help make lovely,” to “enhance,” to “beautify.” We all know that God’s doctrine is beautiful within itself, but as Christians “put on” Christ (Galatians 3:27), and manifest the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23), and live in accordance with His doctrine, they bring out its beauty in a practical way before the eyes of the world, and in that sense they “adorn” it.
- J. Because of its importance I must require that you memorize 2:11-14.
- K. Evangelists (or gospel preachers) speak with authority (2:15) only as they speak the Lord’s word faithfully. We have no authority within ourselves, because Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18 and Ephesians 1:21,22), and in all things He is to have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18). We need to thoroughly understand that! Yet, when we are SURE that we are speaking His truth (John 8:32), and are careful that we speak it “in love” (Ephesians 4:15) we can do so boldly (Acts 4:29), and “with all authority” (2:15), knowing it is His word we preach.
- L. In 3:1,2 Paul gave instruction to Titus what he should teach others. So we should teach. But in teaching others, do we not teach ourselves also? We thus need to learn from reading (and teaching) 3:1,2. Especially verse 2: (1) speak evil of no man; (2) do not be contentious; (3) be gentle; (4) showing meekness/humility toward all men.
- M. Note the deplorable condition that “we also” were once in . . . 3:3.

- N. You need to memorize 3:4-7.
- O. In 3:8 Paul simply encourages Titus to affirm these things concerning which he has written, with confidence, so that all believers might be careful to maintain good works.
- P. What we read in 3:9 coincides in principle with such passages as 1 Timothy 4:7; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:14,16,23 and Titus 1:14. Such as that invariably leads to a factious spirit and the splintering of the church. Thus, Paul's strong instruction in 3:10,11.
- Q. 3:12-15 contains the closing comments of the letter. Verse 14 accentuates the same teaching as does verse 8 . . . the need for Christians to maintain good works.

## **CONCLUSION.**

- A. I feel that if the student will really digest the plain instructions laid down in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, and consider the principles of conduct and preaching involved, he would have the gist of what preaching is all about. This is the reason I have placed a great deal of emphasis upon this part of our study, and why I expect you to be well versed in what we have covered in this outline.
- B. However, the above outline is but a small portion of what you need to know. We will also be studying much of a practical nature that will help acquaint you with the "real world" that you will have to face in your preaching activities. In so doing, I hope to remove any false illusions you may have as to what it is going to be like to be a preacher. I want you to know some of the things you will face, so that you can go into it with your "eyes wide open."

## BIBLICALLY AND PRAGMATICALLY, WHAT IS THE WORK OF A GOSPEL PREACHER IN THE MODERN WORLD?

### I. BIBLICALLY.

- A. The first responsibility of a gospel preacher (or any Christian as far as that is concerned) is to live an exemplary Christian life so as to NEVER cast reflection upon the name of Christ and His Cause! See 1 Timothy 4:12, 16; Acts 20:33-35; 1 Corinthians 9:26,27:13:1-8a; 2 Peter 1:5-11; Philip-pians 1:27; etc.
- B. The primary work of a gospel preacher is to teach and preach the word of God without favor or compromise at every opportunity! “Publicly, and from house to house” (Acts 17:2,3:20:20), in “one on one” situations (Acts 8:27-39), or to a large gathering of people (Acts 21:35-22:22) . . . whenever and wherever the opportunity affords itself. (See Matthew 28:18,19; 1 Timothy 4:6, 11, 13; 2 Timothy 4:1-4; Acts 5:42; 8:4,12; 20:20,26,27; etc.) God’s truth needs to be taught in all its fullness (Acts 20:26,27), plainly and understandably (Nehemiah 8:8), boldly and courageously (Acts 4:29), and in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- C. To accomplish #2 above the preacher must study God’s word so that it may be presented effectively. We will never learn all we need to know, but we should constantly be trying to learn all we can, with the singular desire to handle aright the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). See also 1 Timothy 4:13, 15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; Acts 17:2 ,11; Psalm 1:2; Titus 1:9 (although the reference is to elders it would apply in principle to gospel preachers also); 2:1; 1 Peter 4:11; etc. Remember, the Bible MUST BE our source Book for all our preaching and teaching. While it can be a good thing to read other books for additional insights and broader understanding, still, above all else, we need to know “thee Book” (2 Timothy 3:14-17)! And “thee Book” is what we need to preach and teach!

**NOTE:** May I stress loud and clear that one of the main things that has hurt the church in recent years is that brethren have made “hirelings” out of the men who occupy the pulpits of countless congregations. Instead of allowing them, and encouraging them to be bold and fearless preachers of God’s truth, many brethren have cast them into the role of “mere puppets” whose purpose is to please the congregation and to live up to all the expectations brethren have foisted upon them. In many a modern day congregation, the local preacher has so many administrative responsibilities, incidental assignments, and “pastoral” duties to attend to that he is scarcely more than a shadow of what he should be.

Who is responsible for this pathetic situation? First of all, the brethren who have intimidated preachers and forced them into “their mold” of expectations by holding tightly the purse strings of their very livelihood, and secondly, the preachers themselves who have not had the backbone to be what God wants them to be and who have failed to teach brethren what a true gospel preacher really is supposed to be doing.

In the “real world” of our day and time, in addition to the above, some other responsibilities that are involved and which brethren have come to expect include:

**NOTE:** Some of the following will also be discussed in the sections that follow.

- D.     Bulletins. In most local church situations the brethren want a weekly church bulletin and, usually, the elders want the preacher to be the editor of it. While this is sometimes time consuming and somewhat bothersome, if you look upon it as another way of teaching it can be viewed as a worthwhile project. If the preacher is appointed by the elders to be the editor of the church bulletin then he should indeed be in charge of it. In my judgment, the bulletin should be a good blending of teaching and news of interest to the congregation. We want to take advantage of every vehicle available to us to teach but, from a practical standpoint, the bulletin is also a good place to put news of interest to the congregation.
- E.     Visitation. Through the years, brethren have grown to expect the preacher to do more and more visiting. In fact, as far as many brethren are concerned, it does not matter whether anyone else is doing any visiting or not, but they certainly expect the preacher to do so. Brethren expect the preacher to visit the hospitals regularly, to visit the elderly and shut-ins, to visit newcomers to the community, to visit those who have visited the worship assemblies, and to visit the brethren in general. Obviously, there is only so much one man can do. A man cannot be studying for his class room teaching assignments, preparing sermons, writing the church bulletin, and visiting all at the same time. So, he must be allowed to exercise good judgment in the use of his time. It would be well, whenever a preacher is talking to elders about coming to work with them, to have a clear understanding that he will visit as he has time, as a Christian, but not to the extent it hinders him in his primary work of preaching, and not as “the Pastor,” like denominational preachers fancy themselves and are so called.

Most preachers, as myself, do not mind doing a reasonable amount of visiting as a Christian should do, but I personally resent the pressure to visit imposed by brethren who want to force the preacher into the role of being “the Pastor.” While our brethren, generally, would not call the

preacher “their Pastor,” that is exactly what they want to make out of him in many cases.

- F. Funerals. People are going to die (Hebrews 9:27) and it is only natural to call on the preacher to conduct the service. If you happen to be preaching for a congregation composed largely of elderly people, you will experience a lot of these occasions. And, young folks sometime die also. Also there are the tragic and untimely deaths that happen to both young and old. Death is real and can come at anytime to anybody. Whenever deaths do occur within the congregation, immediate attention on the part of the preacher is required if at all possible. We will deal with how to handle these situations in the material that will follow under “Problems Faced By Young Preachers.”
- G. Weddings. People get married, too. And, again, they turn to the preacher, generally, to perform the ceremony. Involved in these matters are also the pre-marital counseling sessions, the rehearsal, the wedding itself, the reception, etc. As stated above under funerals, we will deal with how to handle these occasions under the section of “Problems.”
- H. Other forms of counseling. In larger congregations, especially in the urban areas, a great deal of time can be spent in counseling. Many people are hurting in this old world, and they often turn to the preacher to help them. Some of these situations can be very involved and complex. While some counselling cannot be avoided I, for one, believe a preacher should be very careful NOT to become overly involved in counseling. It can be time consuming and frustrating. Besides, a preacher can very easily get himself in “over his head” and into a lot of trouble IF he is not extremely careful. I believe most counselling should be diverted to the elders whenever feasible. Again, we will discuss this more fully under “Problems.”
- I. What is generally called a “Vacation Bible School.” In smaller congregations up to about two hundred to two hundred fifty members the elders usually turn to the preacher to direct the “VBS.” He seems to be the most logical one to receive the assignment. The preacher, if called upon, must learn to delegate most of the work responsibilities to others or else this will be another “bog” in which to become “bogged down.”
- J. In addition to the above the preacher sometimes must do some (or a lot of) secretarial work (depending on the local church situation) and, in like manner, some janitorial work, be a goodwill ambassador, coddler of the disgruntled, arbitrator or “fire extinguisher,” young people expert, old people expert, middle-age people expert, organizer, promoter, pastor, deacon, errand boy, general flunky, and jack-of-all-trades.

- K. And of course, he must find time for his family, household and yard chores, taking care of his business, etc.
- L. Believe me it is a full time job being a preacher, and especially in today's world!

# PROBLEMS FACED BY GOSPEL PREACHERS

## PART I – ILLUSIONS

### I. INTRODUCTION.

Note - A few things in this section may be somewhat repetitious, overlapping to some degree with things already said. Even so, there is benefit to be gained by getting some things firmly fixed in our minds, and repetition often assists in accomplishing this.

- A. Too many beginning preachers (young men especially) commence their work grossly misinformed as to what to expect. Someone failed to condition them as to the challenges of reality . . . the kinds of situations which exist in more places than not.
- B. As a result many become disheartened right away. Their “bubble” bursts! Their “bed of roses” illusion of “smooth sailing” church work soon becomes a thorny bed of disappointments and discouragements. A goodly number give up and quit, and others who continue on in the work become bitter and very cynical.
- C. It is my considered judgment that “beginning” preachers need to be plainly informed as to what to expect. Much heartache could be avoided if we will just be honest and forthright in dealing with life as it is.
- D. Let us take a brief look at some of the illusions or misconceptions numerous young preachers have and then see the facts (reality) that exist:
  - 1. Many start out with the illusion that all members of the church are genuine Christians. Yet, sadly and regrettably, this just is not true. While there are those who are really trying to live right, yet the fact is that Satan is having a proverbial heyday in the lives of many professed Christians. Such sins as worldliness, immorality, materialism, covetousness, hatefulness, stubbornness, envy, jealousy, gossiping, murmuring, backbiting, unforgiving spirits, the desire to run things, etc., are often manifested. Numerous brethren have very bad attitude problems.

Older, more experienced preachers have “been there” and have experienced this reality, and have learned the hard way what will be faced. But too often the young preacher, just getting started, is naive and idealistic, and is in for a rude awakening.

Believe me, I could write a book out of my own reservoir of personal experiences on the un-Christian attitudes and un-Christian conduct on the part of brethren I have encountered along the way. Many of those experiences shook me to the core but, through the grace of God and an encouraging wife and numerous faithful Christians who encouraged me, I have managed to weather the storms. But on three or four occasions, I became so discouraged that I came close to throwing in the proverbial towel. I am thankful to God I did not quit!

I am not relating all this to you to for any reason other than to help you! I just want to condition you for what I know you will face in the work of preaching in this day and time.

2. Many young preachers enter local church preaching thinking that the Lord's church is surely united and working together in harmony and love, and that surely no trouble is to be found. Thank God there are a goodly number of congregations which do function smoothly for the most part, but it is a fact that many do not! The beginning preacher needs to be prepared by being plainly taught that where there are people involved there generally will be problems of some kind or another. That is just life. That is just the way that it is, although we all wish it was not so.

It is a mistaken concept to imagine that brethren are always going to see eye to eye on everything, and that they will always stand together for what is right and true. That is not reality, nine times out of ten! Many congregations are in one of three stages: (a) they have just gotten over some trouble; (b) they are in the midst of some trouble; or (c) they are just about to get into some trouble.

Consider the young preacher who enters his first work under the false illusion that everything is peaches and cream but all of a sudden he realizes he is in the midst of a bonafide mess! Oh, what to do? "Why did someone not warn me about things like this?" he asks himself. Such a rude awakening can be the beginning of many sleepless nights and possibly ulcers for many a young man.

I know what I am talking about! I was idealistic. When I first started preaching in June of 1954 I thought all members of the church surely were "on fire" for Christ as I was, and all wanted to do what was right as I did. But it was not that way at all! My first three works would have sunk most young preachers. I say that with no desire to boast, but just being honest. They nearly sank me and I



believe with all my heart that had it not been for God's providential hand they would have.

3. Many young preachers enter local work under the illusion that if a man is an elder in the church he is near to being perfect. The young preacher has been taught, rightfully so, that he should love and respect the elders (shepherds/ pastors, bishops/overseers, elders/ presbyters) of the church. He has gained the impression that surely men who are elders will always do what is right, and lead the church forward for Christ in a dynamic way. Thank God for elders who are like that but, tragically, they are few and far between. The ones who are like that should be counted "worthy of double honor" (1 Timothy 5:17). May their tribe increase because they are desperately needed now throughout the brotherhood. One of the most pressing problems the church faces today is a lack of qualified, sincere, fervent in spirit, competent, dynamic leadership. The fact is that many men who are somehow appointed as elders should never have been appointed. They are "elders" in name only and bare little if any resemblance whatsoever to being true "shepherds" of the flock, who love the Lord and His church, and feel heavily the burden of responsibility of tending the flock and watching in behalf of the souls under their oversight as such who will give an account to God. (Read 1 Peter 5:1-3 and Hebrews 13:17.)

It is impossible to respect some men who are called "elders" because their lives and attitudes will not allow you to conscientiously do it. Imagine the young preacher's dismay when he discovers himself in a local church situation and he realizes how unqualified and incompetent the elders are under whose oversight he is working! What if one or more of them are like Diotrephes in 3 John? The young man could very easily become brow beaten and so discouraged he would just fold his tent and quit. (And many have done just that!) No one ever told him that there would be men in the eldership who should not be there. What to do about it? How to cope? The illusion bubble bursts!

4. Another illusion a lot of beginning preachers have is that everybody is eagerly awaiting them to come preach the gospel to them. That is just not true. Most people have little interest in spiritual matters. Young preachers should be conditioned to the fact that many, many people are hardened and indifferent to the gospel. Oh, sure, there are those who will listen and obey, and we all seek to find them as Jesus taught us to do (Matthew 10:11-14). The Lord told Paul to preach on because "I have much people in this city," and so

Paul stayed in Corinth a year and a half (Acts 18:9-11). In the process, we invite (call through the gospel - 2 Thessalonians 2:14) people to “come to the feast.” Yet while many are called, few are chosen (read Matthew 22:1-14).

Another point you need to consider at this juncture. Many young preachers expect people to change too rapidly. A very few will but most people will not. In fact, many people do not plan to change at all! It is going to take hard work and persistence . . . the going out into the “highways and hedges, and constrain(ing) them to come in” approach to convert very many (Luke 14:23). Thus, young preachers need to be encouraged to intensify their love for the Lord and lost souls, and try all the harder, but at least they should know the reality that awaits them.

5. Closely related to the above misconception is this: the idea many young preachers have that they must not only preach the gospel, but try to see to it that everybody lives by it. To approach your preaching life that way is to introduce disappointments and frustrations into your life by the buckets full!

All of us must realize that our obligation is to faithfully proclaim God’s truth while living right ourselves, and leave the rest to those who hear to God. Remember, you are supposed to tell them *of* God, not *be* God. None of us will ever be able to get all who hear us to live right all at the same time. Just about the time you get some doing right, others will “go out the back door.”

Thus, the young preacher needs to be drilled in this simple axiom: “do the very best you can do in the light of God’s word and then do not worry about the outcome.” How many gray hairs could be averted if every preacher could learn this principle?

6. Most young preachers begin their local preaching life thinking that preaching is their main responsibility (which it is, biblically!) only to discover that their brethren expect them to be some sort of a superman in being not only a good preacher but demonstrating expertise, and expending time and energy in about every other area imaginable! No matter how hard he tries, he soon finds he cannot live up to the expectations of all the brethren! All of these expectations of the brethren frustrate him to no small degree. He learns that there is no way he can “hit a home run” (which brethren expect!) every time he steps into the pulpit and yet do all the other things expected of him. He must have time for study and preparation, but many brethren, and even elders, do not realize this.

7. Numerous young preachers, upon graduating from a Christian College or a Preachers' Training School, seem to have the illusion that they "have arrived" and know all the answers. It would be to your own good to realize, in all humility, that the real learning process has just begun. Egotism is definitely detrimental to any preacher, and especially to a young preacher. The Bible teaches humility repeatedly (cf. Luke 14:11; 1 Peter 5:5,6; James 4:10; etc.).

While we, as preachers, should have strong convictions and be confident, assured, and bold in our preaching of the truth, yet we must realize that the learning process continues throughout a lifetime. We therefore should not come across as "know it alls."

8. Many young preachers begin their local preaching life oblivious to the "goldfish bowl" existence to which they and their families are oftentimes subjected. The preacher and his family live in a "glass house," especially in smaller communities, and some brethren will make a point in keeping up with all you do - or do not do!

Brethren have consciously or subconsciously erected a "mystical pedestal" in many places, atop which they place the preacher, and the young preacher finds himself holding on for dear life. Everything the preacher and his family do is scrutinized and often criticized, and some brethren are masters of the art! Perhaps, without even realizing it, there is a double standard for the preacher, fashioned by the brethren over a long period of time until now it is pretty well "set in concrete." This type of situation can take a greater toll on the wife and the "preacher's kids" than on himself. "It ought not to be like that," we say and, thankfully, it is not everywhere, but it is in some places. And it is better to be informed of it now than to learn it the hard way later.

