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Preachers and Degrees

James R. Cope

Recently a young preacher said to me, "I am going ahead and get my degree." The background of this statement caused me to ask, "Why do you want a degree?" He replied, "Because it seems to me that it will be a very short time until a preacher will be forced to have degree to be used by the churches."

I do not want to be misunderstood. I am in the school business and have been, in one form or another, many years. God knows there are too many ignoramuses now and I certainly have no objection to file against any person's going ahead with his education. The situation

projected in the young man's statement, however, promises a sad day for churches of the Lord. A degree within itself is not wrong, and no premium is to be placed on a lack of training. In most instances academic degrees reflect a student's formal training and in many instances are an index to one's abilities. At least this is true along certain lines and in certain fields of endeavor. That degrees amount to anything in the kingdom of God, however, I emphatically deny! The obtaining of a degree for the degree's sake or the having of a degree because of the prestige it may give the preacher who possess one or a dozen is placing the emphasis

in the wrong place. Such a disposition smacks at making a sheer "profession" out of that which should be New Testament evangelism. More than this, it reveals a state of mind which if followed to its logical end will result in nothing but a "clergy system" pure and simple. Still worse, this state of mind indicates a complete ignorance of the true mission of the preacher and the real essence of the religion of Christ.

We know of no person who objects to a preacher having a degree if he wants one, two, three, or all he can get and pay for. But it seems to us that when a degree is obtained it is high time for

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GOSPEL MEETING

April 4, 5, 6

Rob Slover

Night Services: 7:30 P. M.

Sunday Morning 9:45 & 10:45

FULTONDALE CHURCH OF CHRIST

a gospel preacher to forge. he has it. No academic degree necessarily reflects Christian character. No theological degree necessarily reflects a preacher's knowledge of the Word of God, his ability to preach the gospel, or his soundness in the faith. No degree can add one cubit to any man's spiritual stature or his moral worth. When any man uses his degree to impress the brethren with his spiritual attainments, either he is ignorant, they are ignorant, both are ignorant, or else both simply do care about what God's Word teaches on spirituality. We fear that in some instances the latter is the case.

Some years ago I was asked by an elder in a large church in a Southern city to recommend a preacher to work with the church where he was an elder. Before I could ask any question he immediately impressed me with this point: They just had to obtain a man with not less than a M. A. degree. He said nothing about what kind of life the preacher led or whether he was sound in the faith, but he must have a Master's Degree. He explained that it was a college town and many of the people who would hear the preacher would be college personnel including many of the highly educated professors. The brother was obsessed with the idea of a preacher possessing a degree. Apparently he felt that the degree would immediately convert the whole college to Christ. I merely relate this incident to suggest a state

of mind that prevails in some quarters.

Attainment in certain vocations and professions is conditioned upon academic achievement as this achievement is reflected in his academic degrees and honors. Medicine, law, engineering, and other professional and technical fields have certain standards which must be met for the aspirant to be recognized and get ahead in them. The church of Jesus Christ, however, is not one of these professional and technical fields, and the sooner preachers, elders, and brethren generally learn this lesson the better it will be for the kingdom of God.

The power of God to save the souls of men has been deposited in the gospel (Rom. 1:16). Regardless of the methods and manner employed no power will save the sinner except the gospel. One may be well versed in all the academic learning and wisdom of men this world affords and yet be a failure in the kingdom of God if he fails to deliver that which the Lord has commissioned his disciples to preach.

The language of inspiration on this point is appropriate: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Cor 2:1,2). "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by

whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

[Editor's Note: Brother Cope will be with us in a meeting June 9-15. This good and timely article from him needs serious consideration by brethren everywhere.]

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Conscientious Scruples

It was one of those so-called "modern" churches with recreation center, gymnasium, television lounge, kitchen, banquet hall, and an inexhaustible program of picnics, skating parties, ping pong, bowling and ball games. The week-day attendance was up, but Sunday attendance was sagging. I seems that many had conscientious scruples against going to places of amusement on the Lord's Day!

- Via Rose Hill bulletin
Columbus, Ga.

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Recent Deaths

Two of the saints here at Fultondale have passed away recently.

Sis. Willie Kyle

Bro. Donald Earnest

Our sympathy goes out to their families.

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THE RULER AND THE RULED

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

God, who made man, knows man and his needs. Hence, He has ordained certain units of society for the good of man. If order is to prevail in these units there must be some kind of government. There must be those who are "in charge" - there must be those willing to let others be in charge. There are **over** and **under** relationships.

In civil affairs, the unit is a state of some kind. God ordained civil powers to rule or govern a civil unit (Rom. 13:1-5). He did not ordain any specific form of government (other than for ancient Israel) - but did ordain the power and commands citizens to submit to it.

