

ON THE ACQUIREMENT AND RECOGNITION OF EVANGELISTS

A) INTRODUCTION

Churches of Christ needs and requires the services of gospel ministers/evangelists/preachers. The Bible says:

Ephesians 4:11-12 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

Romans 10: 13-15 *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

Acts 8:5,12,40; 21:8 *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them... But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women... But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea ...and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven...*

Colossians 1:7; 4:7-9,17 *As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ... All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts; With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here... And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.*

1 Thessalonians 3:2 *And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:*

2 Timothy 4: 2,5 *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine... But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.*

Titus 1:5 *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:*

In recent years, churches have resorted to outlining desired attributes and advertising as follows:

VACANCY FOR THE POSITION OF A PREACHER

The suitable brother **must not be less than 35 years old, must be happily married and possess a Diploma/Degree from a recognized Bible College...**

Remunerations: very attractive and negotiable.

Only qualified candidates need apply.

Signed "XYZ Church of Christ"

Such adverts are becoming the norm rather than the exception in the brotherhood in many lands, especially amongst the "bigger" congregations. There are many things sometimes required of a prospective preacher but let us examine Advanced Age, Married Status and Bible School Qualifications. Is it **scriptural** to make these requirements compulsory for one to be a preacher, minister or an evangelist in the church that Jesus built?

Many Christians are unsure but feel it is a wise judgment that could be justified because:

1. Older family men can easily command the respect of the congregation and the community.
2. Such with family experience can effectively counsel married couples.
3. Such are less likely to engage in sexual immorality within and outside the church.
4. Theological professional or academic qualifications show that a man is knowledgeable, ready and well equipped to be a preacher.
5. Management principles in human organizations show that such are the best practices.

On the contrary, the regular and rigid imposition of those criteria could be unnecessary because:

1. Even a young unmarried preacher may by his good and godly conduct earn the respect of all except for those who are proud and keep looking down on others. Isn't it better to serve the creator from one's youth?
2. The best counsel is rooted in the word of God irrespective of the age of the giver. Marital experience is scripturally required of Elders not Preachers. When those who are in [or should aspire to] the leadership positions in a church neglect duties expected of them, they try to deflect everything to the local Preacher.
3. Should a brother not become an evangelist till after marriage? Excessive fear of imagined promiscuousness is not only a lack of trust in the Lord and the would-be-preacher but is also a vote of no-confidence in our sisters [wives and daughters] and an indirect admission by the proponents of what they could possibly do if they were in the unmarried minister's position. Whether 'happily married' or not, anyone that lacks self control may engage in sexual immorality, so we need not play God while claiming to be cautious.

4. Should our ministers be like the denominational 'Bishops' that preach with the wisdom of men? A clergy that claims that Bible knowledge and its interpretation resides only in them?
5. Are 'our management principles' better than God-given principles? Are our ways smarter, better and more effective than that which He has revealed in the New Testament on how to organize His Church?

Evidently, the reasoning underlying those advertised requirements is typical of man seeing NOT as the LORD sees. Only God sees the heart so we will somehow focus on the 'outward appearance.' Elders rule in matters of opinion and may specify desirable qualities for would-be-preachers in their congregation but should such specifications be immutable while *unscriptural*? We should not habitually make the aforementioned arbitrary demands on prospective preachers. Few of these qualities may be found to be expedient by a church due to their own peculiar situation, in which case any candidate who possesses such could have an advantage in those areas. To as a matter of policy, automatically disqualify brothers for non-possession of these three requirements means that what is sought is more or less an employee of the church and not necessarily a servant of the Lord, a man of the people instead of the man of God. **Let us therefore be careful not to presumptuously legislate on behalf of Christ and declare bound on earth that which Jesus would not bind in heaven.** Below are clarifications.