9. Most young preachers enter their beginning works expecting significant growth but are quickly and greatly discouraged to encounter so much indifference, lukewarmness, apathy, and complacency! Running head on into this can deflate any preacher and rob him of that spark he started out with. Believe me, I have had enough cold water thrown on me through the years to form several huge icicles!

## **II. CONCLUDING REMARKS.**

There are, no doubt, other mistaken ideas or fanciful illusions young preachers often have in mind when they commence their lives as proclaimers of the word of

God, but the above are at least some of the main ones. It is the conviction of this writer that the Cause of Christ would be far better served by two things:

- A. Inform young preachers in a frank and candid way what to expect. They need to be encouraged to face all the challenges and adversities they will encounter with a singular aim to overcome, to the glory of God and to the salvation of their own souls. The young preacher needs to have it indelibly stamped on his mind the need to have the faith of Abraham, the courage of Daniel, the love of John, and the devotion and commitment of Paul. The young preacher MUST count the cost (Luke 14:26-33), and make a resolute determination to “keep on keeping on” in spite of all the discouragements and disappointments he will meet. It would be well for every young preacher to treasure in his heart such statements of Paul as the following: Galatians 2:20; 6:14; Philippians 1:21; 3:7-11; 4:4-7, 11-13, 19, 20; Acts 20:24; 21:13.
- B. Every congregation needs to be taught from the Bible regarding the preacher and his work. They should be taught in a practical way how to work with a preacher, and how to treat him right and fair as the “golden rule” enjoins upon us all (Matthew 7:12) in our relations one with the other. Members of the church need to realize that the preacher and his family are just human beings, no more and no less. He is not perfect, but neither is anyone else. Brethren should not expect from a preacher and his family that which is unreasonable. They should be more understanding of him and his work and less inclined to criticize. Especially should the elders be patient and understanding in working with a young preacher, and gently help mold him and aid him in development. Mutual respect and love between a preacher and the elders is essential, because they must work together as a team in order for the Cause to prosper.

## **PROBLEMS FACED BY GOSPEL PREACHERS**

### **PART II – CHALLENGES OF A PERSONAL NATURE**

#### **INTRODUCTION.**

Note - Some of the problems listed below will perhaps overlap to a degree because they deal with matters that are interrelated.

##### **A. The preacher's own spiritual development.**

A preacher is a human being. Therefore, he, just like anyone else stands in need of a healthy spiritual diet and plenty of "spiritual exercise." His "spiritual food" should be readily apparent: Psalms 1:2; 119:105; Matthew 4:4; Acts 20:32; 1 Peter 2:2; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17; etc. And he needs to make a personal application of what he learns, and use that knowledge daily. Note the principles of Hebrews 5:11-14.

As a preacher, and especially a young one, it is obvious that he will need much spiritual strengthening. The trials, tribulations, and temptations he will most likely encounter during the first four or five years of his preaching life can either make him or break him. He will need to mature in Christ rapidly in order to overcome. Remember, in His letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord made it clear that Christians must overcome in order to eventually receive the eternal blessings God has in mind for those who prove themselves faithful.

Thus, the young preacher needs to study the Bible regularly and diligently in order to be strengthened and fortified for what he will experience. He must then couple with his Bible study frequent and sincere prayer to God for wisdom and understanding (cf. 1 Samuel 3:9a and James 1:5,6; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 4:2; etc.). Fervent prayer to God will bring forth Heaven's blessings that will work to good (cf. James 5:16b). God wants to help us: Hebrews 4:14-16; Romans 8:26-28,31-39.

To be an effective gospel preacher, and a fruitful servant for the Lord, a preacher's character must be unimpeachable! To ensure that such should be, Bible study, prayer, and a deep-seated resolve to live as God would have him live is the answer! Nothing short of that will do. What a tragedy it is that many have defaulted along the way by not being the kind of men they should be. The Cause of Christ has been desperately hurt by preachers who have affairs, who will not pay their debts or who enjoy telling risque stories, etc. etc. etc. Remember, young preachers, regardless of how well you might be able to deliver a sermon, if you do not really

try to live what you preach and teach then your oratory sounds vain, and is vain! Do not be a hypocrite! Most people feel very much like that which Edgar A. Guest expressed in poetic fashion:

I had rather see a sermon, than hear one any day,  
I'd rather one walk with me than merely tell the way;  
For the eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,  
Fine counsel can be confusing, but example is always clear.  
And the best of all the preachers are men who live their creeds,  
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs!

I can soon learn how to do it if you'll let me see it done . . .  
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.  
The sermons you deliver may be very wise and true,  
But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do.  
'Cause I may misunderstand you and the high advice you give,  
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live!  
Though an able preacher charm me with his eloquence,  
I say . . . I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one, any day!

B. The preacher's family.

It would be impossible to over-emphasize the need for the young preacher to have a dedicated Christian wife. God knew that it was not best that the man should be alone (Genesis 2:18) and so He made a help meet (i.e., one that was suitable to be his companion) for him. A good preacher's wife can be of inestimable value to a preacher in his work. But on the other hand, one who is not what she needs to be is like a great weight hung about his neck.

In the present-day situations of most local church works, very few single men "fit in" to what brethren are looking for. Now you may immediately object to that on the basis that Paul was not married, or that the Bible does not require preachers to be married, etc., and you would be right. But still, I know from experience that most elderships in these times want a preacher who is married. It may not be exactly fair or right that they should feel that way but it is, nonetheless, a fact. I am sure there are exceptions to this and I have known single preachers who have done quite well . . . but across the board, if you are interested in preaching for a local congregation, you will probably be more readily accepted if you are married. If on the other hand, you are going to devote your life to mission work I think it would be less a factor. In fact, in that case, you might possibly even be better off in that kind of work if you are single, depending on where you go and the nature of your undertakings.

But since having a wife is quite important to a man in being a local preacher, it is immensely important that he have the right type of wife. It is imperative that a preacher have a wife who is a sincere and genuine Christian; one who loves the Lord, the church, the truth, and the souls of the lost. One who is willing to sacrifice for the Cause of Christ, and be willing to go with her husband wherever the providence of God may lead them. From the practical side she needs to be kind and gentle, modest in dress and demeanor, clean and neat, friendly and hospitable, understanding and patient. It would also help if she were one with a good personality, and is likeable. She also needs to have a good working knowledge of the Bible and be able and willing to teach Bible classes for children and/or ladies. These attributes will aid her husband immeasurably in the local work.

I have known numerous preachers who have been greatly handicapped in their work because they were married to the wrong kind of wives. Several have quit preaching because their wives either kept them in trouble with various ones in the congregation, or were just not interested in the work and gave them no help or encouragement. How sad!

Another matter of vital consequence we should talk about concerning a preacher and his family is time – time for the family! This is oftentimes a BIG problem for the preacher as there are so many demands made on his time in accomplishing the “church work” that he scarcely has any left over for his family. But after 40 plus years of preaching, I have come to this conclusion: A PREACHER MUST NOT NEGLECT HIS FAMILY! It is not fair to them or to you, and I am convinced that God does not want us to do so. It would be well to have this clearly understood with the elders before accepting a work; that while you will do the best you can with the church work, you MUST have time with your family. While saving others too many preachers have lost members of their own families! A few years back while conversing with an older, well known preacher friend of mine who had three grown sons, I asked him about his family. Tears welled up in his eyes and, with quivering lips, he said, “Maxie, I’ve lost all three of my boys.” He meant by that the sons were no longer faithful Christians. How tragic.

C. The preacher’s finances.

There was a time when the pay for the preacher was pitifully low. I remember my Dad telling about preaching two or three week long meetings and maybe getting something like five dollars, a ham, three dozen eggs, garden vegetables, and ten gallons of gasoline. Even in my own reservoir of experience I can recall pitiful salaries compared to other endeavors. For an example, I started out in my first work in Nebraska at

seventy-five dollars a week, and I had to pay all my utilities, all my Social Security, etc. My second work was for ninety dollars a week and part of the utilities. There were no benefits in addition to the salary, whatsoever, at either place! My third work was not much better.

However, through the years the pay has increased wonderfully, and we should all be thankful for that. A goodly number of congregations now pay at least half of the preacher's Social Security and some pay either all, or at least part of, his health insurance. But even so, in comparison with other professions, preaching is still on the bottom side of the scale as far as salary and benefits. Most gospel preachers do not make anything near what the average professional brother in the congregation makes. And brethren seem to think that is the way it is supposed to be! He may have comparable education (or even better), be as able (or more so), have years and years of experience, etc., but still the prevailing thinking seems to be that the preacher not make anymore money than the average member makes. This is ridiculous thinking! Would a congregation want "just the average John Doe member of the congregation" to be their preacher? Certainly not! Then why pay him as if he were the "average?"

Perhaps the biggest deficiency is that preachers for the Lord's church generally have no retirement benefits given them through the years except most congregations now pay half of his Social Security. A very few congregations have set up some kind of a retirement fund, but generally it is grossly inadequate. Most congregations, however, have done nothing for the preacher as pertaining to a retirement fund for his declining years. Whatever is saved must be saved by the preacher! And in the case of so many of us, it was way too late in life before we were making enough to start any kind of savings so that we are in pretty sad financial shape for the future. My advice to young preachers is start some kind of a saving investment NOW regardless of how small an amount it might be, and keep adding to it on a regular basis. At a young age when you start, the investment will have time to grow significantly by the time you really need it. In my case, and others I know, it is too late to build very much, and thus the prospects for our declining years, financially, look very marginal.

But, whatever you do in regard to finances, do not over extend yourself! There is nothing that can get you down any more so than to get yourself in a very tight situation financially. It is depressing. Also it can cause serious strain on your marriage and distract from your work for the Lord. So, do not spend more than you make!

Be careful to formulate and adhere to a reasonable and sound budget. Do not commit yourself financially for more than you are capable of paying. Determine to pay all your debts promptly. If you get yourself in



debt way above your head you are headed for trouble of one kind or another, and you will hurt yourself and the cause of Christ. Remember, learn now to live within your income, and continue to do so throughout life. A word to the wise is sufficient.

The old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is certainly true in this case. In a humble but firm manner, when negotiating with elders concerning your coming to work with a local church, set forth your needs for adequate financial support to begin with. A clear understanding with the elders, perhaps even in writing, is a must! Too often, at least in times past, elders would ask a prospective preacher, “What can you come for?” And the preacher, almost sheepishly, and not wanting to be materialistic, would reply, “Whatever you think, brethren.” Well, what the brethren think is generally considerably lower than what it should be! It is far better to say, “Brethren, here is what I need, and this is what it will take in order for me to be able to come here.” The Bible teaches plainly that “they that proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). In this modern era elders should be in tune with the times enough to realize that a man that is worth having as the local preacher is worth providing for in a very adequate way, both now and for the future. Include in the agreement that there will be reasonable increases made in salary from year to year. I never did this, and raises did not come very often. Whereas if there had been a clear understanding . . . ? Learn from my mistake in this regard.

The main thing to remember is seek first the Lord’s kingdom. Put Him first in your life and He will provide for your needs somehow (read Matthew 6:25-33). God will take care of His faithful ones! Essentially, this is the premise that I have operated under all my preaching life, and though not rich in material things (and we should not want to be: Luke 12:15-21; 1 Timothy 6:7-10; etc.), yet God has always providentially provided for all our needs – not wants, but needs.

D. The preacher’s leisure, or time for recreation.

Certainly everyone needs some diversion from routine activity. The preacher is no exception. Any activity that is wholesome, honorable, and would not damage his influence should be considered fine for recreation.

Some fellows may enjoy playing golf, while others might prefer going fishing, or hunting. Some might prefer playing tennis, or bowling, or whatever. I know some who enjoy gardening, yard work, or woodworking as recreation. Regardless of what it might be, I do think it is good that every preacher have some kind of diversion he enjoys whereby he can get his mind off his work for at least a little bit each week.

As in all things caution must be exercised. Do not go overboard on matters of recreation. It would be easy, as an example, to become obsessed with playing golf to the point it would hurt your work for the Lord. Remember, as a preacher of the gospel, that preaching is your first priority. Your times of recreation are strictly secondary! Do not allow leisure activities to take precedent over His work. All I am saying is this - take some time each week for recreation, but be reasonable about the time you allot to it.

E. The preacher's "drive" (or you might call it "ambition") to excel.

Every Christian, and especially every preacher it seems to me, needs to be very careful as to motivation. What are we striving to accomplish? What do we wish to attain? Is it to truly be a servant of the Lord and do all the good you can possibly do in this life, or is it to preach for a "big, prestigious" congregation, and have acclaim?

This is a far greater problem with preachers than many would like to admit! It is only human and natural to want the acceptance of our peers and others we know. And there seems to be an impelling urge in most of us to prove ourselves to our associates, friends, and family. But it goes way beyond that with a goodly number who preach . . . the matter of ego! Though few would admit it, Satan sets a trap for many preachers in fanning the fire in their own hearts to become big wheels in the brotherhood. I have known a few preachers with egos bigger than the Good Year blimp! But certainly not all have big egos, and they are not out to make a name for themselves. But all do have feelings, and feelings can be easily damaged, sometimes almost beyond repair.

Let me illustrate: if a preacher, and especially one just starting out, faces a really problematic situation right away, and feels it would be best for himself, his family, and the Lord's Cause to move on, this can be extremely damaging to his own sense of self-esteem and/or self-worth. In such situations, Satan lurks to trap him. The preacher, experiencing this hurtful episode in his life, takes note of other preachers of his acquaintance who seem to be faring just fine in their works. Several things can result IF he is not very careful to place his trust in the Lord (read Proverbs 3:5,6, and Romans 8:28): (1) jealousy, envy, and resentment toward his fellow-preachers who are faring fine and who may not seem to understand his plight; (2) bitterness in his own heart toward the brethren causing the problem, and bitterness toward those who fail to rally to his support, and bitterness toward church work in general; (3) an erosion of his convictions - the beginning of developing a "go along to get along" attitude, so that in his next local work he will not again experience the hurt, and the humiliation and shame of getting fired and having to make a move.

Preachers must realize the human inclination toward vanity involved in this whole spectrum, and not allow Satan to gain the victory. Preachers must *never* lose sight of the one whom they serve! Our singular desire should be to please our Lord! (Read carefully Galatians 1:10; Hebrews 12:28 - remember the instruction Paul gave to Christians who were bondservants in the first century, and let the principle of his instruction apply to yourself as you endeavor to serve the Lord: Ephesians 6:6.) Our fidelity to Christ *must* supersede our natural desire for either acceptance or accolades from other human beings. An earthly reputation of success is futile and worthless if we have failed to be totally faithful to our Lord!

Thus, the only aspect of this “reputation” consideration that should concern us is this . . . to be fully and completely assured in our own hearts that we have really, sincerely tried in a spirit of humility and love, to stand for the truth and that which is right! If this be true with you and me, regardless of what things might appear to be to others, or our apparent reversals in given situations, be assured that God knows, cares, and understands (cf. Matthew 5: 10-12; 1 Peter 3:12-17; 5:7; James 1:2-12; etc.).

Over the long haul you will become known among most brethren and most of your fellow-preachers for what you really are, and for whether or not you stand for right and truth. Even if you should run into some difficult and discouraging situations, do not let that get you down. Your true friends and loyal brethren will understand, and it does not matter what enemies or critics might think. And remember, we will all have our enemies, critics and those who do not like us. Remember what the Lord went through for us (Romans 5:6-8; Galatians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; etc.), and what early Christians such as the apostle Paul suffered in preaching the gospel (2 Corinthians 11: 24-27).

One thing needs to be said right here. Sometimes the preacher is the problem in “church trouble” and “preacher firings.” I have known some who brought problems, and getting fired, upon themselves. “They got what they asked for” as the old saying goes. But at least 75% of the time, or more, I believe the preacher is the victim of something terribly wrong within the congregation where he is laboring if he gets fired.

Self-evaluation before problematic situations arise are always in order as a precautionary measure. Every preacher needs to objectively look at his life (2 Corinthians 13:5), and ask God to search his heart (Psalms 139:23, 24), that indeed he might walk in the way everlasting. The preacher should never be the causative factor in church trouble. Most generally I do not believe he is. Therefore, I do not think it is fair for brethren to conclude that just because a preacher “has problems” in a certain “local

work” that he is “the problem.” Most of our brethren recognize that some of the finest preachers have been severely tested through heart-rending situations that were NOT of their own making.

Closely associated with this is the “competitive spirit” we sometimes observe between preachers. Too many times a preacher will view others’ preachers as a threat to himself, and sees himself being in competition with them. It becomes a race to see who can outdo the other. Somehow we all need to work toward putting a stop to the “professional concept” of preachers vying with other preachers for the “biggest” pulpit, etc. We should see ourselves as fellow servants of the Lord – all on the same team, working together for the ongoing of His Cause, and to His glory (read Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 1:31; Galatians 6:14, etc.).

Concluding thoughts on this problem of a preacher’s vain ambition to climb some mythical ladder of acclaim, every preacher should read and reread Matthew 20: 20-28 and learn the lesson Jesus taught. The drive for power, prestige, and position can destroy spirituality like a cancer destroys the body. Do not let the Devil defeat you from within your own heart!

F. The preacher’s problem of overcoming discouragement.

Of all the weapons Satan employs to try to “sink us,” I believe discouragement is one of the most potent in his arsenal. It has defeated many men who started out to preach with great zeal. Men once inflated with enthusiasm and fervor in starting out have been so soon deflated by Satan’s sharpest “puncture tool” known to us all as discouragement!