In domestic affairs, the unit is the family. God ordained that parents rule over children. (Eph. 6:1). The husband is over the wife. (Eph. 5:22ff). Thus, a family is ruled by a kind of husband-wife board (a wife has a role in the management¹ of the house - 1 Tim. 5:14) with the husband being the chairman of the board!

In spiritual affairs, the unit is the local church. God ordained elders to rule over local churches. (Acts 20:28).

The Ruled - Take Heed

It may well be that all the talk human rights has conditioned us to think that each person has the right to do his own thing - period. (I am all for human rights, when properly understood and applied) So, we develop the attitude that no one has a right to tell us what to do about anything - that we are answerable only unto ourselves and maybe to God.

If this attitude catches on in any unity of society (state, family or church) there is bound to be trouble. Anarchy is not far away. It will mean that one need only

abide by rules that are to his liking and ignore all others. After all, is he not just as qualified to decide what is right for him as they are. Hence, every man becomes his own ruler, making his own rules.

So, a citizen thinking his judgment is as good as those in power decides what laws he will obey or ignore. He decides what taxes he will pay. He decides who should be arrested or executed. He may get a gun and go into the law and order business on his own.

So, a youngster thinking that his judgment is just as good as his parents demands equal say or more about when and where he goes, what he does, and with whom he does it.

So, a novice in the church thinking his ideas are as wise as anyone's insists that he have equal voice with the elders. He is hurt when he has to yield his judgment to theirs. There are other brethren, who by reason of time should be far beyond the novice stage, that have a hard time bringing themselves to submit to anyone.

Those who should be ruled by others must be aware that they accountable to God first (Acts 5:29), then those who rule over them - in a state, a family, or a congregation.

The Supreme Ruler gave His word or law to govern man. No rule made by any man can set His law aside. Our judgment cannot override God's word.

However, there are things that God has left up to us to decide in harmony with His will. Some of these affect only the individual himself and God - hence one can do his own thing answering only unto himself and God. Some things have to do with collective units -

states, families and congregations. If there is to be harmony with common purpose and direction some decisions must be made on behalf of the unit with all submitting to the decision. There are many forms of civil government. God gave no particular kind for all nations. America is a democracy or republic. It serves us well. It is a majority rule system and the minority must submit to the majority unless the law of the majority violates the law of God.

However, in the families and congregations, God in his wisdom did not leave it to us to decide the form of government in these units. The rule in the family or the congregation is not by the majority. In these units God has provided for rule by the more experienced and mature people - parents in the family and elders in the church.

I am deeply concerned that this principle is being ignored by Christians. In many "Christian homes" wives will not submit to the husband's judgment. Children run the household rather than parents.

In many congregations that claim to be of Christ the elders are mere figure-heads who are "in office" to satisfy the "technically" for scriptural(?) organization. They are not allowed to rule in any real sense of the word. The real oversight is often a preacher or other brethren behind the scenes (often not so far behind the scenes) or even the majority pressuring elders to do their bidding. If elders do not submit to their judgment then it is quickly decided that "we would be better off without elders" so we can have an arrangement where

¹REF Continued on Page 4

¹In 1 Timothy 5:14, the R.V. rightly translates the verb *oikodespoteo* by "rule the household" (A.V., "gild the house"), the meaning being that of the management and direction of household affairs" Expository dictionary of New Testament Word, W. E. Vine.

those under their rule may have ideas that are worth listening to. They need to understand the rule they have by the will of God does not preclude their seeking and/or accepting advice from others -- even from those in submission to them.

Having a place of authority does not give one the right to be self-willed (cf. Tit 1:7). There is nothing in the biblical idea of rule that demands an "ivory tower" isolation from the needs and concerns of those who are to be ruled - or that immunizes one from just criticism. In fact, the concerns and needs of those they oversee are to be ever on their hearts.

It is a poor father who decides matters affecting the lives of the whole family without allowing an input from the family. Suppose one decides to buy a new family car (60 payments out of the old family budget) without discussing it with the family. It would mean that the wife may have to cut the grocery bill. The son may have drop out of college or find another part-time job. The daughter may have to give up her piano lessons. So

what? He is he is head of this house and he wants a car. He gets it. After, all it is a **family** car. He is head of that family and he does not have to ask anybody about the matter. That settles it. Now, really do you think that man is ruling according to God's will? There is a difference in **ruling** and **ruling well**". (cf. 1 Tim. 3:4). I may rule my house - as long as I have my twenty gauge, but I doubt that it would be he kind of rule that would qualify me for the eldership.

Ruling at home is the training ground for congregational rule. High handed rule is neither right nor workable at home or in the church. Elders are warned not to lord it over the church. (1 Pet. 5:1-8). They are, themselves, accountable to the Chief Shepherd.

There is too much of a "tug of war" in many homes and congregations. It is the ruler **versus** the ruled rather than ruler **and** the ruled. Some may be due to those who rule not being able to rule without being overbearing. Some may be due to an insubordinate spirit in those needing be ruled.

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