

Seven Kindly Don'ts for the Schools of Preaching

The concept for schools to train men to preach the gospel of Christ has been around now for decades. I am a former student and graduate of one of these schools. A number of the schools have done much good in the years gone by. However, over time, because the schools are the institutions of men, and men conduct them, problems have a tendency to arise, and to one degree or another cause damage to the work and reputation of the respective school. Some of the schools have even gone into complete apostasy. Recognizing past contributions of several of the schools of preaching, we nevertheless, because of some recent developments, kindly and humbly suggest seven don'ts to those who direct and/or instruct in the schools.

Don't produce yes men or robots. Others have said, and I have noticed, that graduates of various schools can be identified by merely hearing them preach one sermon. That is to some degree expected, but it sometimes indicates the man is a robot. Schools of preaching must be very careful that they do not hinder a student's willingness and capacity to think for himself. Teach him that not every explanation of every verse of scripture he gives should come from the notes he got from you. He needs to think for himself upon the word of God, or his development as a preacher will be hindered, not helped. Furthermore, his ability to help someone else in their understanding of the scripture will be diminished. Robots are yes men, and God does not need yes men to preach; He needs faithful students of the word (2 Tim. 2:15).

Don't convey a burden of mental debt to your alumni. Brethren, your job is to produce sound gospel preachers, not fund raisers. Raising money is your responsibility. If a graduate takes it upon himself to raise some funds, that's his prerogative, but let it be his idea. From the first day of school, we were constantly reminded that we owed a huge debt to the school and the sponsoring congregation. After graduation, pressure to raise money for the school's new projects come so frequent they become a hindrance to the work of an evangelist. Neither conveying a burden of mental debt to the student nor applying pressure upon the graduate to raise money ought to be.

Don't compromise truth for the sake of funds. Some of the best lectures preachers have had the opportunity to attend are the schools of preaching lectures. There was a time when everyone could be absolutely confident that every man on the program had a reputation for soundness and opposing error. Questions were raised a few years ago about why one or two speakers had been invited to speak on a certain lectureship, because they were known for being less than defenders of the truth. Although I have no personal knowledge of the truth of it, word leaked out that at least one speaker was included as part of a deal in which the school would receive a prominent brother's library in return. Because of that one incident, some have not returned to that school's lectureship since.

Don't let the school become more important than its reason to exist. Men have the tendency to let their loyalty for the work place become more important than the actual work they do. Schools of preaching are not immune. A school director and an instructor were overheard discussing the upcoming lectureship. They were talking about a particular error held and taught by a preacher who had routinely spoken on their school's lectures. They correctly agreed that he should no longer be included on the list of speakers, but they also agreed not to become involved in the issue that disqualified the brother from speaking; they would let other brethren fight the battle. Why would they do that? The only reason that comes to mind is if there were young men who were close to the aforementioned preacher, but who might also be considering attending that particular school. Taking a stand against the man and his error could drive away potential students. No school is so important as to continue to receive the support of brethren when it becomes more important than truth and the work of training men to preach.

Don't put yourself above giving account to brethren. Recently, there have been too many incidents of schools refusing to answer the queries of brethren. Instead of humbling themselves, they judge the hearts of questioners and "plead the fifth." Any school that regards itself above the brethren and recognizes no accountability to the brethren, no longer deserves our support, monetary or otherwise. In the secular world, this is the arrogance that is recognized

among those in the intellectual class who perceive themselves so important they need not answer anyone. We sincerely hope this is not the attitude of some brethren in the preaching schools.

Don't defend and fellowship a false teacher because to rebuke him would jeopardize your relationship with other brethren and works. It is bad enough to ignore the error of a false teacher for cronyism or friendship. To ignore it because it would cost standing with other brethren and works only compounds the situation. This problem goes beyond the reevaluation and reaffirmation of elders as taught by Dave Miller, and those who continue to defend him. It goes beyond the error on divorce and remarriage as taught by Stan Crowley, and some schools that agree with him. It goes beyond the disturbing material that Barry Grider published in the February 10, 2009, bulletin of the Forest Hill Irene congregation in Memphis, Tennessee. It extends to any who extend fellowship to a false teacher directly, or indirectly, by fellowshipping those who do. Criticizing those who stand for the truth and who oppose error and those who teach it, will finally turn to your disadvantage.

Don't leave the impression with others that you are superior or arrogant. A brother known to this writer was a student in one of our schools of preaching. He was a relatively new Christian and lacking in the knowledge of some others. One day he asked a question in class that most of us would have already known the answer to, but because of his spiritual youth, he did not. The instructor, instead of answering the question, publicly ridiculed, belittled, and made fun of him for asking it. He even suggested the young man had no business being at the school. That instructor is now the director of the school. It is our hope and prayer that he has since ameliorated his attitude. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident of the manifestation of arrogance. Some teachers should not teach because they do not know the material well enough. Others should not teach because of a shortfall of other qualities needed, like humility and genuine care for, and patience with, his students. The schools have a responsibility when hiring and evaluating instructors to find and keep men who are humble-minded.

The schools of preaching have historically done much good work for the cause of Christ. In the past, they stood solidly for the truth and actively against error. That seems to be changing, now. We hope that, unlike the colleges and universities that ignored their charters and subsequently departed into complete apostasy, the brethren at the schools of preaching will return to the commitment of loyally standing for the kingdom of truth.

© 2009, Charles Dale Pogue

Permissions Granted:

You may print, copy, distribute, and publish this article free of charge so long as the article is unchanged and is credited.