A preacher may find himself in what seems to be a hopeless situation . . . maybe no one really seems to care, except himself, as he encounters so much indifference, apathy, and complacency. Or maybe there is one of those “bad situations” where it looks to the preacher like wrong is winning out over right and, in spite of all his efforts, matters do not appear to be getting any better. In such cases, the devil has used the preacher’s own brethren to bring him to a point of despondency. Or some crazy, mixed-up, bizarre happening transpires.

This is one area I know whereof I speak, believe me. My first three works were discouraging enough to “sink a battleship.”

1. Immediately upon graduating from ACC (ACU now), my wife and I journeyed some seven hundred miles northward into a north-central state where we had never been before to work with a small band of Christians who had invited us. The picture they had

painted in letters and phone calls was far from what we found to be fact. First of all, they had promised us a new house to live in upon our arrival, but in actuality we were placed in an old, antiquated, extremely large house with very high ceilings that would give anyone the “creeps.” Also, instead of finding a “rosy” situation existing within the ranks of the church as had been indicated, we found dissension. And two or three “personalities” like you can not believe!

We had not been there three weeks until we experienced the beginning of what proved to be an unbelievable and devastating experience. One of the elders and his wife had a grown daughter (about nineteen or twenty years old at the time) who was planning to be married soon. The bridal shower the church ladies always gave on such occasions had already taken place before we had moved up there. I knew NOTHING about the particulars of the romance, the wedding plans, or anything. As unbelievable as it is, here is what happened: on a Friday the mother and daughter came by our house, asking me to perform the wedding ceremony which was scheduled for the next Thursday night (six days away). They told me of the young man. She had known him for only two weeks before he had been sent to Korea with the military. He had been in Korea for two years, during which time they had carried on frequent correspondence, and had made plans through their letters to be married immediately upon his return. Except for the two weeks of getting acquainted before he went to Korea, their “romance” was strictly one of correspondence. (He was not a member of the church, by the way.) He was due to arrive in San Diego on Tuesday, then fly to the Midwest on Wednesday, and the wedding would be Thursday night. Remember, she had not seen him in two years, and had only known him two weeks before he went overseas. I felt it was quite appropriate to inquire of the young lady, “Are you sure?” as I explained that marriage is for life, etc. At the time she nodded her head in the affirmative. Though I had serious misgivings yet, being young, totally inexperienced, and just starting out and anxious to “fit in,” I (reluctantly) agreed to perform the ceremony, which was to be the second one for me.

Well, that Sunday morning, there was another young man who visited the church assembly. He himself had just gotten out of the military and had come there to visit another family in the church. He was introduced to this young lady and I saw them conversing with one another, but thought nothing about it. Boy, was I in for a surprise or what?! The very next morning (Monday) about 8:45 someone knocked on our door. Upon opening the door, I was

surprised to see “Bob” (the brand new personality on the scene . . . of just one day) and “Jolene” (the young lady to be married to “Joe” on Thursday night) standing there. Having no idea why they were together, or why they had come by to see us, I invited them in nonetheless. She said to Fran and me that what she had to say would come as a shock to us. (Was that ever the understatement of the decade!) She said, “Brother Boren, ‘Bob’ and I want to get married today!” I could not believe what I had heard her say! Fran and I were aghast . . . we were totally dumbfounded! I said, “‘Jolene,’ what in the world are you talking about? You are supposed to be married to ‘Joe’ this Thursday night!” She then explained to me that when I asked her if she was sure on Friday that she knew immediately deep within her heart that she was not . . . that she did not really love “Joe” and that she did NOT want to go through with the impending marriage to him. And that when she met “Bob” on Sunday morning, it was “true love” at first sight between them, and they had spent all day Sunday together and into the early morning hours of Monday, talking, and they just felt the best thing to do was to go right ahead “NOW” and get married, so as not to make matters worse when “Joe” was to arrive on Wednesday. Fran and I were absolutely speechless!

I finally managed to ask, “Have you told your parents?” To which she replied, “Brother Boren, you don’t know my mother. She will absolutely go into a rage!” (I was to learn that she knew what she was talking about in this regard but, at that point in time, I had no earthly idea how accurate her assessment was!) I said, “Regardless, ‘Jolene,’ you have to tell your parents.” She and the young man left to do what I had told her was necessary. About an hour later, as Fran and I still were in a state of shock, our phone rang. It was her father (one of the elders) telling us to come to their house immediately. When Fran and I arrived “Bob” and “Jolene” were sitting on a couch crying, the father was sitting in a chair with his head bowed low, cradled in his hands. “Lena” (the mother) was standing in mid-floor. She was absolutely seething with anger like nothing I have ever seen before! She pointed to another couch and screamed at us to “sit down!” For the next forty-five minutes she cursed me up one side and down the other! It was an INCREDIBLE experience! I was twenty-two years of age and Fran was not quite twenty. We had our oldest son, Danny, who, at the time, was about three months old, with us. “Lena” placed all the blame for this whole unbelievable turn of events on me, saying that if I had not asked “Jolene” if she was sure, this would never have happened. She called me every thing she could think of and, believe me, the foulest-mouth sailor had nothing on her. After she

finally ran out of breath, I somehow managed to suggest that we all pray. Upon hearing this suggestion, "Lena" stomped out of the room, cursing as she left, and slammed the door. I managed somehow to word a short prayer, though Fran and I both were crying by that time. "Bob" and "Jolene" never stopped crying through the whole mess, and her father never lifted his head up and never said a word. So, after the prayer, Fran and I (with Danny) left for our big barn of a house.

Believe it or not, the mother went into her daughter's room, got all her things, and threw them off the front porch into the yard. "Bob" and "Jolene" loaded as much as they could into his car and drove away and got married. I never saw them again after that, though I heard from various ones that it all worked out with them. But believe it or not, some thirty-four years later I went to a congregation to preach in a gospel meeting, and who came and sat down beside me to be the song leader for the meeting than that very same young man who had married "Jolene" thirty-four years earlier!? Can you imagine my surprise!? Naturally I inquired as to how they were doing, etc.? In a very brief way, as we only had a few minutes before the service was to begin, he told me that only a year earlier "Jolene" had left him for another man. But for many years they had experienced a happy marriage, had three or four children, etc.

As for "Joe", he was bound to have had a rude awakening upon his arrival in San Diego and made that initial call to his bride-to-be who had just eloped with another man, though I cannot speak from first hand knowledge as no one ever told me how that came out. I never met "Joe." All I know is the marriage set for that Thursday night never took place, and the whole thing was "hush-hush" within the little congregation. The mother never spoke to me again, and the father scarcely. Talk about being discouraged! I was three weeks into my first work, fresh out of school, far removed from family and friends, and this "stranger than fiction" thing happened. Even today, whenever the story is related, I can sense that most people are quite skeptical about the story . . . but it really did happen, I can assure you.

Some three months later Fran and I (including Danny, naturally) were invited over to the home of a couple, named Troy and Alene, for the evening meal. They had a son named Billy who was thirteen years of age when the story that follows happened. (A few members of the church, in whispered words, had warned me of Troy's temper but I had never seen it, and being young and naive, I

had largely discounted the warnings. But I learned what they meant!) I shall never forget the setting. It had come a big snow the night before and throughout the day of the night we went to their house for supper. Alene was a good cook and the aroma of fried chicken and all the trimmings made our mouths water as we entered their home. But Alene was not quite ready for us to eat as she was doing last minute preparations. Fran, carrying Danny in her arms, went on into the kitchen and I seated myself next to Billy on the couch. Troy was about ten feet away across the room. TV was relatively new to us in those days (1955), but they had a set and there was a "Western" on. It was about time for the "good guy" to shoot it out with the "bad guy." When Alene called, "Supper's ready, come and get it," Troy told Billy to turn off the TV. Like any little thirteen year old boy would do he said, "Wait just a minute, Daddy."

Whereupon Troy came across the floor like a flash, grabbed Billy by the shirt with his left hand, and in a maddened craze commenced hitting Billy up beside the head with his right hand fist! Billy started screaming for his mother's help! It all happened so quick I did not have time to think. My natural instinct caused me to reach up and grab Troy's right arm to keep him from hitting the kid any more. Troy was a powerful man and when I grabbed his arm, he literally threw me across the room and I hit the wall and fell to the floor. But my intervention did allow Billy to break away and run into the kitchen. But just like a panther Troy was upon him again, beating the "daylights" out of him. I do not know how I managed to get up off the floor, or how I mustered the courage, but I ran into the kitchen and grabbed Troy the second time. Billy broke free when I did, and ran out into the night. Troy lifted me about three feet off the floor and slammed me down in the chair that was at the head of the table, and with his fist doubled up and coiled to strike, cursed me and told me if I dared move, he would stomp me through the floor and bury me right there! Alene was frantic . . . crying, and begging Troy to stop. Fran was crying too, having backed into a kitchen corner with Danny for safety. Frankly, I was too scared to be crying at that point!

After Troy seated me as he did, cursed me and threatened me, Alene took Fran by the arm and seated her at the table and she, too, sat down. Troy was still standing ominously by me, trembling with anger, but at least had ceased his tirade. Of all things, Alene called on me to lead in prayer! I could scarcely even talk, and the only thing I can remember getting out in the prayer was, "Dear God, please forgive us for this awful scene." I had no more said, "Amen"



until Troy resumed his tirade of cursing and further threats. I managed to say to Fran, "Let's go, honey." With him walking beside me threatening to stomp me through the ground, we went into the living room to get our coats and galoshes on. I was so befuddled that I put my left galosh on my right foot, and the right one on my left foot. Troy followed us all the way to the car threatening to bury me if I ever again interfered with his disciplining Billy again. Fran and I were broken hearted and we went back to our house barn, cold, trembling, and hungry. So far from familiar faces and places, loved ones and friends. Talk about being discouraged! When the three elders (including "Lena's" husband) were later informed about what happened, they quickly excused Troy saying, "That's just the way he was raised," and suggested I should not have intervened in the first place. Huh!? What should I have done? Sit there and let Troy beat the poor kid to death?

2. We were so disheartened and ready to get back to Texas that I made the mistake of accepting the first work that was offered to me. Although I did not have the truly outlandish things happen to me in my second work that had happened in the first one, yet the day to day nitpicking, etc. was so discouraging. One of the elders majored in argumentation. He loved to "gig" me and try to rile me. Almost every week he would come by my office on Monday morning, wanting to pick a fight with me over some obscure passage of Scripture, or some far-fetched pet idea he had. He was such an abrasive personality that he just grated on my nerves. His first name was Carl and it got to where I dreaded it when I would hear him walking down the hallway to my office because I knew what he had to say would be agitating and designed for disputation. He never had a good word to say, or anything positive. He was an expert in straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel!

Another one of the elders was a "horse trader" in town, with a reputation for misrepresentation, and/or outright cheating - anything for a dollar! Also, he was completely devoid of spirituality. During my preaching he was always seated on the second row with his knee propped up on the pew in front of him, and with a match stick in his mouth that he would chew till it was fan-shaped. In that position he would sit there throughout my sermon, working that match stick around in his mouth, looking all around as if he were bored to tears. He had an obsession with the local swimming pool and "monitored" it often, being observed many times throughout the summer sitting in his car right outside the fence that was around the pool. Time and again he would bring up the swimming pool in elders' meetings and describe in detail the girls bathing suits, and

what he had seen. His descriptions were so vulgar that it was embarrassing.

The spiritual atmosphere there was stifling, as they majored in minors 9/10ths of the time. It was so discouraging!

3. But again, I made a colossal mistake by accepting the first job offer that came along. I had gone from the frying pan into the fire, but this time I went into the fiery furnace! We moved to Oklahoma, and I encountered a man who made Diotrephes pale in comparison! He pretty well “owned the church” there, and totally dominated it. In fact, even the townspeople referred to the church in that town as “\_\_\_\_\_’s church.”

One time as I taught a class on Acts 6, I simply said that there were two schools of thought as to the meaning of verse 15, where Luke records that the council saw Stephen’s “face as it had been the face of an angel” (ASV). I said, “There are a few who think there was some sort of divine manifestation that caused Luke to record that, but most think that it was because of the sublime character of Stephen, and his wonderful Christian deportment, etc.” Then I said, “Of the two possibilities, I lean toward the latter as being more likely.” Whereupon this “brother Diotrephes” lost his temper and insisted that “Stephen had a halo over his head” and that is why Luke wrote what he did! I tried to calm him down and reason with him by replying, “Perhaps there was some sort of miraculous manifestation, but the text doesn’t say so . . . we would have to assume that there was.” He became angrier and he caused a terrible scene.

This same elder always counted the number present during the Lord’s supper. Those who waited on the table knew to “look him up” and give him the emblems where ever he happened to be. Well, one Sunday morning they somehow failed to deliver the bread to him, and started to return to the front of the auditorium. He was still counting but all of a sudden, noticing they had passed him by, he starts following them down the aisle, snapping his finger, saying in anger and disgust, “You missed me, you missed me.” The last man in line was pretty well deaf and did not hear him until they had gathered back at the table. “Brother Diotrephes” plopped himself down on about the second row and the brethren, finally having gotten the message they missed him, quickly carried a tray with the bread on it to him. But he refused to take it, with his arms folded, and puffed up like an old toad frog! Neither would he partake of the cup. And when they passed the offering plate, he

wadded up his check and threw it in the aisle! (Believe it or not!) That night, though he was the only one partaking, the brethren had to serve him the Lord's supper. Can you believe that? Well, it happened.

The church there was doing no mission work, nor benevolent work, though the building was paid for, and there were thousands of dollars in the bank. One Sunday night I preached a sermon on the work of the church and gave ample Scriptures on evangelism and doing good and pointed out that the church is not in the "banking business." As soon as I was concluded he got up before the congregation and really laced me over the coals, saying that he would run the affairs of the church and that I had better mind my own business! He just went on and on, sort of like the energizer battery we hear advertised all the time! It was an ugly spectacle, and a total embarrassment to the church as a number of visitors were there and heard what he said.

And this is just a little bit of what happened there. Some other incidents will be included a bit further on in the material I am giving you. But talk about being discouraged! Three works in a row that were absolutely devastating! I was on the verge of throwing in the proverbial towel I can assure you.

Time and space do not permit a discussion of the million and one things that can arise in local church work that are so discouraging. But the bottom line question is, "What should a preacher do in such situations?" My answer is: try to be optimistic and look on the bright side of things, regardless of how dark and ominous the clouds might appear to be. Admittedly, this is easier said than done. But at least try to not dwell on the negatives . . . try to focus on the positives. Look for the good instead of the bad. Channel your own thinking in the right direction (Philippians 4:4-9). Through whatever trials we may face remember, "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

When you feel discouraged, spend a lot of time in prayer (Hebrews 4:16). Also, try to get with some other gospel preachers or sincere brethren, share your problems, and tell them you need a "cheer-up" session. Chances are you will end up smiling and counting your blessings. And keep in mind that things are seldom as bad as they seem to be on given occasions. Usually, things will work out. Do not borrow trouble! And do not try to go it alone. Depend on the Lord, and He will see you through the valleys.

- G. Closely akin to the problem of discouragement is the preacher's problem of learning patience.

Most young preachers are filled with zeal and they want to see things done, and want significant growth realized right away. They want to see brethren working, Christians living right, and people being baptized! Preachers find it difficult to adjust to a nonchalant approach to the Lord's work that most brethren have. The young preacher comes into a local preaching work with a "full head of steam" expecting things to change for the better over night, and it just does not happen. It is so easy to get discouraged, and to become so very impatient with brethren!

Young preachers have to learn that the devil has a greater hold on people than imagined, and that our adversary uses every trick of the trade to distract brethren and keep them from being busy in the Master's work: from watching TV, to school activities, to vacations, to job schedules, ad infinitum, Satan keeps brethren doing something other than the Lord's work.

What is the solution? All we who preach can do is just "keep on keeping on" in our setting the proper example of "first things first" and in "preaching it straight" concerning what must take priority in our lives if we expect for heaven to be our home (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10b; 3:15, 16; etc.)! Yes, the preacher must preach the truth in love and gently try to correct those who oppose themselves (2 Timothy 2:24-26). God will see to it that His word does not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:11).

Patience is not a virtue that most of us are born with, but it must be learned and cultivated (see 2 Peter 1:5ff). We need to follow Job's example in this regard (James 5:10, 11). We should avoid being like the old brother who is reputed to have prayed, "O God, I need patience, and I need it right now." Well, we may need it right now, but generally it takes awhile for us to develop it. To a degree, it comes with the maturing process because we learn with time, and experience that things seldom work out the way we would like. Humorously speaking, "He who doesn't expect overly much will not be disappointed." We just need to do the best we can, and keep plugging away, doing our best to be faithful and true, and realize that is all we can do.

- H. The preacher's problem of coping with criticism.

Putting up with criticism is one of the most challenging problems a preacher faces. Let us not kid ourselves, it is not easy to take! Especially when one is trying as hard as he knows how to be a good preacher of the

gospel. But try as he may, you can be assured someone is going to be critical of his efforts.

Abusive, unfair, and petty criticism can bring much heartache and discouragement into the life of any preacher but in particular one that is young or just starting out. Most every man who attempts to preach will get his share of criticism. It is just human nature to be critical of others. It is not right, and it should not be, but it happens anyway. The preacher, because he is in the limelight, so to speak, is extra vulnerable. And there are so many brethren who are “self-appointed experts” on how the preacher should do his job!

