

Not What These Hands Have Done

Horatius Bonar (1808–1889)

Not what these hands have done
 can save this guilty soul;
 not what this toiling flesh has borne
 can make my spirit whole.
 Not what I feel or do
 can give me peace with God;
 not all my pray'rs and sighs and tears
 can bear my awful load.

Thy work alone, O Christ,
 can ease this weight of sin;
 Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
 can give me peace within.
 Thy love to me, O God, not mine,
 O Lord, to Thee,
 can rid me of the dark unrest,
 and set my spirit free.

Thy grace alone, O God,
 to me can pardon speak;
 Thy pow'r alone, O Son of God,
 can this sore bondage break.
 I bless the Christ of God;
 I rest on love divine;
 and with unfalt'ring lip and heart,
 I call this Savior mine.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

It's Not a Cadillac! Part Three: What Do We Need?

Kevin T. Bauder

As General Motors' top line, Cadillac has become a metaphor for the best and most luxurious of something. A Cadillac is never a necessity: a Chevy could get you from one place to another. The people who purchase Cadillacs are after class, prestige, and comfort. Consequently, when the Religious News Service recently referred to the M.Div. as the "Cadillac" degree for ministers, it was implying that the M.Div. is not a necessity, but a luxury for pastors who are interested in class and prestige.

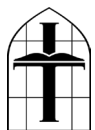
Is the RNS right? The answer to that question depends upon the answer to two other questions. The first is, "What does biblical pastoral ministry look like?" The second is, "What preparation is necessary for that kind of ministry?"

Previously, I argued that the New Testament envisions pastors who feed the flock through their preaching and teaching, who manifest spiritual wisdom as mature men of faith, and who watch over the souls committed to their care. This ministry centers upon the proclamation of Scripture. A biblical pastor has no right to express his own opinion. He must declare the Word of God. The Scriptures are the heart and backbone of his preaching, teaching, counseling, and his care of souls. His business is to preach the Bible.

Therefore, a pastor has to know the Word of God for himself. He must interpret it with precision and skill without having to rely upon the interpretations of others. He has to be able to explain what God says, not what the commentaries say that God says.

This duty demands a certain kind of preparation. It requires him to know the biblical languages well enough that he can read (or at least translate) his texts from the original languages. That level of competence requires years of instruction and practice, first at the level of grammar, then at the level of syntax, then at the level of exegesis.

Furthermore, to handle the Scriptures rightly, a pastor must develop skill as an interpreter. To gain that skill he must study the art and science of hermeneutics, and he must also be guided through the process of handling the biblical text until the necessary skills become almost intuitive. While he



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should not neglect the commentators, he must be in a position to evaluate their work rather than simply taking their word.

As he develops an understanding of individual passages, books, and of the Bible as a whole, a pastor must also grasp how the biblical message fits together. He must understand how each section contributes to the integrity of the whole. The Bible is both an argument and a story; mastering these as they are presented from the perspective(s) of the biblical writers is the task of biblical theology. To be faithful, a pastor must be a competent biblical theologian.

Different parts of the Bible sometimes address the same topic, and a pastor who preaches the Word will want to understand their relationship—for example, how Paul’s understanding of regeneration connects to John’s. Furthermore, a pastor will have to face questions that arise in life, and he will want to know everything that Scripture might have to say about those questions. Learning to sift, weigh, and correlate the biblical data in this way is the task of systematic theology. The Bible presents an overall system of faith that encompasses both belief and practice; a faithful pastor must master at least its substance.

This system of biblical doctrine connects to life at a variety of points. Apologetics is the defense of the Christian faith. Homiletics is the proclamation of the Scriptures so that people grasp the demands that the faith makes upon their lives. Biblical counseling is the art of warning, encouraging, and helping those who struggle in applying Christian verities to their lives. A qualified pastor must possess measurable competence in all these areas.

As people grow in their knowledge of biblical doctrine, they begin to see its intricacy, interconnectedness, and relevance to life. At some point they realize that theirs is not the first generation to wrestle with theological issues. Consequently, a pastor must appreciate that the teachings he has received were hammered out in the rough-and-tumble of controversy, supplemented with a certain amount of trial and error. He can understand neither the ideas nor their relevance unless he also understands how and why those ideas were developed. In a word, he must have at least a general grasp of the history of Christianity.

Beyond all these, he must learn practical or pastoral theology, which involves the hands-on aspects of putting the biblical teaching to work. It is one thing to defend the doctrine of believer baptism, but a pastor must actually know how to baptize. He should be committed to the doctrine of congregational polity, but he should also be able to chair a business meeting. Pastors must not simply know *what* is true and *why*; they must also know *how* to do the things that rest upon those truths.

Some of my friends believe that as long as a man has the practical skills, he does not really need the biblical and doctrinal foundation to pastor effective-

ly. I will grant that an ecclesiastical movement such as Baptist fundamentalism can survive if a few of its pastors lack full preparation. Within much of Baptist fundamentalism, more than a few leaders have substituted practical skill for biblical and theological preparation. They have become wildly successful at gathering crowds that valued the wrong things. This appearance of success has perpetuated itself until some corners of the movement have capitulated to full-on pragmatism. Unbiblical forms of ministry have become the norm in many circles.

At least part of the solution has to be a firm insistence upon the adequate preparation of future pastors. These would-be pastors need to commit themselves to a New Testament, Ephesians 4 vision of ministry. Then they need to secure the kind of preparation that will enable them to implement this vision. Rather than viewing preparation as an interruption before they can begin ministry, they must realize that (as R. V. Clearwaters used to say) a call to serve is a call to prepare.

For the kind of ministry that the New Testament describes, none of the above preparation is a luxury. It is not a “Cadillac.” It represents the basic, indispensable skill that a pastor must bring to his work. The remaining question is, Where can he find that sort of instruction? I intend to address that question next.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
