

Some Reasons I Believe in Seminary and Theological Education

I am convinced that the most important characteristic or qualification of a minister is personal integrity. I address this several times every semester at Southeastern Seminary. Paul says in 1 Tim. 3:2 that a leader in the church must be blameless or above reproach. Personal integrity is foundational to everything else that one does in ministry. Second, I believe compassion and love for those we serve is crucial. Jesus said that love would be a distinguishing mark by which men would know that we are His disciples. Therefore, a genuine love and compassion for our people is absolutely essential. Third is biblical fidelity and conviction. A minister of Jesus Christ should live a Bible saturated life. If a minister does not believe in the inspiration and complete truthfulness of Scripture, in the inerrancy and sufficiency of the Bible, in my judgement he is not qualified to be a minister of the gospel. Our view of the Bible should be the same as that of the Lord Jesus and it is clear that He did not doubt a jot or a tittle (Matthew 5:17 & 18). Fourth, a minister must have a passion for the souls of lost men and women, boys and girls. Jesus came “to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). We, like our Lord, must be about the task of sharing the gospel, and do so as the Puritans said, “promiscuously.”

At Southeastern Seminary we are committed to training Apostle Pauls. We want men and women with keen minds and theological conviction balanced with a passion for missions and evangelism. Theology and missions should never be divorced. Indeed, each will be impoverished without the other.

Theological preparation can assist a minister in each of these areas. Of course it is the case that one can be competent without theological education, but theological education can take each of these four vital areas and assist the minister in his growth and development. Is theological preparation, then, the most important qualification or even a necessary qualification? No. But it certainly can be a great benefit for those who take the opportunity to pursue it.

I am convinced that tremendous problems will arise in a church as a result of a lack of theological education among its leadership. Our churches overall are grossly anemic in their basic knowledge of biblical and theological truth. The blame for this must lay at the feet of the ministers who are responsible for preaching the Word and also for committing biblical truth to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2). Many of our churches are vulnerable to the latest theological fad or “wind of doctrine.” False teachings like open theism, salvific inclusivism, and even universalism can slip in unchecked if pastors are not instructing and exhorting their people in sound doctrine and refuting those who teach error (Titus 1:9). Theological education can assist a minister in knowing both what he believes and why he believes. It can help him understand the great theological debates throughout the history of the church (think divine sovereignty and human responsibility!) and to more readily recognize theological danger and error when it appears. Grounding ministers in biblical and theological truth can help them do the same for their church

and enable a church to stand strong for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

I believe the minimum requirement in terms of theological education to be the master of divinity. Again, there are always exceptions to the case, but by and large this three year 90 hour program of study is what I would expect minimally for the minister who would pastor my church. Of course, more education is better. In fact, I encourage every minister that attends our Seminary to go as far in their theological education as they possibly can. Furthermore, I tend to throw down a gauntlet, but one that I believe is true, and say to them that anyone who has the ability, calling and opportunity to go all the way to the highest level and does not do so sins against God and prostitutes the gifts that the Lord has given them. It is a matter of Christian stewardship that we hone and refine the gifts that God has given us for His honor and His glory. Indeed, God deserves excellence in everything we do (1 Cor. 10:31). This includes our loving Him with our mind (Matt 22:37).

At Southeastern Seminary we seek to address the full orbbed expectations of the minister of the Gospel. We begin by laying a strong foundation in biblical and theological studies. We continue to be committed to the original languages of Greek and Hebrew, and we believe that they are absolutely essential for the faithful preaching of the Word of God. We do not, however, want our ministers to become ivory tower theologians who are “no good” to the common people. Therefore, we balance our curriculum with strong emphases in missions, evangelism, leadership, biblical counseling, and expository preaching. We have developed “intern partnerships” with local churches who teach our students what they can learn only in the context of a local church. We want to expose our students to various models and approaches to ministry, critiquing all that we examine in light of Scripture.

Southeastern Seminary believes there is really only one valid model for preaching for an effective ministry. That model is exposition. We recognize that exposition can be done in different ways, however, the faithful preaching of God’s Word, book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, and word by word cannot be neglected if the church is to be dynamic, vibrant and alive.

Far too many seminaries have compromised in the area of biblical and theological conviction, and as a result they have adopted a more therapeutic model when it comes to educating their ministers. A pastoral care model or a corporate CEO model too often dominates rather than a pastor-teacher model (Eph. 4:11) which is true to Scripture. The good shepherd of a local church will feed and lead, preach and protect his flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4). To do this effectively he must be convicted of biblical truth and grounded in biblical truth. At Southeastern Seminary we place a premium emphasis on the classic disciplines of theological education, and we are convinced that this is absolutely necessary for the health and vitality of the church in the 21st century.

The single most important reason that someone who believes that God has called them to ministry should pursue theological education is because it will enable them to be a better minister. Billy Graham has often said that if he could add anything to his ministry, it would be a seminary education. He believes that the ministry that God has given him would have been even more productive had he availed himself of seminary. That is a strong word from a very well respected voice. I believe all persons who are considering vocational ministry would do well to heed the counsel of this great servant of God. I don't think they will be disappointed, and neither will the people they serve.