Of course, not all criticism is unfair, or meant to be cutting or hurtful. Some older and wiser brethren sincerely have the best interest of the young preacher in their hearts, and offer “constructive criticism” with the honest intent of trying to help him improve and do better. The preacher needs to weigh the criticism, and consider its source. If it is good and could benefit him he should be man enough to accept it, profit by it, and not resent the one who offered it. Even if criticism is petty and offered in less than a kind way, at least consider it fairly and honestly. If you are convinced that it is valueless to you, then do your best to forget about it. But if you it can be of value to you, and you can profit by it, accept it and be thankful. Remember, do the best you can do, and try to improve, and that is all you can do. It is impossible to please everyone and you just as well not try. So when some start “straining at gnats,” consider the source and try to let it roll off like water on a duck’s back. (That is easier said than done.)

I suppose all preachers at one time or another have been deserving of criticism, because after all, we are just human beings, and imperfect. But try not to leave yourself open to unnecessary criticism. We are vulnerable enough at very best. A preacher just cannot be too careful in his work, mannerisms, and conduct. There is no use to invite the critic to attack by being careless.

What really hurts, and young preachers need to be conditioned for it as best they can be, is when no matter how sincerely you try to do your best, someone invariably seems to find something to pick at you about. This can be exasperating and frustrating. There are some brethren who seem to thrive on “preacher picking.” They have “fried preacher” for Sunday dinner instead of fried chicken. It is almost like some have put up a big sign behind the pulpit stand . . . “Here is the preacher – it is open season – shoot him down if you can!” Believe me, I have had plenty of pot shots taken at me through the years.

One such incident happened early on in my preaching life. I had spent hours working on a particular sermon, and had the lesson filled with many Scriptures, good illustrations, etc. But somewhere in the sermon, I used the word “grievous,” but I pronounced it like a lot of Texas folk do, “grievious.” All my life I had heard it with that extra “i” in it. Anyway, there was this old sour brother who seemed to me to live for one reason only, and that was to find me in fault . . . and he had a heyday while I was there because I made numerous mistakes . . . and he told me of each one! Well anyway, while I was standing in the foyer shaking hands, I saw him coming. His face was red as a beet in anger because that was his usual modus operandi; he evidently did not know how to approach someone in a civil manner. With loud voice he bellowed out, “Young man, I’ll have you know that the word is ‘grievous,’ and not ‘grievious!’” If you have ever been run over by a Mack truck, you know somewhat like I felt. I managed to somehow pick myself up off the floor, as it were, and tried to say, “Thank you for bringing that to my attention. I’ll be glad to go home and check that out in the dictionary.” He replied, “There’s no need to check it out in the dictionary! The word is ‘grievous!’” Whereupon, he stormed out the front entrance way to the church building leaving me and those who heard and saw what he did with our mouths agape!

When Fran and I got in the car I said and asked, “Honey, the only thing that man got out of my sermon was that one mispronounced word. He obviously paid no attention to the Scriptures I gave and the applications that were made. He just latched on to that one mistake. Do you reckon that’s the way it is going to be in preaching?” And yes, nearly forty years later, I can tell you the answer is YES. And even today I still am filled with fear and trepidation whenever I dare verbalize the word “grievous.” I can assure you that it has no extra “i” in it . . . you see, I did look it up in the dictionary! Just mark it down, there will always be those, though they have never preached in their lives, will be able to tell you how to do it!

Try to handle criticism like Abraham Lincoln suggested when he said: “If I were to read, much less answer, all attacks made upon me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how, the very best I can, and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out alright, what is said against me will not amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, then ten thousand angels swearing I was right would make no difference.”

I. Young preachers have the “handicap problem” of being young.

You cannot help the chronological age you are, and there is no need to apologize for it. Just realize there are advantages and disadvantages that go with the territory. Some of the advantages of being a young preacher

are: good health and an abundance of energy; a keen appetite for more knowledge; a desire to do his best; he is not yet "set in his ways," but is still pliable; a zest for all he does. And, if he is careful to live right, as Paul taught in 1 Timothy 4:12, he can be a great example to all.

Some of the disadvantages of being a young preacher are: the way some brethren view you. Some will look upon you with the attitude, "Who does this young whipper-snapper think he is, trying to tell me how to live? Why I'd done a lot of livin' before he was even born!" Yes, there will be those who discount what you say just because you are young! Also, young men generally do *not* know all they need to know . . . that which they will learn in time. They are inexperienced, and may not have the finesse to handle situations that arise like older preachers would. And perhaps their sermons reflect their deficiencies of knowledge and experience . . . they have not had the practice that comes only with the passing of time. Etc., etc., etc., etc.

I shall never forget what happened to me when I was twenty-three years of age, right after we had experienced the discouraging blows of what we went through in Nebraska. Fran and I moved to a rather large congregation of about three hundred or more members in a Texas town where the church had been for years. Through the years that congregation had been fortunate in having some very capable preachers. The first Sunday there I was very nervous, as you can imagine, and was careful to be seated early on the front row, ready to go. Before the service started I was sitting there going over in my mind how I was going to begin. All of a sudden I felt very rough fingers rubbing me vigorously behind my right ear. I turned and looked up just in time to hear this man about seventy years of age say to me in a gruff voice, and with a sour expression on his face, "Huh, just as I thought . . . still wet behind the ears!" With nothing further said, he turned and walked back down the aisle. I nearly wilted right then and there! It just took the wind right out of my sails. I had already gone through so much trauma in my first work in Nebraska, and here I was ready to start another work, and this happens to me just before I was to get up to preach my first sermon there. I felt like crying, but I had to reach deep within for the strength to do the best I could in spite of what had happened. And oh, how many times I have had to do that! I could not begin to count them!

A young preacher is wise who realizes the apprehensions and misgivings older folks have concerning him because of his age and, if he is humble and not brash, most brethren will soon overlook his inexperience and shower him with parental type of love and affection.

My advice to young preachers is this: when you meet with the elders, or in business meetings, be a good listener. Be very careful what you say. Make what you do have to say count by having something really worthwhile to say. After awhile, after a period of time in proving yourself, older men will become more and more receptive to your ideas and suggestions. But if you come into a work and immediately start pushing for changes with new ideas and methods of doing things, you can almost be sure problems will arise!

It is humorous how some brethren think. Before a preacher is about thirty-five they consider him "too young." After he goes over forty-five they consider him beginning to lose steam and think of him as having "peaked out" and headed down hill. Yes, there is about a ten year span, age wise, that the preacher is considered just the right age that brethren are looking for. Otherwise, he is either too young or too old! Timothy, the young man (1 Timothy 4:12) or Paul the aged (Philemon 9) just would not "fit in" with quite a few congregations today. What the average congregation wants today is a preacher thirty-seven or thirty-eight years old with twenty-five years of experience!

J. The very real problem of the preacher "talking too much."

This inclination of talking too much has gotten more preachers into trouble than anything else I know about. In fact, and hear me well, there is nothing that can get a young preacher into more "hot water" than talking too much! The tongue is the hardest member of our body to tame. Though small, it can create havoc if uncontrolled. "Behold, how much wood is kindled by how small a fire." (Read James 3:2-12) A safe guide is this: do not gossip! You do not have to account for what you do not say. Read such Scriptures as Proverbs 10:19; 17:27,28; and 21:23.

Someone has written: "If to others you're tempted to talk, five things observe with care; to whom you speak, of whom you speak, and how, and when, and where." (This little saying I have heard many times, but I do not know who originated it.)

Remember, people can "twist" what you say. Your actual statement can be distorted, especially after it is passed along through several different ones, to mean something entirely different than perhaps you intended. Extra caution should govern our conversations with anyone . . . it would be impossible to over emphasize just how important this matter is!

If you say something bad about somebody, rest assured that it will eventually get back to that person. Remember, it is generally true that those who will talk to you about others will talk to others about you!



Especially must a young preacher be extremely careful in starting out. When you move somewhere to work with a congregation, I can almost guarantee you that somebody will “drop by to see you” within three to six months who wants to tell you about various ones in the congregation, and what all has happened in the past, etc. What ever you do, do not get caught in this trap! Do not join in and start sharing your first impressions of people, etc. The temptation will be there, but do not do it. If you do, it will come back to haunt you. Mark my word on that. Your first impressions of people may very well be altered, or changed, as time goes by. Some you do not much care for to begin with may prove to be your best supporters and friends. And some you thought were “hunky-dory” at first may prove to be two-faced and back stabbers. Be careful what you say!

K. The very real problem of preacher’s “job insecurity.”

There is probably no other work or life pursuit with so much uncertainty and feelings of insecurity as what is involved in being a gospel preacher. While it is true that a very few preachers have stayed a long time at places, the fact is that the vast majority have not.

The preacher’s tenure at a place can often be terminated if just one elder gets “crosswise” with him, or if a very small number within the congregation “get it in for him” and start trying to move him out. And more often than not, sad as it is, the disgruntled ones win out and succeed in running the preacher off.

A young man does not have to experience that over once or twice, and he gets “gun shy.” Such happenings often kill his spirit and his self-confidence, rob him and his family of the happiness they should be experiencing, and dishearten him to the extent he starts thinking about quitting. He becomes disillusioned, discouraged, bewildered, and hurt deeply. All the wind has been taken out of his sails, and he looks and feels like a little whipped puppy.

If a young man confronts untenable situations in his first two or three works, he has to be mighty strong to keep on going. He will have dreadful feelings of job insecurity and if he stays in preaching he will almost come to dread going into an elders’ meeting. After a preacher has been hurt deeply two or three times, it is not easy to put oneself back into a similar situation where it might happen again. I know whereof I speak! I went through three of the most difficult situations a young man could possibly face in my first three local works, as was suggested in my comments on discouragement.

Is there a solution? All I know to tell you is this: just be assured in your own heart that your motives are pure in wanting to serve the Lord, and that you are doing the best you know how to do in all sincerity, and trust in God. Be confident that He is able to take care of you. (Read Ephesians 3:14-20; Philippians 4:9,13,19; 2 Timothy 4: 16,17; Hebrews 13:5b; etc.)

L. The problem of losing one's self-confidence.

The problem just discussed above is one of the main causes for a beginning preacher to lose his confidence. Once it is lost it takes determination and hard work to regain it, but . . . it can be done! Self-confidence is essential to doing the work a preacher has to do. While some preachers have too much, and some have too little, what is needed is just the "right amount." Too much is distasteful, too little is detrimental, but "enough" is vitally important. Most young preachers tend to have too little self-confidence. A young preacher has the realization of limited knowledge and what he considers limited abilities, and his feelings and self-esteem are easily damaged.

So what is the solution? Much study, hard work, practice and experience will do wonders to eradicate the problem. In the meanwhile, be quick to admit your inadequacies and deficiencies. Never hesitate to say to a questioner if you do not know the answer to the question, "I don't know, but I'll do my best to find the answer." But at the same time, have confidence in the message you preach and in the truth you know, and be willing to expend the time and effort to learn more and to improve. Always strive to do better. God will give such a disposition of heart "the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

M. The problem of worry.

This is a problem common to most every human being. It can be a very real problem for the preacher also, especially if he finds himself in a complex and problematic situation. In fact, it can be a problem of major proportions to young and older preachers alike if it is allowed to be.

When I first started out as a preacher, running into the hurtful and stressful situations I encountered, I found myself worrying a lot. One night Fran had already gone to sleep and I was tossing and turning in bed, worrying. This awakened her and she asked me what was wrong? So I told her all I was worrying about. She said, "Honey, you need to practice what you preach and stop worrying." Well, that was not what I wanted to hear, but I thought about it and realized she was right. I have steadily improved in this area ever since then and now seldom worry. Oh, I still admit to being sort of fretful over incidents now and then, but not any "real" worrying.

First of all, it is sinful and wrong to do it. It violates plain teachings found in God's word: Psalm 55:22; Proverbs 3:5; Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7; etc., and what Jesus Himself taught in Matthew 6:25-34. Worry is evidence of a lack of faith in God. Secondly, it is very harmful to one's health. Worry can bring on ulcers, hypertension, and other maladies. It can contribute significantly to a nervous breakdown. No one who is knowledgeable of how awful and debilitating a nervous breakdown can be would ever want to have one of those. I knew a preacher once who had one. It was the most pitiful thing you can imagine. His first name was Bernard. I have long since lost track of him. He had a good heart but he was ultra-sensitive and he worried about everything, double-time. Finally, he just crumbled. How sad and pathetic. One way to avoid such is to NOT worry.

Besides, worrying over matters is not going to solve a thing! In every given situation the preacher needs to do the best he can, really trying to do what is right, and then do not worry about the outcome. Do not leave God out of your life. Have confidence that He will help you. Pray to Him fervently and leave matters in His hands.

- N. The dangerous problem of making snap judgments and sayings things hastily plagues many preachers.

This is a problem that a few years of experience generally will take care of, but before the necessary experience is attained, many a young preacher will live to regret some quick, ill-advised decision made, or hasty word spoken. A good rule of thumb is: "think before you speak" and also, "think before you make a decision or a judgment." Be sure to try to get all the facts and give yourself time to think things through so that when you do decide to act and/or speak, you will do so based on thoughtful deliberation and assimilation of all the facts pertaining to a given matter.

If someone says something to you that makes your adrenalin flow, it would be better to make no reply at that moment. Do not make any decision of consequence in a "half-cocked" fashion. Read James 1:19; Proverbs 29:20; 2 Timothy 2:23-25; and do not forget about the importance of self-control (2 Peter 1:6). Allow at least 24 hours to go by before making any decision that would affect the church work or your family, or both. You would be surprised how the dawning of a new day after a good night's sleep and fervent prayer can change one's perspective of things.

- O. The problem of a preacher not maintaining the proper relationship with women.

The matter of flirtation and sexual promiscuity is a problem as old as the human race and reaches every segment of society. But of all people that should be careful in this regard, it is the gospel preacher. First, for his own personal purity and salvation, and secondly, for the good of the Cause. Misconduct in this area can be devastating to the preacher, his family, and the church. I have known several preachers, personally, who have succumbed to temptation in this area, and when it happens it is nothing less than a tragedy for all concerned. It does, in fact, affect so many.

Remember, no man is an island to himself. What I do has an affect on others, and the same is true with you. Perhaps David, of the Old Testament, is the best known example of the ramifications of adultery (2 Samuel 11 and 12). Not only was sexual sin involved, but then murder, and far-reaching repercussions.

What we must remember is that preachers are still humans and the inclinations of the flesh are present with us, too. The difference between Christians and the people of this world is, however, that we, as His people, must control fleshly appetites, and keep them restrained. Please note such Scriptures as 1 Corinthians 9:27; 1 Timothy 5:22b; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Peter 2:11; Romans 13:13,14; Galatians 5:24; etc. A young preacher cannot be too careful to maintain proper relationships with women. He must not allow himself to get into vulnerable situations where he might be tempted to say or do something wrong. What must be his guide? Naturally, our answer is the Bible. Read Proverbs 5:3,4, 8,9, 18-21; 6:24-33; 7: 21-27; Matthew 5:28; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 15-20; etc. In particular 1 Timothy 5:2 gives explicit instruction as to how a young preacher should behave toward women in the church.

Practically speaking, it might be well to point out a few suggestions that should help to avert anything sinful from happening, or even anything that might appear “suspicious”:

1. Do not make calls on women alone. Take your wife with you, or one of the elders, but do not go visit with a woman at her home, or apartment by yourself. If she is in the hospital that would be different.
2. Do not counsel a woman in your office if there is no one else in the church building. Even if there is someone else there, such as the church secretary or building custodian, keep the office door open. Never UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES go to a woman’s home to counsel her unless her husband, parent, or other adult is there with her, or unless you take your wife or one of the elders with you.

3. Be extremely careful in counseling a woman over the telephone who calls you to talk with you about her problems which may well involve intimate and/or sexual matters. I know a preacher who ended up having an affair with a woman who was a member of the congregation where he preached, who started calling him about her problems. One thing led to another. You cannot be too careful!
4. Be prudent in your remarks to women and in your conversations with them. Words, how they are said, the voice inflection used, and facial expressions all send signals in this matter of man and woman relations. Even if a person does not mean anything by a certain remark or touch, it can be misinterpreted. Just BE CAREFUL. Do not say or do anything that you would regret. Keep your eyes and hands to yourself.
5. Do not allow yourself to get into a compromising situation. Remember Galatians 6:6-8.
6. Be discreet in your hospital visitation also, where women you might visit may be scantily clad. A courteous knock on the door and/or announcement of your presence, with sufficient time lapse for her to say, "Come in" before you enter the room can save embarrassment for you and her.



## **PROBLEMS FACED BY GOSPEL PREACHERS**

### **PART III – IN CHURCH WORK**

#### **INTRODUCTION.**

Note - Under Roman numeral II there were fifteen problems cited that pertain more to a preacher's own person. Under this heading, Roman numeral III, we will be dealing more with problems encountered in actual church work. Naturally there will be some overlapping, and not in every case is the distinction between the two categories clearly defined. All of these problems are related in some way one to the others as you cannot separate the preacher from his work. In nearly every other field of endeavor you can, but not in preaching. So closely connected is the work of the preacher to his very own person that they mesh together. But, nonetheless, the following are fifteen of the most frequently encountered problems which a gospel preacher faces in his local church work:

- A. The problem(s) of a preacher beginning a new local work, whether it is his first, second, or even a later one.

It is not my purpose under this heading to discuss all of the aspects involved in beginning a new work, but only to point out a few things that I feel definitely need to be considered:

First, there is the need to investigate a work before you accept an offer to move to a place to labor there. It is generally conceded that a local congregation, before securing the services of a preacher, should have someone (whether it be the elders or a "pulpit selection committee" of some sort) "investigate" the preacher they are considering for the work. In fact, they would be foolish not to do so. They need to know that the man they select for the responsibility of preaching in their pulpit is a genuine Christian (not a troublemaker), and one of ability, etc. But from the preacher's standpoint, it is equally important to investigate the congregation with which he is considering working.

