

## What Do We Do When The Preacher Is Gone?

The Bible uses the terms preacher and evangelist in describing those who teach and preach the word of God. "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? (Romans 10.14) Some congregations have men who preach while working at a "secular job" while others preach "on a fulltime basis". Meaning one is paid more than the other. Often the "part time preacher" is doing just as much as the "full time preacher" but he gets paid less. Either way the congregation he works at depends on his presence, ability, teaching and preaching.

From time to time "the preacher" will be gone. It may be due to illness, vacation time, or Gospel Meetings elsewhere, or his leaving for another work. In those situations, I have often heard the question, "What are we doing to do while the preacher is gone?" This is a valid question since there is a need to take up the void left by his departure. Obviously, we cannot and should not just put a sign out front saying "Closed Due to Preacher Being Gone, Will Be Back Soon." It would be a spiritually poor congregation that would just stop meeting until another preacher came along. Therefore, something has to be done. Which means someone must step up.

This presents an opportunity for the congregation. It gives a young man who is desiring to preach on a regular basis the opportunity to learn and present a lesson. At one time I attended a congregation but preached at nearby congregations when their regular preacher was gone. (I guess this meant I was the irregular preacher.) By having a young man to come to preach a lesson or two encourages the congregation and the speaker. He learns his craft by standing before a new audience. Often the members at his home congregation may hesitate to offer constructive and needed criticism while those at another group may not. Members get to hear the Gospel from a fresh view point (notice I said fresh and not unscriptural). "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15) So, this is often the decision of the congregation.

Another advantage for a congregation is to ask its men to take up the slack. This is an opportunity for the men to grow. No one learns as much as the Bible Class teacher and/or the preacher who takes the time to study his Bible, to organize his thoughts, write them down, and preach a lesson. The church in the first century did not establish a college to train its preachers it simply taught the word and grew its preachers. Some of the best preachers I know, never went to a school to learn how to preach. They learned at their local congregation. I have known of various congregations to have numerous men become "full time preachers" as a result of their teaching and training program. It is important for congregations to give their members the opportunity to fill the pulpit and/or teaching position. I was blessed with being at a small congregation that gave me the opportunity to "practice". Another congregation provided me with more training by having classes on public speaking. Still another allowed me to study under an older preacher. Each provided me with certain advantages in learning and developing into a better Bible student.

Perhaps the congregation has men already equipped to preach. This gives those men the opportunity to keep their skills sharp. Frankly, I believe there are many men with the ability to preach in most congregations.

Finally, one of the qualifications of an elder to the ability to teach. I realize this may not be limited to filling the pulpit but a man who can teach a class and/or preach meets this qualification. We need to develop more men who will be qualified to serve as elders and one way is to fill the pulpit from time to time.

So, what do we do when the preacher is gone? We take advantage of that opportunity to grow! – Dennis Tucker.