B) ON YOUTHFUL AND / OR UNMARRIED PREACHERS

Spiritual maturity is not solely dependent on physical age neither is marriage an absolute guarantee against sexual immorality, though both factors are helpful. It appears what some churches of Christ want when they advertise for a Preacher is actually a "Pastor" -1 Timothy 3:2,6. Not that an elder can not double as a preacher (1 Tim. 5: 17-18) but that is not necessarily required by the Lord. The scriptures show that Timothy was a youth (1 Tim. 4:12) and even unmarried Paul [the aged apostle - Philemon 1:9] probably started out as a young man -Acts 7:58, Acts 8-9, 2 Tim. 1:11. They were both Preachers and Ministers. We equally know that Phillip the Evangelist had three daughters -Acts 21:8-9. Thus both singles and family men, young or old may be Preachers in the Lord's church. **The fact that the unmarried is less distracted (1 Cor. 7:32-33) is twisted by the apostate in forbidding to marry (1 Tim. 4:1-3), let us not hold unto the other extreme of forbidding single preachers, for whom marriage should be a voluntary matter -1 Cor. 7:7-9; 9:5, Mt. 19:12.**

C) ON BIBLE COLLEGES / PREACHER TRAINING SCHOOLS

The scriptures teach about the need and role of different workers in the ministry. It is evident that the apostleship and prophethood offices are foundational for revelation (Eph. 2:19-20; 3:3-5, Jude 3) while other offices are reoccupied by men for the propagation of the gospel and to nurture the saints. I find it interesting that of the offices that Christ bequeathed in His Church; both Evangelists and Teachers scarcely have 'encumbering' qualifications attached to them (2 Tim. 4:5, Heb. 5:12-14) compared to who could be an Apostle (Acts 1:21-22, Gal. 1:11-12, 1 Cor. 9:1), Prophet (Num. 12:6, Deut. 13:1; Heb. 1:1), Pastor (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:5-9) or Deacon (1 Tim. 3:8-13). The inspired 'relatively relaxed' qualifications for Preachers and Teachers indicate that the Lord wants men who have the ability and aspiration to easily fill these offices, yet responsibly -James 3:1; 1 Timothy 4:16. The church is the only body recognized by Christ to furnish workers for His vineyard (Rom. 12:4-8, 1 Cor. 12:14-27) not man-made, government regulated Bible Colleges where outsiders moderate and influence the curriculum. **Many do not realize that the Church is God's own Bible School (Eph. 1:22; 3:10-11, 16-21) where the truth that thoroughly equips is rightly divided and declared -1 Tim. 3:15, 2 Tim. 3:15-17, 1 Thess. 1:8.** That could be why they cite Paul's action in Ephesus after baptizing some men to justify their Bible Schools established to train and award certificates to ministers.

Acts 19: 7-10 And all the men were about twelve. And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

How could anyone conclude from these verses that Paul started a formal Preacher Training School [and probably issued certificates to would-be-evangelists after a two year course]? That passage says nothing about "the Bible School of Paul" or "a Preacher Training School." If anyone claims so, did Paul also issue Diplomas for a "three months disputing course" in the synagogue? Was he disputing with the disciples or the scholars of Tyrannus? Contrary to assumptions, the passage shows that Paul:

- a. For three months, was alleging and showing in the Jewish synagogue that Jesus is the Christ who has established God's rule or kingdom in fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures.
- b. On encountering incorrigible blasphemers, decided to withdraw and evacuated the disciples to the school [more accommodating lecture hall / place of gathering of the followers] of one Tyrannus.

- c. Continued his reasoning or preaching before the populace for about two years with the result that virtually everyone in that Asian region heard the gospel.

Within the period under consideration that Paul preached, the disciples and many subsequent converts (verses 11-20) became members of the church at Ephesus! **In any case the apostle separated the disciples from the Jewish antagonists NOT that he deliberately separated some Christians from the church to start a seminary.** The entire event is similar to what had earlier happened in Corinth –Acts 18:1,4-11. The other often quoted passage used to support the establishment of Bible Colleges is;

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

If the inspired apostle intended the formation of “Preacher Training Schools” outside and apart from the church as some assert, then he equally requires that we set up other religious certificate issuing colleges such as:

- a. **“Aged Women Training Schools”** since the preacher was to instruct them that they also may teach young women – Titus 2:1,3-5. Perhaps only its graduate sisters should teach the women’s class?
- b. **“Bishop Training Schools”** since such men were to be taught by the evangelist yet they themselves must become ‘apt to teach’ before being ordained – Titus 1:9, 1 Tim. 1:3; 3:2; 4:6. Shouldn’t we impose this?