1. Too many times a preacher (mostly younger men but some older ones too) will accept a work without knowing much at all about the conditions that exist there. Without investigation he would have no way of knowing whether or not the elders are qualified and whether or not they are men who will stand behind solid, Bible preaching. Perhaps there is strife within the congregation, or considerable discontent. It could be a really bad situation, but without looking into it the preacher might accept, being oblivious as to what he is getting himself into. It is nothing unusual for a preacher to shortly

realize after moving to a place that he has made a mistake. Three weeks after moving to our third work, one night I told Fran, "Honey, we have made a terrible mistake in coming here." I had failed to investigate. In short order after arriving there, I could see what a mess I had gotten myself into, but I had to try to make the best of it at that point. It was a work that nearly "sank" me - the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. I would never have had to go through all that I experienced there had I investigated to begin with.

2. How can a preacher check out a work before moving there? By having his eyes wide open and his ears tuned in while visiting there for the so-called "try out sermon." (I detest that expression, and this way our brethren have of selecting a preacher!) Ask yourself some questions as you try to observe what is going on within the congregation you are considering. What is the average attendance? What kind of difference is there in Bible study attendance and Sunday morning worship? What about Sunday nights and Wednesday nights? What about the contribution in comparison to the number of members and their seeming prosperity? How much mission work are they doing? What about their benevolence? What kind of outreach activities are apparent . . . visitation, personal evangelism, etc.? What about the friendliness, warmth, and hospitality of the congregation? Do they seem to be a spiritually minded people? What about the attitude of the elders in your meetings) with them? Do they appear to be considerate and amiable? What kind of questions do they ask you, and what do they seem to expect of their preacher? Are they spiritually minded men themselves? Do they seem to really love the Lord and His Cause? Do they seem Biblically informed? Will they stand behind you in the preaching of the truth? Are they reasonable, and fair?

Also, a preacher can learn a great deal by talking with the preacher who has just left and, if possible, the one who was there before the last one. Why did they leave? How long did they stay? Does this congregation want a man who will come and stay, or do they go through preachers every two or three years? In conversing with them, are problem areas divulged that maybe you had not seen personally? Are the problems they relate to you of a nature you could work with or would they really wear thin with you if you had to cope with them week in and week out? Try to get those previous preachers to tell you as much as they will so you will at least have the benefit of knowing all you can about the congregation with which you are considering working. If the congregation has sister congregations near by, it would not hurt anything to talk to some of the preachers and elders in the vicinity who might be able to give



you further insight. Are the brethren at the congregation you are considering respected and esteemed by others in the area? Are they cooperative with others, or are they isolationists?

3. If the congregation passes all the initial investigation and you are still interested in moving there then the next step, of course, is to have some serious deliberations with the elders (or in the case of a church work having no elders, with the men of the business meetings). Several things should be clearly understood before you decide to accept the work:

First and foremost revolves around your preaching. You need to tell them clearly that you are committed to preaching the plain truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth – the whole counsel of God . . . and that you intend to do so. Get each of the individual elders to answer this question: “As long as I preach the Bible in love will you stand behind me in that preaching?” It is imperative that you determine whether they want the truth preached or not! If they do not want the Bible preached, then that should end the proceedings because no true gospel preacher would want to go to a place where the elders (or other leaders) do not want God’s word preached.

In regard to this it would be wise, especially in this day and time with so much change taking place in many congregations, to lay out on the table the issues we are confronting to ascertain what their position is on these matters and to let them know yours. If there is major disagreement, it is better to know before you move there than after. For an example, I would ask them about the “marriage, divorce, and remarriage” issue. I would ask them about matters pertaining to worship. What about mechanical instruments of music in worship? What about a chorus (or choir) in worship? What about singing during the Lord’s supper? When to partake of the Lord’s supper? What is the role of women in the church? What about worldliness, including social drinking, modesty of attire, etc.? Racial matters? Church cooperation? Distinctive New Testament Christianity as in contrast to a denominational concept? How do they feel about the “change agents” and liberal trends? Also, will they protect and defend you against petty criticism?

4. If everything is mutually satisfactory to this point, and you feel disposed to accept their offer if it is made, there are still some things that need to be worked out and clearly understood. I have come to the considered judgment that it is well to get these matters in writing because the passing of time has a way of dimming peo-

ple's memories. It is a prudent and reasonable thing to ask the elders to write these matters down and all sign the agreement, so there can be no misunderstanding as time goes by. What about the support (salary)? It should be plenty adequate in this day and age of inflated prices and cost of living. Be reasonable (not extravagant, nor on the other hand, self-penalizing) in telling them the amount for which you will come. Make sure the salary is one that includes all fifty-two weeks a year, including when you are gone in meetings and on vacations. Will there be raises, at least once a year? What will be the criteria upon which the raises will be based? What kind of fringe benefits do they provide? At least half of your Social Security? Health insurance for you and your family? House and utilities (or a housing allowance for you to buy your own home? This is preferable in most cases because it gives you an opportunity to build some equity.) Any kind of a retirement plan? Time away for gospel meetings (any mission meetings included?), lectureships, and vacation I should be clearly agreed upon, in writing.

What is their job description? Or in other words, what do they expect of the preacher? Is it reasonable? If you cannot live with it you better speak up in this period of negotiations because once it is in place, it will be set in concrete as far as they are concerned.

One thing is needful: that mutual respect for, confidence in, and consideration of one another exists between the elders and preacher, or else trouble looms on the horizon! Thus, before accepting a work, (1) investigate as best you can, and (2) have a clear understanding on all important matters, preferably in writing and signed by you and the elders. If you are careful to do this, most of the problems that might arise during the course of your stay there will be solvable. Brethren need to be able to talk matters over and reach a mutually agreeable solution to problems.

- B. The problem of the preacher and family allowing themselves to get "too thick" with certain ones in the congregation.

This is a problem closely akin to talking too much (which was discussed under "personal problems") because we generally are prone to talk freely with the ones to whom we feel closest. This can be a dangerous thing, as was previously pointed out. More often than not when a preacher moves to a new work there will be some who just "eat him up" to begin with. The unsuspecting young preacher can easily be "hooked" by them and be their "fish" for awhile. It is only human nature, you see, to respond to those who seem friendliest. Other families in the congregation may appear

more reserved and not as friendly, so it is easy to take up with those who initially appear to be more interested in the preacher and his family.

But a few months pass, and you learn a lot that you did not know to begin with, and those who “ate you up” commence to “eat you up” *in an all together different way!* Often times the ones who impress the preacher and his wife the most to begin with (there are exceptions to this of course) will depress you the most when you really come to know them. Also, the ones you did not really much care for to begin with may very well prove to be your best friends in the long run. So how do you cope with this potential problem? Be wary of those who “come on strong” and seem to want to take you over initially, and especially those who do this and who also subtly start running others in the congregation down. Do not allow yourself to become a part of a clique! Do not get drawn in by just a few. Try to treat everyone in a friendly and cordial way, but be careful to not play favorites. While it is only natural to like some people more than others and to have special friends, just be careful! Give yourself plenty of time to really get to know the people before forming special friendships and before confiding in anyone. Just remember, I warned you that some people whom you consider close friends early in your work may not remain that way, and if you have told them things concerning what you think of others and how you feel about certain matters, you can be assured that it will get around to all. THEN you would give anything if you had been more careful! By saying all this I do not mean to shake your faith in brethren or to cause you to be unduly suspicious of others. Some will remain true-blue all the way through your friendship with them, but the fact is that some who immediately impress you as A-OK may not turn out that way. It is best then, for a young preacher and his family, to be very selective and careful in their choice of close friends and confidants.

- C. The problem a preacher faces when he encounters the “one man pastor system” that prevails in numerous congregations. Or, in other words, instead of letting the preacher be an evangelist, they force him into the role of “a pastor” but without any real “say-so.”

Our brethren have made much ado over the fact that there is no such thing as a “clergy/laity” arrangement in the New Testament, and rightfully so. We believe in the New Testament pattern of a plurality of elders (bishops / pastors) in each congregation along with deacons, teachers and evangelists. (See such Scriptures as Acts 14:23; 20:17-28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7,8-13; Titus 1:5-9; Philippians 1:1; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4; etc.) But in actual approach and practice, I dare say that about the only difference between many congregations of the Lord’s church today and the denominational arrangement is superficial only. We would not think of calling gospel preachers “pastors,” as do the denominations, but for all

intents and purposes, that is exactly what brethren expect them to be, except with NO authority as denominational preachers generally have. It has been truthfully said of many congregations: the preacher is doing the work of the elders (or pastoring), the elders are doing the work of the deacons (concerning themselves with such things as the upkeep of the church building, parking lot, etc.), the deacons are standing around wondering what they are supposed to be doing, and the membership in general is just standing (or sitting) around doing nothing. What a pity and shame!

It would be wonderful if we ourselves would get back to the New Testament order - having the elders truly being the shepherds of the flock as the Bible enjoins upon them (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3; Hebrews 13:17), the deacons being the special servants as is indicated (Acts 6:1-4; 1 Timothy 3:17), and the preachers proclaiming the gospel (Mark 16:15; Acts 2:14ff; 4:2, 4; 5:42; 8:5,12; 9:20;10:33b;14:7;17:2,3; 2 Timothy 4:1-4; etc.).

We ask in dismay, what keeps perpetuating the “one man pastor system” among us? (1) Some preachers like to be “the pastor” and others who do not like to be are forced into the role if they expect to keep their jobs. (2) Unqualified elders who are content for the preacher to do their work as long as they themselves are “running things”and can fire the preacher if he does not live up to all their expectations. (3) An untaught membership that does not really know, or care very much, just as long as they do not have to do much of anything, and as long as the preacher is working sixty to seventy hours a week doing all they expect him to do.

What is the solution? I suppose the one thing that can help remedy the rut we are in, in regard to this matter, is for brethren to study their Bibles more, and for a lot of teaching to be done concerning the Biblical pattern for elders, deacons and preachers.

D. The problem of spreading yourself “too thin.”

One of the hardest things in the world for a preacher is to say “no” when brethren ask him to take on another job. And because we do not say no to every whim and fancy brethren can dream up for preachers to do, we oftentimes spread ourselves too thin so that we cannot really do justice to anything.

In order to get into a predicament where he has more “irons in the fire” than he can handle, all a preacher has to do is just let the brethren have free rein in planning out his activities for him. As we have already noticed, so many brethren seem to think that the preacher has nothing else to do

but the little odd jobs they concoct for him. Will the brethren ever learn that a preacher has a full-time job doing what he is supposed to be doing? He cannot possibly do his job well plus all the other things brethren expect him to do!

What is the solution to this problem? Be careful to take on only that which you feel that can do reasonably well in the time you have. Recognize your saturation point. When you reach that and you are asked to still do more just say, "Brethren, I'm sorry, but I just can't take on something else at this time." If further explanation is called for, remind whomever that there are so many hours in the day, and that you are just one man, and one man can do just so much. If needs be, remind them that you are not Superman! Prepare yourself, perhaps, for a foolhardy rejoinder such as, "The rest of us have to work for a living . . . you've got plenty of time to do these things we've asked you to do. That's what we're paying you for," ad nauseam!

To spread yourself too thin can only bring much unneeded pressure that is difficult to cope with. Although we have all done it (i.e., spread ourselves too thin), it is not wise. Learn to kindly say no when you feel like you are beginning to be over-extended.

E. This brings us to a related problem – the scheduling of your time.

This is always a challenge because of the nature of a preacher's work. His work is not like anyone else's! A man who works at a factory or in an office goes to work at 8 a.m. and is off at 5 p.m. It is not like that with a preacher! The preacher is on call twenty-four hours every day. Many are the times he is still at work in the late hours of the night or early hours of the morning with some church problem, with emergency counseling, with a death situation, or someone in critical condition at the hospital, etc. The preacher cannot punch a time clock like most other folks.

It is almost impossible for a preacher to maintain a hard and fast schedule. Of necessity his schedule must be flexible because of the nature of his work. Brethren who insist a preacher should keep a "punch the time card like I have to do" schedule want the preacher to "punch in" all right, but they do not want him to be able to "punch out" as they get to do. Most preachers would be tickled pink to punch in at 8 a.m. and punch out at 5 p.m. with the assurance that no one would bother them between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. But often times the ones who insist the loudest on the "time clock" approach are the very ones who call the preacher at night.

But, regardless of the need to be flexible, it is a good idea to try to keep some sort of a schedule or regularity about one's work as a local

preacher. The way it is done may differ from one preacher to the next depending upon individual situations and preferences. There is no “set in concrete” way that a schedule should be laid out. Each preacher knows better than anyone else what his work is, and how best to accomplish it. If there is anything that is exasperating, it is to have some uninformed member of the church tell him how he ought to be doing his work. I have had any number, through the years, do just that . . . try to tell me how to preach, and how to do the work of an evangelist. Most of the ones who will attempt to do that are the very ones who might well quip, “What an easy life the preacher has . . . he just works two hours a week! Haw, Haw, Haw!” The preacher, upon hearing that, and being human, sometimes feels that urge to kill - kidding of course! In my earlier years I tried to explain to such characters what all is involved in doing the work of a preacher, but not anymore. I simply respond with something like this, “You know, you’re right? Being a preacher is truly like living the life of Riley. And you ought to get in on this gravy train. I know of several congregations looking for preachers right now and I’ll be glad to take you to meet the elders and let them know you are interested.” That generally puts them to flight right away because those very brethren could not do what it takes to be an effective gospel preacher if their lives depended upon it! Down deep, they are bound to know that because when their bluff is called they generally drop the subject like a hot potato.

I would suggest that it takes about six to seven hours in the office each day, Monday through Friday, to prepare one’s sermons, Bible class lessons, write bulletin articles, take care of correspondence, answer the phone calls “for the preacher,” do whatever counseling is necessary, and the dozens of other matters that need attending to from week to week. Currently (as I write this toward the end of 1994) I generally arrive at the Brown Trail building each morning about 9 a.m. I stay until 3:30 in the afternoon and, more often than not, I take no time off for a lunch break. So that is six and one half hours in the office per day for me, five days a week. Earlier in my preaching life I tried to get to the office by 8 a.m. each day, but at my age (which is sixty-two and one half as I write) I am slowing down a bit. Anyway, six and one half hours in the office makes me available to the needs of the church, plus I need that time to do what I have got to do each week. In addition to my regular church work, for the past three years I have also directed the Fort Worth Lectureship, which is a ton of work! Too, I have taught a course (this one) in the School of Preaching and have spent much time in rewriting and revising material on this subject that I did years ago. (The very material you are now reading.) All of that takes time!

But you see, the basic schedule of office hours does not begin to tell the story because there is the visitation that must be done also. That is

generally accomplished after office hours. Then, invariably, an average of two nights a week (not counting Sunday night and Wednesday night, which involves preaching and teaching) there are functions to attend of either a “church work” nature (such as visitation programs, planning sessions, or what-have-you) or a “social” nature with church members. But even the latter is a very real part of the work of a modern day preacher. You have to do a certain amount of socializing with the brethren to develop a rapport, and to help engender a spirit of camaraderie within the church.

Even part of Saturday is usually spent putting finishing touches on sermons and class lessons, and/or making some calls that you did not have time for during the week. And only other preachers can know the wear and tear that is felt when one teaches a class, and preaches two sermons on Sunday. Mix in with the actual work the pressure to produce and to live up to expectations, and it all takes its toll! And too, most preachers are expected to attend the business meeting of the elders on a regular basis, or general business meetings in congregations without any elders. Either way, these meetings carry additional pressures and concerns a lot of the time because often they become sounding boards for the hyper-critical and disgruntled.

When the actual hours are added up that most gospel preachers put in on what we might call “tangible church work,” it will be somewhere between fifty to sixty and that does not include several other hours when “church work” occupies his mind and, thus, his time! (Remember 2 Corinthians 11:28?) In view of all that, I will have to admit that it irks me quite a bit whenever some brethren criticize behind the preacher’s back, and plant doubt in the mind of the elders by asking, “what does he do with all his time?” Grrrrrrrr!

On the humorous side of things, that reminds me of a true happening I experienced when preaching for the Cameron Road congregation in Austin, Texas from 1966-1971. There was a little five year old boy named Glen who just idolized me, and was always telling me and others that he was going to grow up to be a preacher like “brudder Boren.” Well, one Sunday morning after services I was in the foyer conversing with several members when Glen walked up as he often did, and sort of “hugged” my leg and greeted me. I looked down and said, “Hi Glen,” and then to the others standing there, “You know, Glen is going to grow up to be a preacher some day,” and back to him, “aren’t you Glen?” With his little bright eyes aglow he replied, “Yep, I sure am, but I’ve been wonderin’ about somethin’! What do we do during the week?” Believe me, this really broke everybody up with laughter! The incident spread like wildfire through the congregation and for the longest time the brethren would ask

me in “kidding” fashion, “What do you do during the week, brudder Boren?”

No, I do not think the preacher should be bound to a hard and fast, tight schedule, concerning which he is supposed to account to the elders for every minute of his day. But at the same time, as indicated, I do believe he should try to maintain as best he can a reasonable schedule and be somewhat available on a regular basis.

