

Faith Pulpit

The Preacher and His Library, Part 1

“And the books, but especially the parchments . . .” II Timothy 4:13

Introduction

While no one knows for sure what Paul was requesting when he talked about the books and the parchments, it is probable that he was asking for a copy of the Old Testament, or at least for part of it. Even in his final days of life, Paul was a reader. Since the days of the apostle Paul, reading has been part of the lifestyle of preachers. In fact, probably the most frequently used description of the pastor’s office is the “pastor’s study.” No doubt, a person would be shocked to walk into a pastor’s study and find shelves without books. The pastor’s library should be filled with volumes that will assist him in understanding the Word of God and effectively communicating it to God’s people.

These articles are intended to give reasons for the pastor’s accumulation of books, how to obtain a proper library without mortgaging the pastor’s home, and some suggestions of books that are useful for building the pastor’s library.

Why Build a Library?

Desiderius Erasmus, an intellectual forerunner of the Reformation, is reported to have said, “When I get a little money, I buy books; and, if any is left, I buy food and clothes.” John Wesley told younger ministers to read or get out of the ministry. Of course, the primary book to study is the Word of God itself. Other volumes are utilized to give a greater understanding of the Word of God. Spurgeon, in his own unique style, addresses the subject of the use of other books when studying the Word of God:

Of course, you are not such wiseacres as to think or say that you can expound Scripture without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who have laboured before you in the field of

exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and like a little coterie who think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd, that certain men, who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others.¹

There are a number of reasons for having a thorough library. Having a good number of easy-to-read books on practical subjects goes a long way in supplementing a pastor's preaching and teaching ministry, particularly in the areas of counseling and discipleship. As he spends time one-on-one with an individual, he will maximize and extend the time by loaning books from his shelves on the subject or issue addressed in counseling sessions.

The pulpit ministry itself demands that the preacher have a good number of books at his disposal. He needs these books first of all because of the language barrier. The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Since those languages are not native to the modern day preacher, he needs assistance in word meanings, grammar, syntax, figures of speech, and idioms. Certainly few pastors have mastered the biblical languages enough so that they do not have to consult language helps to accurately interpret the Word of God.

The modern day expositor faces not only a language difference but also a cultural barrier when he reads the Word of God. He must span at least 1900 years of history and enter the ancient Near East as a stranger. Thus, he should possess books that acquaint him with the history of the ancient Mediterranean world. The topography and the geography must be consulted to glean an accurate insight into the descriptions that saturate the biblical record. The customs of every-day life in travel, commerce, clothing, home life, food, and a host of other aspects of life that we take for granted must be studied. Books that deal with the culture and customs of ancient Israel and surrounding countries add to the interpretation and interest when a sermon is delivered and provide fascinating reading while preparing for the message. (Note: Faith Baptist Theological Seminary's "Exploring the Lands of the Bible" overseas modules provide an unequalled cultural foundation for Old and New Testament study.)

Besides helping the preacher understand the Bible itself, books also confirm or critique his own conclusions as he consults trusted works of others. No human being can claim infallibility in interpretation. The pastor should not act as though he has that attribute when he prepares a message. His own insights and observations from a passage should be checked against writings of others who have already wrestled with that passage. This study can provide great encouragement in seeing one's conclusions confirmed, or it can be a great stimulus for further investigation, if his thoughts are countered by that which he reads.

Reading, then, acts as a safeguard to our conclusions; further, it stimulates our thinking for application and illustration. How many reading this article can think of an occasion when reading a single paragraph has sparked a train of thought about a potential application in the message? Reading can

provide excellent illustrations for our media-saturated society. It is important that clear, concise illustrations be used to make the truth obvious. If a mental picture is worth a thousand words, we can save a lot of time seeking to explain abstract truth by the use of good illustrations.

Finally, reading is a great source of personal challenge. A preacher should not hastily present truth that has not yet filtered through his system. The mental exercise of reading is itself of great value, as it cultivates a well-rounded knowledge of both the current and historical cultural context, lending confidence and credibility in the delivery of sermons. Beyond that, if a pastor has been personally challenged during his study of a specific subject or passage, it will certainly be evident when the message is preached. The congregation detects when the preacher's heart has been challenged and changed by the truth he is preaching. If the goal of preaching is to see lives changed, reading can enable us to model that change by our preaching.

Works Cited

1. Spurgeon, Charles H., *Commenting & Commentaries: A Reference Guide to Book Buying for Pastors, Students, and Christian Workers* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 1 (page citation is to the reprint edition).

Dr. Ernie Schmidt

Visiting Professor at [Faith Baptist Theological Seminary](#) | schmidte@faith.edu | [Other Articles](#)

Dr. Ernie Schmidt earned degrees from Pillsbury Baptist Bible College (B.A.) and Central Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div. and D.Min). Dr. Schmidt served for forty-eight years as a pastor and Bible college/seminary teacher and administrator. He was a faculty member and dean of Faith Baptist Theological Seminary from 2002 to 2013, and he served as interim president of FBBC&TS from January 2014 to May 2015. In addition, Dr. Schmidt has led thirteen trips to Israel and has also been to Turkey and Greece three times. Dr. Schmidt and his wife, Gen, now live in Owatonna, Minnesota.