If not, why not? You can’t logically approve of one of these unscriptural schools and reject the others! However, the intention was that Timothy alone should not do the work and wear himself out but that there be fellow-helpers to complement and succeed him, as well as reach out to other places. Just as well- reported Timothy learned from Paul (Acts 16:1-5), he was to tutor other men to serve within the church and to perpetuate the ministry of reconciliation. Timothy would have done his teaching in a very effective manner e.g. by addressing various groups in the assembly of the whole church and by further instructing them in separate sessions. Since the Lord’s Supper and Collection are strictly for when ‘the whole church be come together into one place,’ he and Titus were respectively expected to teach / organize various classes [including midweek classes] not start seminaries and convents. Teaching and communication must be structured for people to benefit whether they are men, women, youths, spiritual babes or children. We have examples of Paul meeting with church elders only (Acts 20:17), with private individuals (Gal. 2:2) as well as with the whole church -Acts 11:26; 14:23, 27. Forget human suppositions for a moment and take another look at 2 Timothy 2:2 with an open mind: What are the things which Timothy has heard of Paul among many witnesses? -*Sound words or the whole counsel of God that Paul preached -2 Timothy 1:13.* Who were those witnesses? -*Other companions of Paul, the various disciples taught and the people preached to.* Who are the intended recipients referred to as faithful men? -*Brothers with devotion and reputation being groomed for maturity and leadership.* Who were the others to be taught by Timothy’s hearers? -*Both unbelievers and believers so that new Christians and leaders may be raised.*

Churches now advertise and formally employ a sole Preacher but Teachers, Elders and Deacons evolve naturally. Is this post-apostolic arrangement of “recruitment and hiring of *the Preacher*” responsible for the non-biblical Bible Colleges? Should we not have many natural in-bred and visiting Preachers rather than a prolonged vacancy later filled by a solo seminary minister? Are we neglecting our responsibilities and scriptural organization to abandon the bulk of the work to one hired hand? Take another look at Paul’s companions, his epistles and the churches that he wrote unto! It is unfortunate that people not God, now demand that a brother must attend a “resident, correspondent or online certificate-awarding Bible School” before he can do the work of an evangelist. This has gone on for some time because we have assumed that it does not matter but is rather convenient. Since the completion of the scriptures no-one can rightfully lay claim to inspiration and revelation (1 Cor. 13:8-13) as the apostles (Gal. 1:11-12) so it behooves us to study and be trained. However, the church is the true custodian of spiritual education not human schools and colleges. Secular education from man-made schools is good but beware when such offers ‘certified knowledge’ in so-called theology, divinity, biblical studies, etc. Seminaries claim to add religious knowledge and values which Christians can not easily obtain in the church but human philosophy and traditions usually corrupts true religion –Colossians 2:8. Besides, centralized training of preachers can easily facilitate the spread of false doctrine within the brotherhood. If Preacher Training Schools / Bible Colleges are expedient then each should be under the oversight of a church, not a joint venture of several churches or the work of an organization owned by individual(s) because the autonomy of churches must be maintained and no group apart from the church has the divine mandate or capacity to raise leaders for the body of Christ. However, **the expediency of Preacher Training Schools / Bible Colleges is yet to be affirmed without reasonable doubt because the New Testament has given us a way to raise leaders and is silent about such. Divine silence is not consent, even as we know concerning instrumental music in worship!**