F. The problem of sermon preparation and study habits.

All preachers of the gospel, in order to maximize their potential for serving the Lord, must continue to study and learn throughout their lives. First, foremost, and always should be the study of the Bible, which is God’s revealed will to mankind. This study of the word should be done daily and diligently. (Need I remind you of 2 Timothy 2:15;3:14-17?) Such study is something each preacher must make up his mind to do, and then do it! There is no short cut to learning. It takes reading, reflection, digging into the reference works and commentaries, comparing with other Scripture references, noting the variance in translations, doing word studies, etc. etc. One of the great tragedies in the church is that so many demands are made on a modern day preacher’s time that he is not left with sufficient time to really study his Bible as he ought. When he does make some time to study, it is toward preparing a particular sermon or class, instead of having the benefit to study broadly for random knowledge and enrichment.

But to sermon preparation itself: there are many views concerning how a young preacher should go about getting his sermons from week to week. Some preachers who happened to be blessed with extra special mental capacities look with disdain upon any preacher who would anyway use sermon outline books. I might respond by observing, “Yes, if a young man is blessed with a natural homiletic ability and a good mind, and he is imaginative, etc., surely to work up a sermon ‘from scratch’ would be preferable to ‘getting an idea’ from some sermon outline book.” But, facing reality, most young preachers starting out do not fit that exact mold, and sermon outline books can serve as a starter for them in sermon preparation.

I heard an older preacher say one time, in addressing a rather large group of young preacher students, “Don’t use any sermon-outline books, but work up every lesson yourself. Don’t use any notes in delivering your sermon, and even the ones you’ve jotted down while preparing the lesson, tear them up immediately after the sermon and throw them away.” I was one of those young students who heard him that day and my heart nearly



sank. I thought, "Boy, I don't stand a chance at this matter of preaching if all he said is the way it must be done." What he said was the ideal and, naturally, I would agree to that. How wonderful it would be to be blessed with such a sharp mind that sermon ideas would just flow and you could be able to turn them out week in and week out without any trouble, and preach without any notes, etc. But realistically speaking, how many young men have that kind of ability? I readily admit that I did not. I was barely twenty-two years of age when I started preaching full-time, and I felt overwhelmed (i.e., felt tremendous pressure) with all my responsibilities of preaching and teaching assignments plus the other things I was expected to do. There was no way I had the capacity to come up with new and fresh material for every time I was to preach. I needed something to help get me started. How thankful I am that I had a few "hand me down" sermon outline books that had been given to me. They helped to get me started. (Personally, I am grateful that I had sermon books by such men as Leslie G. Thomas, N.B. Hardeman, Gus Nichols, and yes, Leroy Brownlow. I remember when brother Brownlow came out with another book entitled *Sermons You Can Preach* that fellow-preachers got a lot of mileage out of kidding one another, "You need to get brother Brownlow's new book "*Sermons Even You Can Preach!*" I have not used a sermon outline book in years, but when I first started preaching I was thankful to have a few of them.

As time went by and I learned more, and got some experience under my belt, then I was able to work up my own sermons. So please do not misconstrue the above paragraph. I am not advocating using "canned sermons" borrowed from others, but in the learning process, I do think there is a place for some quality sermon material that can aid young preachers in getting started. And as to the brother's suggestion to throw away all the notes you have made, I think that is ridiculous! Why throw away information that may have taken hours and hours to dig out? Now again, if one has a photographic mind and can remember all he has ever read, that would be a great idea! But very few people in fact, have such a capacity!

The idea is to do the best you can with what capacity you have and learn, learn, learn! The more you learn, the greater your capacity becomes. In time, perhaps you will be wise like the brother I heard speak that day, and you can then tell others to do the same. Until then I do not see that using others' sermon material is either wrong or detrimental, especially when you make those sermons your own by your own studies, ideas, and personality.

You ask, how do you go about preparing sermons? First, I get an idea. I get ideas from multiple sources. First, from my own Bible reading and

study (that is the best place!), or from some article I have seen, or from some conversation I have had, or from something I have observed, or wherever I run across them. Once I have an idea, I try to write down every Scripture reference that has anything to do with the subject. I think of the objective that I have in mind and the points I would like to make in presenting the lesson. I then try to come up with a good introduction to the lesson. With an introduction in mind, the objective I desire to communicate in mind, and the points to be made in mind, then I carefully go through all the Scriptures and select the passages (keeping them in context! Never be guilty of taking a verse out of context!) that would best bring out these thoughts and give Biblical authority and weight to what is to be said. I am a strong believer in making every sermon very Biblical. I believe in using plenty of scripture in a meaningful way not in a disjointed way . . . not in a disjointed way just to have lots of Scripture. And . . . it is the “icing on the cake” if I can come up with a real “clincher” for a conclusion; something that will tie the lesson together and bring the objective home vividly.

It is very important when a man is preaching in a local church situation that he keep a good record of what he preaches, not just for the purpose of avoiding duplication but, more importantly, that a “well-balanced diet” be fed from the pulpit. Some preachers formulate a lesson plan for themselves for a year in advance to be sure they include lessons that are: (1) basic teaching - first principles; (2) doctrinal themes; (3) current issues facing the church; (4) encouraging and inspirational type lessons; (5) sermons of exhortation and admonition; (6) instructional and informative studies; etc., etc. etc. Whether or not you plan your sermons a year in advance or not is optional, but it is important that you bring different types of lessons that will include “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26,27). Do the best you can do with the ability God has given you. That is all anyone can ask or expect, and that is what God will require of you (Matthew 25:14-30).

G. The problem of preacher- elder relations.

When elders in a congregation are truly qualified and are sincerely doing the work of shepherding and tending the flock as the New Testament teaches (1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28 ; Hebrews 13:17; etc.) and when a preacher is in like manner qualified for his work and is doing his best to do it, and when mutual respect and love exists between the preacher and the elders, the most wonderful and pleasant relationship in the world should result. However, if the aforesaid is not true in one way or another the relationship may often be strained and very unpleasant.

Thank God for elders who are qualified, and who are sincere, humble, and earnest, really trying to be good shepherds with the spirit of Christ being manifested in their demeanor and character. Such men should be counted worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17), and preachers should love such men, respect them, and appreciate them. Such men are of inestimable value in the kingdom of the Lord.

But, sad and regrettable as it is, perhaps the number one internal problem in many congregations today throughout the brotherhood is a drastic shortage of men of such caliber. So many men have been put into the position of being elders that had no business being appointed. In some instances one wonders, "How did it ever happen?" So many congregations are hurting because of incompetent and inept leadership! Many such men know little about the Bible, and yet they are in the position of directing the affairs of the church! How tragic! All kinds of problems are forthcoming in such situations . . . from one extreme to another:

1. I have seen congregations "hamstrung" and held back from doing good and worthwhile things because men that somehow got into the eldership viewed their "job" as one of holding the reins and keeping things under their absolute and total control. (Some of these might be pretty well informed as to doctrine, but are devoid of the spirit of Christ.) Such men usually delight in keeping the preacher under their thumb and letting him know if he does not toe the line in doing things just exactly as they dictate, they will fire him. Elders of this type are often legalistic in their thinking, and lacking in any real depth of spirituality. The young preacher has ice cold water thrown onto every idea he comes up with or any suggestion he makes. There is little sensitivity manifested as to his needs or his feelings.

Many congregations are dying on the vine because of the failure of elders to truly lead. Because they themselves have little or no vision, little or no zeal, or devotion, or concern, etc., congregations are stymied, and become stagnated and ineffectual. What is the young preacher to do when he faces such dead situations? If he really starts pushing for things to get done, he will certainly encounter opposition - yes, even from the elders. But how can he do anything less in view of such Scriptures as Exodus 14:15; Numbers 13:30; 14:11,12,22-24,26-34; Luke 5:4-7; Mark 16:15,16; James 1:22-27; Galatians 6:9,10; Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 3:1-3; 15-17; etc.?

In my second local work, the congregation was doing near to nothing. Not because the members did not want to, but because

the two elders (one of which literally controlled everything while the other was his “yes man”) were satisfied with the status quo. The church was doing no mission work and no benevolent work, although the church building was paid for, the preacher’s house paid for, and there were thousands of dollars in the bank. All the church was allowed to do was to assemble, hear a lesson, and go home. I had made suggestion after suggestion in business meetings of what we could be doing, with each one being immediately shot down. One Sunday night I preached a sermon emphasizing the New Testament accent on action. I brought out that the Lord never did intend for His people to stand idly by, with their arms folded, and watch the world plunge headlong down the broad way that leads to destruction without ever lifting a finger to avert the disaster. . . that He expects us to use our time, talents, and resources in the spread of the gospel. As soon as the sermon was over, “brother Diotrephes” stepped into the pulpit and worked me over the coals like you have never heard before, in very abusive fashion, stating that “the elders (meaning himself!) are running this church and if you (meaning me!) don’t like it you know the way out of town” (or words to that effect). It was a terrible scene . . . an elder rebuking a gospel preacher because he had the courage to point out that the church needed to be doing something to advance the Cause of Christ! (What must those have thought who were visiting that evening?) By standing up for the truth on this and other matters of immense importance, my days there were numbered! Many times I have thought of Galatians 1:10.

2. On the other hand, there are men who somehow get into the eldership who would not know false doctrine if it were paraded right before them. Such men are easily swayed, and “carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). This opens up the door for liberal ideas to invade the congregation. The young preacher is faced with either “going along to get along,” or standing up for what is right and, thus, incurring the displeasure of those who “hold the purse strings.”

This kind of situation is becoming more and more prevalent as liberalism has made deep inroads into the church in recent years. If the young preacher takes a stand for truth and has the courage to speak out on current issues he can count on being fired shortly. He must have the courage and devotion to the Lord to say to himself, “If they fire me, so be it, because I cannot do anything but stand for His truth.”

Before leaving this subject of preacher-elder relations (and believe me, a whole book could be written on this subject), let me say somewhat about the matter of the “authority of elders.” Some elders get so puffed up with an authority complex that they fancy themselves as little popes! Yes, shades of Romanism within the church! What does the Bible say? It tells us that Jesus Christ has all authority! (Read Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:21-23; Colossians 1:15-18; Hebrews 1:1-6; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:25-28; 1 Peter 3:22; etc.) Now it is true that Christ in His last will and testament, taught through the apostles that men who meet certain qualifications be appointed as elders/ bishops/ shepherds, and that in their work of shepherding and overseeing, the flock is to “obey them that have the rule over you, who watch for your souls” (Hebrews 13:17). Consider further Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9. But such men were very clearly instructed not to act as “lords over God’s heritage” (1 Peter 5:3).

In view of all the above, it is clear that Christ has all authority and that He is the head of the church. Elders then are “under shepherds” of the Chief Shepherd, and the limit of their oversight is to see to it that His will be done. Thus, as they lead the flock in doing the will of Christ, we are to follow and obey. But they have no legislative authority, nor are they to “lord it over” the church in high-handed fashion. Too many who have been selected as elders have a gross misconception of what they are supposed to do and, generally speaking, the brotherhood itself does not understand either.

Over the last fifty to seventy-five years, so much has been said about “elders’ authority” that the idea has gone to the heads of many, and they fancy themselves as a “corporate board of directors” with full power to run things like they want to do it. That is not right! The church belongs to Christ, and men who have been appointed elders are to see to it that His will be done, and that His name be glorified. The New Testament teaches that elders are the shepherds under the authority of the Chief Shepherd and their work is to feed the flock, and tend the flock. They are not to run the church like a corporate board of directors!

In my second work I observed that the church stood up every time a prayer was offered. I soon learned that it had been done like that for over twenty years, not because Christ bound upon us that we must stand up for every prayer, but because “brother Diotrephes” had that idea and, therefore, he bound his will upon the church there. I perceived right then the fact that it is just as wrong to bind

where the Lord has not bound as it is to loose where He has bound. So, I preached a sermon on posture in prayer and pointed out that the New Testament emphasizes the posture of the heart, and not the posture of the body. I gave examples of standing in prayer (Luke 18:13,14), sitting (Luke 22:14-20), being prostrate (Matthew 26:39), and kneeling (Acts 20: 36.) After the sermon was over “brother Diotrephes” accosted me in the foyer with his finger pointed right in my face and informed me that he “was running this church and that as long as he was it will stand to pray.” Obviously, not because the Lord said so, but because he said so! He was so filled with the “authority complex” that he fancied himself as being the “pope” there, and what he said was all that mattered. I would not want to be in his shoes at the judgment!

So, in my opinion, the church needs to do a lot of rethinking, and quit emphasizing “the *authority* of the elders” and start emphasizing the *work* and *responsibility* of elders. People will follow the elders’ rule when they are the right type of men, who lead by example, but when elders become inflated with a sense of self-importance and with the misconception that they in fact are “the rulers” of the church, then the Cause of Christ will suffer. It is just wrong, pure and simple!

When a preacher finds himself in a situation involving his working with an eldership that is less than what it should be, he indeed has troubles. And, regretfully, they are not likely to get any better. In some congregations only a few “select funerals” will solve the situation. Since there is a reluctance on the part of most congregations to remove unqualified elders, bad situations may continue for years. How very sad! All a young preacher can do, I suppose, is the best he can. If matters become untenable, his only choice is to make a move. But the tragic thing is that does not always solve his problems, because he is liable to find a similar situation wherever he goes. You see, the problem of unqualified, inept leadership is widespread! Brethren, we have our work cut out for us!

H. The reverse problem . . . of working where there are no elders.

About the only thing as bad as working under an unqualified, dominating eldership, is to work at a congregation where there are no elders, and “things are run” by “general business meetings.” This is a different type of problem entirely, but it can be just as devastating because in general business meetings a fellow who is a “spiritual midget” has just as much say as one who is knowledgeable, and very spiritually minded.

Speaking of business meetings, most of the ones I have sat through were pretty much a waste of time. Nine times out of ten about the only things ever discussed pertained to the physical plant (i.e., the church building), or the parking lot, etc. Seldom ever have I heard matters of real spiritual concern discussed. What a sad commentary on the church today . . . that so many brethren are so temporal minded that it is difficult for them to be concerned for, or to concentrate on, spiritual matters even through a business meeting. The church has too often become obsessed with the trivial and mundane, and has lost sight of what Christianity is really all about.

Let me illustrate with just two or three business meetings that I know about personally . . . and believe me, a book could be written just on things that have happened in “business meetings.” Upon entering my work in one large Texas city, I learned that brethren seemed more concerned with the parking lot than anything else. It was the main topic through the first four or five “business meetings” I attended. Finally, they made a decision to paint stripes on the parking lot, so that the parking spaces would be clearly outlined. Of all times they chose to commence the project was in the late afternoon of the first night of a gospel meeting they had asked me to conduct there! As you can imagine, the paint was still wet when people started arriving to attend the meeting. Most people observed what was going on as some of the brethren were still in the parking lot painting when people commenced to drive into the parking lot, so they stepped over the freshly painted stripes. But later arrivals did not see what was going on and stepped on the stripes, got paint on their shoes and tracked it into the building, etc. It was a mess! I was amazed and appalled that brethren could be so unthinking and lacking in common sense.

Another major business meeting I attended, and I say “major” because it was pushed for three weeks prior to its taking place through announcements from the pulpit - (and this was in a rather large [600 plus members] congregation with a very large number of people with high academic degrees, trained professional people, etc.). Anyway, believe it or not, though the congregation had been led to believe some very important matters were to be discussed, the meeting actually consisted of three things which consumed some two hours time of the approximate seventy-five men who were present: (1) a squeak in a class-room air conditioner . . . good for thirty-five minutes of discussion; (2) the paint peeling on the north entrance door to the auditorium . . . another forty minutes of discussion; and (3) who would we get to mow the lawn and take care of the shrubs and flower beds through the summer . . . that discussion lasted from forty-five minutes to an hour! As incredible as it is to believe, it is fact. Those were the *only three things* discussed in a meeting which had been an-

nounced for three weeks prior to its taking place. We had doctors, lawyers, college professors, etc., in attendance, and we spent a little over two hours discussing nothing but trivials! I went home after it was over and told Fran with tears in my eyes, “Honey, can you believe that seventy-five men of such education and training would actually discuss for some two hours things so trivia! and meaningless as a squeak in a class room air conditioner, paint peeling on a door, and who is going to mow the lawn?!” And not one word concerning reaching lost souls with the gospel, or the spiritual well being of the church, or the needs of widows and homeless children, etc. How sad! The next week in the church bulletin I wrote an article entitled “Who Will Mow The Lawn?” It was a very MOVING (Haw!) article because it undoubtedly contributed fuel to a small but determined number in the congregation who wanted to get rid of me. But I felt the article needed to be written. Reuel Lemmons, who was then the editor of the Firm Foundation, saw the article, wrote and asked me to expand on it somewhat, and then ran it in that publication.

I was relating such happenings as the above that take place in “business” meetings one time in a Leadership Workshop I was conducting in a Texas city. I saw a group of brethren who were sitting together sort of snicker as I was telling some of these stories. During the break I told them my curiosity was aroused and I was wondering what they were laughing about. They told me this story about the business meetings in the congregation they were from: it seems the church there built a new building and, upon completion, had a rack of bricks left over. According to them, in the first monthly business meeting the main topic was what to do with the bricks that were left over. Nothing was decided so a month later, at the next meeting, it was the number one topic again. Still no agreement was reached. The third meeting came with “guess what” being high on the agenda? Then the fourth, fifth, sixth, etc., etc. They told me it had been over a year since the building was finished, and the monthly business meeting was still discussing what to do with those bricks!? That is hard to believe but yet, after over forty years of full-time preaching experience, I am not really surprised!

