

The Ministry, The Church and Fellowship

Written by Lee Hanks

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There are many gifts in the church that should be encouraged. We visit churches where a number of the brethren give good talks, exhort and offer public prayer. This is an evidence of life and each member is trying to bear his part. These gifts should all be encouraged. We have served churches where a goodly number of the male members would take part in the services. They all seemed to want to bear their part in worshipping and praising God who had done so much for them. To put such gifts into the pulpit and try to make preachers of them would perhaps destroy their usefulness. There is a use for each member in the body. The hand, foot, eye, ear, etc.; but we should not try to put any member out of its place. God calls and qualifies His ministers. Preaching is teaching. For one to offer prayer, exhort and tell his experience without expounding the doctrine and fundamental principles of our people is no sign that he is a preacher. Such gifts are necessary and should be appreciated, but do not try to make preachers of them. If one is called to the ministry, he will search the hearts of God's people and the church will find it out. One may have a flow of language and say many good things he has learned from others, but it does not reach the hearts of God's children.

There are many sore afflictions experienced by a true preacher causing him to feel that all these things are against him, but he is being tried in the furnace of affliction to comfort others with the comfort wherewith he is comforted of God. Day will break into his soul again. One strong evidence of a true gospel preacher is humility, feeling his weakness and unworthiness of such a sacred vocation. he does not feel like bragging on himself, or of his ability, and when the brethren express their appreciation of him, it makes him feel unworthy. It is dangerous for one to become exalted. He that exalteth himself shall be abased. A preacher should not try to boss his brethren. He should remember he belongs to the church and not the church to him. He is a servant and not a lord. He should not seek promotion and want to supplant his brethren. If one is called of God his gift will make room for him. He should not be jealous of others. Jealousy is as cruel as the grave. He should be courteous to all his brethren in the ministry and prefer them before himself. He should preach the gospel because he loves it and loves the hearers. While a church should love and appreciate their pastor and other preachers and should administer to them, but filthy lucre should not be the motive that prompts the preacher. It is good for every preacher, when able, to do some work for example's sake. The preacher should preach by his daily walk. He should be a lover of good men and not associate with drunkards, gamblers, fornicators, profane swearers, and never drink with the drunken or encourage moonshiners or other lawbreakers. It would be a disgrace to go to the sacred desk with the smell of whisky on his breath. A preacher that becomes intoxicated should be excluded,--not tell others how to live when he lives an ungodly life himself. He should not engage in foolish jestings or smutty jokes. A preacher without good influence is a curse instead of a blessing. He should study the qualifications of a true minister and should walk accordingly. Much is expected of him. He

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should not be quarrelsome and a meddler or dictator. He should study the doctrine and preach it as his experience and the Bible teachers.

The church needs to be established on the fundamental principles of the doctrine and practice of our people. If the preacher does not educate his flock on these things they will go into heresies. Don't dwell on confusing experiences or church trouble. Don't preach the devil,--preach Jesus in His fullness. This will comfort the little children and encourage them in love and good works. He should ever remember that life precedes action and that we are all poor and needy and need God's graces continually. His life should be prayerful--begging the Lord for guidance. Don't waste time trying to prove that Cain, Ishmael, Esau, the generation of vipers, the goats and Judas were the children of God. Jesus says to such, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and his lusts ye will do.' We know a tree by the fruit it bears. 'By their fruits ye shall know them'. There is an eternal heaven for the righteous and an everlasting punishment for the wicked,--two classes spoken to all through the Bible. Never try to make a parable mean too much,--just the lesson taught--that is enough. Don't spread predestination any farther than the Bible teaches. All of our people will accept it like Paul taught it. That will never divide. It is good always to use Bible terms on controverted points. We should beware of hobbies,--dwelling on one point all the time. The church needs all that is taught on all Bible truths. We should be careful in the execution of discipline. The design of discipline is to save, not destroy. The church is not a slaughter house to destroy good brethren. If reports are circulated on a member, we should go to him with it in love and tell him of it. He may be able to prove his innocence. Never exclude a member without a hearing. 'Doth our law condemn any man before it hears him?' (Joh 5:47). The heathen Romans would not condemn one to death until the accused and accuser were brought face to face and let him answer for himself. The laws of our country demand a fair trial even if one is guilty of crime, and gives him the right to defend himself (Ac 25:16). If a member makes a mistake his own church is the one to deal with him. When the fornicator (1Co 5:1-13) was excluded it was by his own church. Paul could not exclude him. It was the church at Corinth (2Co 2:1-17) that restored him. Ephesus Church could not deal with him. We need to teach repentance. If a member, or church or an association does wrong, when they repent, forgive them. It is not so much what they did in the past, but are they living right now?

And we should remember that there are different phases of gospel truth taught,--there is an inorganic and an organic church; a faith implanted in the soul in the new birth and a gospel faith that we should earnestly contend for. Some depart from this faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. Also there are different phases of salvation. We were saved in the purpose of God (not actually), but He purposed to save them before the world began. Jesus Christ came here to save sinners. He meritoriously saved them (Mt 1:21; 1Ti 1:15; 2Ti 1:9; Heb 1:3; 10:14); they are experimentally and manifestly saved in the new birth; baptism saves, not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God. We are saved by the Lord from darkness and despondency, saved providentially from afflictions, famines, pestilence; and we praise God for every blessing. We are poor beggars and in his great deliverances of us, we do not feel that we merit it. All the blessings are in Jesus. Without Him I have no hope. Let me have the loving fellowship of my brethren. Let us love each other well enough to talk and exchange views without bars of non-fellowship against each other. If you are stronger than I am, please bear with my weakness and pray for me. Submitted in love.

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