The church of Christ was built to worship and glorify God in spirit and in truth, to declare manifold divine wisdom and evangelize the world, to edify the saints and help provide material succor for her needy. The work of the church is not the same as that of the family, government or organization. It is not everything we feel like doing for the cause of the gospel that should be rushed into simply because it sounds great or we have the resources. We must preach Christ from a pure motive (Phil. 1:15) and proclaim no religious organization except His kingdom -Acts 28:31. The individual Christian can do most of the church's work [on a different scope] but the converse is not true. One person is an individual but the moment s/he forms a new formal body parallel to the church solely for spiritual functions, such could easily transgress acceptable limits. Some individual Christians have inadvertently established personal ministries as registered organizations with their own structures, hierarchy, finances, etc. to take over some aspects of the church's work. Such glorify another name and greatly detract from the Lord's church despite any acclaimed benefits. Beware of institutional projects and serve in the one body over which Christ is head. Of concern also is the strained employer-employee relationship between some churches and their preachers. Some churches demand so much yet offer unfair salaries while some preachers keep requesting for upwardly reviewed remunerations for dodgy work. Any church that wants an accomplished theologian as its Preacher must be ready to accede to his demands. Some struggle to do so even if meager funds hardly go to evangelism and benevolence. It does not matter if the small congregations that really need assistance for growth but can hardly afford it get little or no help. The small churches reportedly "offer little career or monetary rewards" and it is the meek or inexperienced newly graduated ministers that mostly consider working with them. Brethren, have we sowed the wind and are now reaping the whirlwind? Men attend Bible Schools mostly because many congregations demand it of prospective preachers, hence the bargaining on wages!

D) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Scripturally, preachers are not obligated to be of advanced age or married or certified by Bible Colleges. **We should revert to the biblical method: any faithful and exemplary brother who rightly divides the scriptures, a passionate soul-winner who also edifies [and perhaps has under-studied a practicing minister] may do the work of an Evangelist and could be supported or sent as a Preacher.** People / a church acknowledges an evangelist and his work primarily by cooperation and secondarily by material and financial support -Luke 10: 2-7, 1 Cor. 9:7-14, 2 Cor. 11:8, Phil. 4:15-18. A true minister is the servant of the Lord and seeks to please God, not men -Gal. 1:10. He prays and studies constantly to be a good soldier of Christ. He trusts in the Lord to supply his needs and may occasionally do some secular work to support himself -1 Cor. 9: 14-15, Acts 18:3; 20:33-34. Some evangelists stay to 'set things in order' in a congregation while others move across territories to proclaim Christ. The latter may later be found with a family in his own 'Caesarea' like Philip was. Not every preacher will choose celibacy like Paul; some will be married like Peter and may even later become one of the Elders in a congregation -1 Peter 5:1-3. Let us properly reflect on this lesson without hastily becoming "uncomfortable that it is ...unedifying ...a strange doctrine ...that should not be discussed lest it rocks the boat ...on what the church has already agreed upon." Please bear with me for my "open criticism of a practice that is common to many churches of Christ all over the world." It is the commonality and open pronouncements of proponents that make this matter deserve scriptural evaluation in the public domain. My prayer and effort is that we be a spotless church, not a blemished one. My request is that those named after Christ consider this matter, no-one should be afraid or too annoyed to provide Biblical answers -1 Pet. 3:15; 2 Tim. 1:7. If we have erred, let us repent and obey the truth. The church will promptly attain its rightful place and get excellent results when the natural evangelists in our midst are recognized. **Since we all preach to good and sincere people in denominations to jettison their errors, accept biblical authority and become members of the scriptural church, we should equally be willing to renounce human doctrines and unbiblical practices when faced with a similar challenge.** That a seemingly beneficial thing resulted from an unscriptural practice does not mean that such practice must be continued after it is realized to be sinful -John 3:20-21, Romans 6:1. Those heaven-bound gladly suppress human wisdom and pride to be followers of Christ indeed. What is needed to restore New Testament Christianity is to study and faithfully apply the Bible. It is saddening to learn that the Church has deviated from the scriptural way of training and acquiring preachers, it should be gladdening to have it pointed out and to quickly make amends. Then shall we truly sing with the understanding that hymn by Ellis Crum:

1 *The church of Christ follows Christ's word, where He doth speak, there we are heard;
Where He is silent, we are too, What Christ commands is what we do.*

4 *Unto Christ be glory for aye, Work thru His church, don't go astray,
Oh follow not the mind of man, For God gave us a perfect plan.*

Chorus *Work for the Master ev'ry day, Help lead the erring to His way;
Believe His word, obey His command, The church of Christ will for ever stand.*