When there are no elders, and the affairs of the church are in the hands of the men’s business meetings, the preacher can be in serious trouble - especially if there are a few of the men who do not much like him and would rather get rid of him. I shall never forget what happened to me in my third work in a town in Oklahoma. To make a long story as short as possible, I will condense this “book of material” as best I can. This happened back in 1958 when racial matters were not yet decided with civil rights legislation. There was an elderly black couple who for years had to travel twenty-five miles to another town to worship with a black congregation that was there because of the prejudice among a strong element of



the white congregation in the town where they lived and where I had gone to preach. Upon learning of this deplorable situation, I first suggested to the men's business meeting that we invite them to start worshipping with us. When that was adamantly vetoed, I suggested we at least try to get a congregation started in the black community by holding a meeting there, so that elderly couple would not have to make that trip to worship God. I finally got the men to agree to that. It was in the summer time and we decided to have an outdoor meeting. We set up lights and pews and a loud speaker system, etc., over in the neighborhood of the black community. We brought in a black preacher named Theodore Gilder (who is dead now) and another black preacher to lead the singing. The meeting started on Monday night and was to go through the following Sunday. It was well supported by the white congregation and well attended by folks in the black community. On Saturday night brother Gilder asked me concerning the plans for the next day, Sunday morning in particular. We had made no plans for Sunday a.m. services at the outdoor meeting because of the heat, but would conclude the meeting there Sunday night. He asked what they (he and the other black preacher, and the elderly black couple) were to do on Sunday a.m. Without any hesitation I said, "Why, you all just come on over and worship with us in the morning." And so they did. I even called on brother Gilder to lead in prayer. I was not prepared for the furor this caused! There were some avid racists in the congregation whom I did not know about. One of them was one of the deacons. As he came out that morning following the service, he doubled up his fist, grabbed me by the coat and was about to strike me as other brethren saw it and pulled him away, but all the while he was calling me a "----- lover," etc. I remember saying to him, "Leroy, with your attitude you just as well forget about going to heaven because you'll never make it!" I shall never forget that. Joining into the fray on Leroy's side was another of like ilk and stripe who glared at me as he went by and said, "I'll never set my foot in this church again, you n----- lover." As you can imagine, I was flabbergasted! I had never experienced anything like that before in my life! I was devastated by such blind prejudice and hatred. Beginning that night about 2 a.m. our phone rang. When I answered by saying, "Hello," I was greeted by a heavy breathing sound, and click! Around the clock for the next three or four days, about every two hours, our phone would ring, and it would be the same type thing. I went to work on a sermon based on Acts 10 which I entitled, "Call No Man Common Or Unclean" and by the next Sunday I - was - ready! I had a recorder (which by today's standards would be crude and antiquated) set up by the pulpit stand, and when I got up to speak, brethren knew something was up. The rumors had flown that week, and the situation was tense. You could have heard a pin drop as I said, "Every word of this sermon is being recorded so there can be no question later as to what was said. Now, brethren, listen to me. If you never hear the truth again in all your lives on this

subject, you are going to hear it this morning!" For the next forty-five minutes I preached the most hard-hitting sermon of which I am capable on racial prejudice and hatred, spelling things out in unmistakable terms. When it was concluded a goodly number of people came forward, penitent and crying, seeking God's forgiveness, but the hard core racists set out to get me! By the next Sunday night, just as the service was about to begin, a "surprise to me" business meeting was called for immediately following the services and I knew instantly what was up . . . they were going to try to fire me. Sure enough, that is what the meeting was about. They asked me to leave the meeting but I said, "No. I know what you are up to, but you will have to look me in the face, in the light of the truth I preached, when you do it." One of the racists brethren said, "Suit yourself." So I stayed. There were twenty-seven men there besides me. The whole matter was heatedly discussed, and even two physical brothers, one for me and one against me, nearly came to blows, literally, because of the stirred emotions. When the vote was taken to fire me, thirteen men stood up to fire me. But then, "How many want him to stay?" Seventeen stood up to keep me! I had won the firing issue by four votes! Of course we (Fran and I) were broken hearted over the whole ugly scene. The thirteen who wanted to fire me, and their families and friends, treated us like we had the plague from then on and made life so miserable that about three months later I resigned and left.

Maybe this will help you to understand why I do not really care much for "business meetings." Most of them I have attended have either been about mundane and trivial matters, or have been hurtful experiences for me or others. I would rather just concentrate on doing my work as a gospel preacher and leave the business meetings to others who seem to relish them so.

"But," you ask, "what if I am with a congregation that expects the preacher to attend the business meetings?" My advice would be to go ahead and go, but be careful what you say. Be a good listener and wield what influence you can for right and truth. But, be prepared to be considerably frustrated at times, and even hurt at times, because both most likely will happen along the way. As I have said several times in this material, these things are brought out for your consideration not to dissolution you but to help you face reality.

Finally, on this point, I want to say that improvements have been made in most congregations in recent years that have helped to avoid angered confrontation in business meetings, and they tend a little bit more toward things of importance than once they did. We have made some progress but, again, do not expect it to have been completely turned around.

How well a preacher fares in a work where there are no elders depends entirely on the conditions that prevail there. If the brethren happen to be very amiable in their nature, and there are no deep-seated problems, chances are that a pleasant and profitable work can be had. Otherwise, it can be a nightmare, especially for a young preacher.

I. The problem of brethren who “let you down.”

Every preacher experiences at one time or another those things which hurt him deeply. But perhaps the biggest disappointment of all is when a brother (or brothers) in whom he has placed a lot of confidence, default in one way or another. When a brother that the preacher thought surely he could depend on, lets him down, the skies can indeed “turn gray and the clouds hang low.” The let downs can come in all different shapes, forms, and fashions: (1) Maybe it is demonstrated in some brother’s lack of Bible knowledge. Perhaps “some matter comes up” on some point of doctrinal truth or principle, and you “take your stand and speak up,” looking to the brother for supportive affirmation, but it is not forthcoming. You discover, upon more discussion, this brother’s woeful lack of Bible knowledge and understanding. You are shocked, and amazed. (2) Or perhaps some brother(s) takes a position without any Biblical basis and you have to oppose him (them). Some may want to “bind their opinions” as if they are God’s law. For an example, when I was preaching in Dallas, the congregation was growing and overflowing the facilities. And the brethren decided we desperately needed to build a new educational wing onto the existing plant and the majority proposed that it include a “multi-purpose room” with a kitchen where the church could have get-togethers and meals from time to time. Much to my surprise a minority of the brethren (including one of the elders, who was a friend, along with some others who were too) opposed it vehemently, citing 1 Corinthians 11:22 in support of their view. I was in the meeting, but had not said anything. When the Scripture was cited and the brethren had a rather strong exchange of viewpoints, they turned to me and asked for my understanding of the matter. I simply said that Paul was dealing with the abuse of the Lord’s supper in that context and that I did not believe the passage lent any support to a “prohibition” of eating a meal together in the church building . . . that church buildings are not even mentioned in the New Testament in the first place, and that we should be careful to use them wisely but should refrain from being too adamant about binding personal opinions concerning their use upon other brethren. To make a long story short, the group of brethren who were so opposed to eating in the church building, after stirring up much trouble over the matter over the next few weeks, all left. It dealt a stupefying blow to the whole “spirit of things” from which the congregation never fully recovered. Several years after I left, the brethren chose to merge with another congregation and sold the

property. But I shall never forget the incident, and how those brethren tried to bind their opinion as if it were God's law, and in essence, split the church. Personally, it was a crushing experience, as I saw first hand how unreasonable some brethren can be, and hard-headed, and willing to split the church over such a ridiculous "issue." I can remember feeling terribly let down by some of those I thought knew better. (3) The young preacher is often let down in his spirit by brethren who fail to show any appreciation for his efforts. All of us are human beings, and have a need to be recognized and appreciated for achievements and good work. O how far a little appreciation, recognition, and commendation can go in making church work pleasant! But more often than not it is seldom forthcoming, if at all. It just never seems to dawn on a lot of people to express positive feelings they may have. But it seems those who think negatively are very vocal. What is the solution? The young preacher must learn to accept people "where they are" and "as they are," and word from there, realizing his true reward will come ultimately (see James 1:12 and 2 Timothy 4:6-8). Though brethren are sometimes unpredictable, and will let you down in given situations, remember that the Lord remains constant and true, and is our abiding Rock of refuge (cf. Psalms 18:1-2:46:1-7).

J. The problem of the "vocal 4%."

In most every congregation there seems to that small element that I choose to call "the vocal 4%." These people do more harm to the progress and furtherance of the Lord's work than the other 96% can counter-act. How frustrating and disgusting that there are such people but, nonetheless, there are! And, regrettably, they manage to "torpedo" the spirit of so many others. The vocal 4% are the negative minded, disgruntled, unhappy, complaining, murmuring, griping type of people that seem to always find something to be harping about. One of their favorite smoke screens behind which to hide is the employment of the terminology, "they are saying this" or "they are saying that." The vocal 4%, for example, will come to the elders to criticize the preacher, with the ambiguous, "People are talking and 'they' think brother Doe preaches too long and too hard, and 'they' don't like it." The vocal 4% make it sound as if almost everyone feels that way. And, all too often, the elders believe them and reprimand the preacher. Through the years how I have longed for elders with the moral fortitude and good sense to put the vocal 4% on the spot by asking, "Who are these 'they' you keep talking about?" If such were to happen the reply would probably be, "well, er, ah, I'd rather not name names." To which good elders should respond, "You have made some pretty strong criticisms, implying a rather large number of people feel a certain way, and now we want to know exactly whom you are talking about." That would silence the vocal 4% I guarantee you, but seldom, if ever, will you see them called into question. Shame, shame. It is long over due that

the trouble makers be disciplined instead of the preacher being fired! "They're saying," or "they are upset" really means that it is what the vocal 4% are saying, and that is how the vocal 4% are feeling . . . no one else!

One thing we learn along life's way is to put little credence in what "they" say. Tongues too often distortion convey under the guise of what "they" say. Lots of good works have met delay by a word here and there from what "they" say. Many a life is marred each day with sly innuendos of what "they" say! So please reflect on this matter today and believe most nothing of what "they" say. Let us seek truth, and evil lips stay, never pausing to listen to what "they" say! It reminds me of the oft-repeated story of the farmer who came into town to talk to the manager of one of the local restaurants about putting frog legs on his menu as a regular item. The manager liked the idea, but was dubious as to the farmer being able to supply regularly what he would need to make it a regular menu offering. "Farmer Jones, are you sure you have enough frogs to keep me supplied every day?" Came the reply, "Oh yes, I assure you I have plenty of frogs on my place." So the deal was made. The next morning, the farmer came into the restaurant with not even enough frog legs for the noon day customers. "Why, farmer Jones, this is not a sufficient number of frog legs for noon, much less for tonight too. Why didn't you bring more?" Farmer Jones had to sheepishly and apologetically admit that these were all the frogs he could find, saying, "From the house it sounded like there were hundreds and hundreds of frogs on those two ponds of mine, but when I went down there to get some, these were all I could find." And that is the way it is with the vocal 4%! They can make it sound as if almost everyone feels negative about the work and want to get rid of the preacher, or whatever but, upon analysis, I guarantee you that it will be just a handful! Why, oh why do elders allow a few disgruntled "toad frogs" torpedo things that are going so well? I will never understand it. Why listen to the vocal 4% instead of listening to the 96% who are positive about the work, love the preacher, etc.? I want to shout to congregations everywhere, "Wake up, brethren, and let justice and right prevail! Too long have we allowed the vocal 4% to thwart good works, and drive away good gospel preachers. It is time to put a stop to it!"

- K. The problem of running into existing church problems such as internal strife.

As has been pointed out clearly, there is no utopia on this earth. And that is true with the church also. There is no perfect congregation. Wherever there are people there will always be problems. There is no way we could cover in this material the nature of all the problems a preacher might encounter in the local church situations in which he may find himself. Usually, however, the causative factors are the same: jealousy, envy,

selfishness, stubbornness, hatefulness, gossip, backbiting, murmuring, sowing discord, etc. etc. These things cause church problems, and engendered strife among brethren. (For your own studies, look at such passages of Scripture as the following: Proverbs 6:16-19; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Colossians 3:5-10; Titus 3:3; 1 John 3:12; James 4:1-11; 5:9; Jude 16-19; Ephesians 4:31,32; 1 Peter 3:8,9; etc. etc.)

What should the young preacher do, when he happens to find himself in the midst of a congregation in strife? Well, one thing is do not take “personality” sides! The one thing the preacher should really try to determine is what is right in this matter? What would the Lord have me to do? Where would He have me stand? How is the best way to go about it for the good of the Cause of Christ? If the strife has emerged because of personality clashes it would be wise to preach a lot of sermons on brotherly love, the evil nature of bad attitudes, and of malicious gossip and backbiting, and the fine art of brethren learning how to get along with one another for the ongoing of the Cause of Christ. There is power in the word. Show from the Scriptures that strife among brethren is contrary to God’s will, and that there is a judgment day coming, etc. That is about all you can do.

L. The problem of extremism in the church.

After years of study and experience, I am convinced that extremism is detrimental to the Cause of Christ. It leads to alienation among brethren, and can result in serious division in the church. Presently (as of this writing date . . . December 8, 1994), the brotherhood is ruptured and divided. Surely all of us who really care are broken hearted over it. What has happened? What has brought us to this state of affairs? As I see it, here is what has happened since I have been preaching (dating back to June of 1954).

1. Antiism . . . started with the “no Bible classes” and “one container” factions, but became more disturbing to the unity of the church in the form of the “non-cooperation” viewpoint. The spirit of antiism really hurt the church, in my judgment, and wherever it is found today the results are basically the same. It was, and is, a legalistic, nit-picking, agin’ it type of approach to Christianity and the mission of the church.

And many who did not go so far as to embrace all the anti-positions, still imbibed the same kind of negative attitudes that tend to stifle the church, and choke out the very essence of what Christianity should be in all our lives. The spirit of antiism will smother and kill the church. It is wrong!

2. Rank liberalism. Emerging from the struggles with antiism came liberalism; in fact, I think it really got started in reaction to antiism. While the seeds of this movement were no doubt among us long before the mid 1960s, it was not until then that it started being expressed and things were said and written which alarmed all brethren who love the old paths of truth. One of the first liberal errors to come out into the open pertained to the work of the Holy Spirit, and claims were made among some brethren of miraculous leadings, of tongue speaking, etc. This seemed to be the launching pad for all sorts of “to the left” ideas. Many brethren quit preaching the old Jerusalem gospel and ceased being definitive about the one church, one faith, and one baptism of Ephesians 4:4,5. Then along came the self-designated “change agents” with a “we’re going to change the church” agenda, advocating the new hermeneutics, denominationalizing the teaching and practice of the congregations under their influence, clamoring for unacceptable changes in worship, the roles of leadership for women, etc. This “to the left” extreme is the singular most threatening danger the church has faced in my lifetime. It is so very wrong!
3. Out of reaction to liberalism has come still another concern to me. First, let me make it clear that I am unalterably opposed to the liberalism that is besetting the church today. I believe it must be opposed but, in so doing, I believe we must try to keep the church together if at all possible instead of driving more wedges between brethren and creating irreparable damage. Granted, there may come a time when there will be no choice but to see an open division come but, to my mind, that should be a last resort option. At this point in time, I still hold out hope that somehow, through strong teaching and preaching, we can still stem the tide and salvage the presently fractured situation. The concern is with an attitude which I have seen manifested among some brethren who are arrayed in opposition to the liberalism described above under #2. Doctrinally I agree with these brethren and consider myself on the same side of the fight. But I cannot subscribe to what seems to me a “circle drawing mind set” that I see in the attitudes of some. Whenever brethren reach a point of viewing most everyone else that chooses not to be in “their camp” with suspicion, and who “read off” those who do not dot every “i” nor cross every “t” precisely like they think it should be done, then that attitude has gone too far the other way for me to abide. I think this is taking what is a right position of doctrine to an extreme and wrong position of attitude, and I believe it is wrong and hurtful to the Cause.

As stated in the opening paragraph under Problem L, so much could be said on this matter. In fact, an entire, large book could be written on it. But I will allow the above comments to suffice. A closely related problem follows.

- M. The problem of the young preacher keeping his equilibrium or balance in the midst of all the furor.

In my considered judgement (and something every gospel preacher needs to also consider) that it is of vital importance each of us determines to remain balanced, reasonable, and sensible to the best of our abilities. It is so easy for one to go off on a tangent and become a hobby-rider if he is not very careful. There are so many “isms,” errors, and sins in this wicked old world, that we could pick out one and spend all our time fighting that one thing. For example, it would be easy for me to become obsessed with fighting Catholicism to the degree that I could lose sight of the need to try to reach out to the lost with the gospel. The system called Catholicism has always been a pet peeve to me. But so has Mormonism. So has the absurd theory of evolution. So have the immoral practices of homosexuality and abortion. And believe me, I try to fight all of them as I have opportunity. But for me to “go to seed” against any particular one to the neglect of my primary mission of taking the glorious light of truth and salvation to spiritually starved hearts would be to become unbalanced.

The same principle is true with disturbing issues facing the church. For an example, due to being personally agitated in times past by some in the “one-cup” camp, it would be possible for me to divert myself into an all-out exposé of that position. But in doing so, I would have to sacrifice valuable time and energy that could be devoted to other matters more important. That brings me to the issue we call “liberalism.”

If I should allow that one matter to obsess me, which I could easily do because of my strong feelings against it, I would forfeit valuable time and energy in promulgating positive truth to others. Do I oppose liberalism? Yes! But I also oppose Catholicism, and Mormonism, and evolution, and the one-container notion, etc. etc. etc. etc. I believe the greater amount of good can be accomplished by my remaining balanced. Opposing things that are wrong to the best of my ability as I have opportunity, but also doing the positive work of preaching and teaching good news! And what I am saying in a personal vein, I hope will motivate you to reflect upon your own direction of emphasis, and resolve also to remain balanced.

Good advice to a hunter would be, “Do not go chasing off after a rabbit when there is an elk in the meadow ahead.” In like manner, a gospel preacher should not be diverted from his main mission of proclaiming the



glad tidings of the gospel to go in a “one way” vendetta against antiism or liberalism or any other “ism.” Keep your equilibrium! Remain balanced! Do not go off on a tangent! Do not join yourself into a warring camp with a “circle-drawing mind set” that sets all others at naught. Sure, stand for right and truth in all your teaching and preaching, and against what is not right or true. But to become a hobby-rider, or obsessed with one “target” will be to limit your effectiveness as a gospel preacher, in my judgment.

N. The problem of weddings and funerals.

When a young man starts out in preaching, these two responsibilities can loom as major hurdles. Either can be a difficult chore. Again, so much could be said, but let me condense my comments as best I can:

1. Weddings. Before being called upon to perform a wedding, the young preacher should probably talk with two or three experienced preachers about how they go about conducting a wedding. Most preachers will be glad to take a little time and explain what they do, give you an outline of a suggested ceremony, etc. Once you get this information, go over it in your mind, study it, etc., so when you are called on to perform a wedding, as you invariably will be, you will be ready. Of course, there is no tutor like experience, so you will learn how best to do it. But a little help does not hurt anything.

If you are called on for a wedding, the first thing you need to do is meet with the couple planning to be married and talk with them. You need to talk with them about the importance of the marriage relationship, and that it is a life-long commitment, etc. You must learn if either has been married before, instructing them in Biblical teaching concerning marriage. If either has been divorced, you must make it plain to them what the Bible teaches on the subject. A number of gospel preachers I know will not perform a marriage ceremony for any divorced person under any circumstances. As for me if a person assures me, after I have discussed all the Scriptures with them which pertain to the subject, that a Scriptural divorce was obtained, then I believe such a person is free to marry again (Matthew 19:9). The same passage that teaches remarriage for the guilty is wrong, also teaches that remarriage for the innocent is allowed. However, if there is any doubt concerning either's qualifications to marry, I do not hesitate to tell them that in the light of Scripture I cannot have any part in it.

But having determined that you can conscientiously perform the ceremony of a couple asking you to do so, two or three counseling sessions with them may be in order. However, this can be very

awkward for a young preacher, especially when questions of a sexual nature may emerge, and the couple he is talking with are as old as he, or older. Therefore, be discreet, and be careful not to get into a discussion that may be better left alone. After a preacher attains an older age, he is in better position to discuss with younger couples some of these more sensitive areas.

Find out what they want for the ceremony. Go over it with them in detail. Make sure you are on the same frequency. Usually, for larger weddings, the floral people, or someone of the couple's choosing acts as a wedding coordinator. If so, go along with the flow, making whatever suggestions you feel would help. For smaller weddings, the whole rehearsal may well fall on your shoulders. Time and experience will teach you how its done. Remember, it is not your wedding. It is theirs. As long as what they want to do in the wedding ceremony does not violate any accepted procedure or Scriptural teaching, weddings can vary considerably and still be okay. I try to work with the couple closely, assuring them that we want to have a wedding that is their dream. Especially so, it is the bride's day! Help them to make it special!

Be prepared for any eventuality to happen at weddings. I shall never forget one time when I was to conduct a wedding for a couple - just a small (about 50 people) gathering of friends and loved ones there. Just as I was about to start the ceremony the young couple had a whispered exchange between themselves and she commenced crying. I softly enquired if anything was wrong? He leaned forward and said, "I can't go through with it." I simply said to those gathered that "a matter has arisen that needs tending," and if they would be so kind as to patiently remain seated for a few minutes we would be back. So the couple and I walked into the church office and I asked, "What is going on?" He then explained he was not sure, etc. They asked to be able to converse alone for a few minutes so I stepped out into the foyer. About five minutes later they called me back into the office and informed they had decided to go on with the wedding. By then, I had thought things over myself. I said something like this, "Marriage is far too important, being a lifelong commitment, to enter into it without both being sure and certain. I think you should postpone your plans at least six weeks, if not longer, and really think things through, etc. etc. etc." To that they agreed, and the wedding party was so informed. I then told them of a gospel preacher friend of mine who specialized in marriage counseling, giving them his name and address. They wanted me to call him then to set up an appointment, so I did. I learned the next day from my friend that that very

night, after he and his wife were in bed, the young couple came by, saying they had made up their minds and wanted to get married right then and there. Armed with the information I had given him he too, after counseling with them for an hour or so, persuaded them to wait. He and his wife went back to bed. About 2 a.m. his door bell rang and it was the young couple, wanting to get married. He said, "Come on in and let's get it over with!" Whereupon, he got his wife out of bed to witness it and, with their pajamas on, my preacher friend performed the ceremony. The next day he called me and told me about it, and told me they gave him ten dollars. I laughed and said, "Part of that is mine you know, as I should get a referral fee." He replied, "Not on your life! I earned every penny of it!"

I could tell you many more stories of weddings. In Austin one time a big formal affair to be held at a denominational church building. It was already a very tense affair because the mother of the bride and the mother of groom did not like each other at all, and both were trying to "run things." The rehearsal the night before had almost resulted in a brawl. But here it was Saturday afternoon . . . the time for the wedding came, and there was no groom! The building was filled with five-hundred people or so, many of them socially elite. We waited and waited. Frantic calls were made trying to locate the whereabouts of the groom to be. Behind the scenes things were about to get out of hand. I had to inform those gathered of matters beyond our control had caused a delay and asked for their patience. A full hour after the wedding was supposed to have begun, the groom rushed into the back part of the building where the wedding party was about in a fight. The bride to be was crying, the mothers were angry. We learned he had gone to see Texas play football with some of his buddies as a "last fling," and got caught in an impossible traffic jam. The wedding went on but believe me, that marriage got off to a shaky start!

Then there was the time I gave the bride's ring to the groom, and over the microphone attached to me to a packed building said, "Jim, will you take this ring and place it on her finger and repeat after me these words . . ." Everybody in the auditorium snickered and I knew I had said something wrong but had no idea what it was. For weeks the brethren kidded me asking, "Do you reckon Jim ever got that ring on her finger?" Haw!

2. Funerals are a whole different set of circumstances. Whenever the preacher receives a death message, the first thing he needs to do is go wherever the family is gathered. It may still be at the hospital,

at the family home, or at the funeral home. Wherever, upon learning the location, go there. Let them know you care and that you will help them anyway they desire. If the deceased was a faithful Christian speak words of comfort and assurance to the family members as best you can. After a brief but comforting visit with the family you can choose to stay around for awhile sort of in the background, or depart. Somewhat later make a return visit, and then again after you have been informed as to the arrangements for the funeral.

I always work closely, first with the family, desirous of including whatever Scripture, poem, or remembrance they want brought out in the service; helping them to arrange for the singers and songs, checking the obituary for correctness, pronunciations, etc. Also, I double check with the funeral director, going over with him the planned procedure for the service and coordinating with anyone else the family has asked to assist in the service, etc. After the service is concluded as far as your sermon is concerned, you will come down from the pulpit platform and stand about two feet or so from the head of the casket. (If you only assisted, let the conducting preacher stand in that place, and you next to him.) People who pass by may shake your hand, or not, depending on them. I never do more than simply shake back and nod in acknowledgment of their presence. When it is time for the family to come by, you assist as you perceive you are needed and wanted. In some cases, it is better to just stand where you are. If you know the people well, it is generally better to move close to them, put your arms around them as is comfortable and natural to the situation, and console them with soft spoken words.

As with weddings, I have had all sorts of things happen at funerals . . . like the large lady who fainted while viewing the body in the casket and I had to catch her to keep her from hitting the floor. Or the funeral of a young man who committed suicide. His family blamed it on the wife and her family, and they blamed it on his family. Her family were members of the church and his family were Baptists. The funeral was in our building and it was filled and overflowing. You could have cut the tension with a knife. Or the time I was to assist another preacher at a large funeral. The time came to start and he did not show up. The funeral home was filled and all I had been asked to do was to read the obituary and lead a prayer . . . the other man was to preach the service. After delaying for about ten minutes, the funeral director told me we just had to commence so, with no preparation or notes at all, I had to conduct the service. The other preacher showed up as I was concluding.

He made a few remarks and closed with a prayer. Or the time when my phone rang and a frantic voice told me something terrible was happening at the home of some of our members and that I needed to get there as fast as I could. I hurried over to find sheriff's cars, police cars, an ambulance, and the whole neighborhood gathered. One of our members had tried to kill his wife, but she escaped him by the skin of her teeth. He then took a shotgun, put it to his chest and pulled the trigger. The whole community was in emotional shock and the building was packed the day I preached that funeral. (I have also preached three other suicides in addition to the two mentioned above). One was a friend of mine who had a "high up" job with a Texas utility company, but also preached nearly every Sunday some place. He wrote out exactly what he wanted done, who to preach the service, etc., and then blew his brains out. Boy, that was a rough one.)

By the way, the man who assisted me that day died about a year later, and I helped with his funeral, too. I have preached three "double-funerals." One was a mother and her grown daughter, killed in a grinding head-on collision just about five miles from the church building. I preached a young man's funeral who was killed in a car wreck in the late 1960s, during the "hippy movement." The building was filled with hippies. At least they heard one gospel sermon in their lives!

I could relate many other incidents. But the main thing for you to remember is this: be attentive to the needs of the family as best you can. Cooperate with the funeral director, but remember, you are "the boss" as far as the conducting of the funeral is concerned. Work with him but, in case of a conflict do not hesitate to stand up and state how things are to be done.

O. Counseling problems.

The demand for preachers to be counselors has grown by leaps and bounds. Some preachers jump at this sort of thing, but I am not among them. I know one man who gave up preaching in order to become a full time counselor. Not me. The Lord did not commission us to be counselors, but to preach the gospel! Too, a preacher has to be doubly careful in this day and time because of all the malpractice law-suits. Things are not like they used to be in these matters. So a word of caution: be careful in matters of counseling. I learned that in complex situations to refer people to the elders, who are the shepherds of the flock.

Every preacher is called on to do some of it, no doubt. Believe me, I have done my share! But I have seen many people have their lives in such messes that it would require expertise far beyond what I can offer to unravel things, if indeed they can be unraveled. I am not a counselor, but a preacher. I can tell people what the Bible teaches on the conduct of one's life. And, of course, that is what people need to know. If folks did what God said to do they would not get themselves into such messes in the first place. But once they do, I will help them to the extent I can, and then send them on to the elders, or to professional help if the situation calls for it. You will be wise to do the same.

## **II. CONCLUDING REMARKS ABOUT THE PROBLEMS.**

It was impossible to cover these as thoroughly as I would like to have done. Time just did not allow. Someday maybe, I will be able to do a full length book on this whole topic of the "Life And Work Of A Gospel Preacher." But for now, this will have to do. Because of condensing my thoughts so much I was not able to fully express myself on every facet of matters discussed. Therefore, it is certainly possible that readers may find something or another with which they disagree. Perhaps if we could discuss it, whatever it might be, there would be little if any disagreement. Actually, I gleaned so much insight into these matters back in 1963 when I sent out nearly two hundred questionnaires to gospel preachers throughout the brotherhood. Some one hundred seventy of them were returned with all sorts of good information. I assimilated these responses and along with my own thinking, have shared this material with young preachers and with anyone else who might be interested. Naturally, there are other problems that could be mentioned that we did not cover. But I tried to give the fifteen most often mentioned "problems of a personal nature" for young preachers, and the fifteen most often mentioned "church work problems" of young preachers. My sincere prayer is that this material will be helpful to the latter who are very dear to my heart.

This material is not copyrighted. However, if it may be used to the good of the Cause and to the glory of God that is fine with me. Christian ethics would teach us though, not to plagiarize but to give credit where credit is due. Please do not take anything out of context if you choose to cite something I have written here. If you have any doubt as to what I meant in a certain place, call or write me and I will be happy to clarify myself. To those who love the Lord, His church and His truth, may I bid you Godspeed in all of your endeavors for good and truth, and urge you to "preach the word!"

## **PROBLEMS FACED BY GOSPEL PREACHERS**

### **PART IV - ADVICE TO GOSPEL PREACHERS (ESPECIALLY BEGINNERS)**

NOTE - The following points of advice were gleaned from many sources from the questionnaires referred to above, from my own experience, and from conversations with hundreds of gospel preachers over the 40 plus years of my labors in the gospel. These points of advice are not necessarily given in order of importance though I do believe #1 is exactly where it ought to be . . . #1!

1. Realize that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Master. Strive to serve Him and please Him in all that you do and your life will be blessed in so doing.
2. Be happy, positive, and optimistic - remember, God is on His throne! (See Revelation 4).
3. Pray often . . . sincerely, humbly, and fervently. God will help you!
4. Work hard and long, with fervency of spirit. This will give you inward satisfaction and will negate any accusations being made that you are "a lazy preacher."
5. Do not neglect your family!
6. Study the Bible, and preach the Bible! Use lots of Scriptures in your preaching, but be sure you use them properly and in context. We must curb liberalism by calling people back to the Bible!
7. Do the very best you can to do what is right, and then realize that is all you can do. Remember, anybody can do what is wrong but it takes a real man to do what is right! You do what is right. If others choose to do wrong, you cannot help it. You cannot control other people's lives. Do not fret over what you can not control.
8. Love everybody, including your enemies. Do not retaliate evil for evil (Romans 12:19-21).
9. Crucify self! (Galatians 2:20; 6:14.)
10. Squelch vain ambition for position, power, fame, praise, etc. (See Galatians 1:10, and Colossians 1:18.)
11. Cultivate a genuine interest in people, and especially in their souls. Be willing to spend and be spent for others (2 Corinthians 12:15). Your greatest happiness will be found in living for others! Someone prayed in poetic fashion: "Others

Lord, yes others . . . Let this my motto be; help me to live for others, that I might live for thee.”

12. It is probably best to begin in a relatively small, and not so demanding work . This will give you time for more study and development, and you can gain the experience you will need for future challenges.
13. Do not try to imitate any other preacher or idolize any man. You can *admire* others, and profit by observing them and learning from them, but be your own man . . . be yourself. Study and think for yourself. You have got a mind . . . use it!
14. As a matter of practicality and prudence, it would be wise for a young preacher to know how to do something other than preach . . . just in case. Think of it somewhat like “a security blanket.” This would greatly relieve the pressure and anxiety over your “job,” knowing that if worse came to worse, you could always earn a living for your family. This also will help you to never compromise truth!
15. Read and digest the teachings of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Do this every once in awhile. It will help you in seeing yourself as you ought . . . as a gospel preacher with a mission given by the Lord.
16. Work at improving your own character . . . increase humility, kindness, understanding, patience, self-control, service to others, etc. Determine to be honest and truthful. Be responsible. None of us ever reach a point where we no longer need to grow (2 Peter 3:18).
17. Schedule your time wisely and try to stick with it.
18. Acquire all the knowledge you can absorb and pray for the wisdom to use it properly.
19. Try your best to not become discouraged. This is a challenge, I know, but really try!
20. Remember, you cannot get everybody to live right all at the same time. You are to preach the word, not police the word.
21. Keep your word. Let your word be your bond. Do not make promises you cannot keep.
22. Avoid being dogmatic. Do not go around with a “know it all” attitude. That is not to say you should not be confident of truth and be willing to stand up for it. Just be careful as to your attitude.



23. Pay your debts promptly. Do not default in this for your own sake, and for the sake of the church.
24. Endeavor to work as closely and as harmoniously as you can with the shepherds of the flock.
25. Stay in constant contact with your elders. Keep the lines of communication open between them and you. Clear things through them, even if they seem incidental. This will make for a good relationship.
26. Do not gossip! Number one, it is wrong; number two, it will backfire on you every time!
27. Be impartial - do not "play favorites."
28. Do not believe all the compliments you hear about yourself. Beware of those who flatter you overmuch. Remain humble! (1 Peter 5:5,6.)
29. Accept the fact you will be criticized - many times unfairly and unjustly. It goes with the territory.
30. Learn to be thick skinned without being calloused of heart.
31. Be slow to speak your mind. Control your temper!
32. Approach drastic changes slowly and carefully. Do not do or say anything you will regret later! Learn to think things through before you speak or act.
33. Beware of those who "eat you up" when you first begin a work. At least be aware they could later turn on you. Be careful not to confide too much in anyone until you know them very well indeed!
34. Do not get "too thick" with anyone in the congregation - elders or members. Be friendly and nice to all.
35. Do not be surprised at anything that may happen! In church work you never know from day today!
36. Keep your thinking and your preaching balanced. Do not go off on tangents!
37. Love the Lord, His church, and His truth above all else. Next, love your family best.
38. Practice what you preach! Live for Jesus every day, sincerely and earnestly.

39. Keep your eye on the goal, that sweet home of the soul! (See Philippians 3:13,14; 1 Peter 1:3,4.)
40. Every once in awhile reread the material in this book. Hopefully, it will do you good.

**NEVER GIVE UP! NEVER GIVE UP! NEVER GIVE UP!**

“Dear Father in heaven, help those of us who are trying to be preachers of the gospel to always preach only the truth, in love and kindness, yet with boldness. May we always be motivated by love for Thee, and Thy Son Jesus, and the souls of the lost. Help us to do all the good we possibly can while we live on this earth, and be merciful, we pray, when we fall short of Thy glory through human frailties. We love Thee, dear Father, and we need Thee every hour of every day . . . in Jesus precious name, amen.”

Maxie B. Boren