

## A BRIEF SUMMARY OF INSTRUCTION IN HOMILETICS AND PASTORAL THEOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

*Reinhold Pieper*<sup>2</sup>

*Translated by Wilbert H. Werling*<sup>3</sup>

“It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). So the apostle writes to the Corinthians, and gives the criterion according to which every pastor judges himself, and by which he should be judged by others, namely, faithfulness in his office. No more, but also no less is required. No vast scholarship, no sparkling eloquence, no other special gifts are demanded. He must, of course, have such a degree of knowledge as is needed to carry out the demands of his office. He should, for instance, have such a command of the language in which he preaches that he does not make crude blunders. This would divert the attention of the hearers from the proclamation of the truth, so that the Word fails to strike heart and conscience.<sup>4</sup>

If one has this kind of knowledge then he does not need any special learning, not even knowledge of the ancient languages, for a practical and blessed pastorate. If these were the indispensable requisites, how many pastors would then be really qualified? A wide range of learning is to be highly prized, particularly when it is faithfully used to attain the aim and purpose of one’s office. If, however, those who have, or seem to have, this knowledge, look down upon those who were not able to acquire it, then their studies have a withering influence upon them, and confirmed the saying:

Hebrew roots, we understand,  
Thrive the best on arid sand.

A pastor may possess a most extensive and scholarly knowledge, and yet be a rather beggarly preacher, and have only a moderate, or even no blessing on his work. This will be the case if he does not have the qualification of faithfulness, which Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (“our sufficiency is of God”) designates as indispensable.

“What could this faithfulness be?” asks Luther, and answers: “What advantage is it, or of what use is it, if a bishop were so great that he had charge of all dioceses, as the pope presumes? Of what avail is it if he were so holy that his shadow could raise the dead? Of what good is it if he were as wise as were all the apostles and prophets? This is of no concern here. But to be faithful, to give the Word of God to the people, to preach the Gospel and share the mysteries of God, that, that is the great concern. That benefits everyone; everyone is profited. Therefore before all things faithfulness is to be sought and required in stewards.”<sup>5</sup> ...

Foremost in the question of faithfulness is the careful and conscientious preparation of every sermon. In one of his lectures, Dr. Walther once remarked, “A pastor who does not use every free hour for the preparation of his sermon, is unfaithful in his office.” And so it is. To be sure, all power to rescue sinners lies indeed in the Word (Romans 1:16-17). No scholarship, no eloquence, and the like, of the preacher can make it more powerful than it is, but the mysteries of the Gospel are so deep and unsearchable (Ephesians 3:8 - “the unsearchable riches of Christ”), and all powers of even the most capable preacher so insignificant, that he must exhort himself to the utmost to unlock and proclaim the divine mysteries to the welfare of his hearers.

I repeat: The saving power lies alone in the Word, but a careless, lazy preacher preaches out of the church those he desires to win. His sermon should be the net with which he catches the fish; instead it is a scarecrow that drives them away. It would be more beneficial if he would remain silent. Since often careful preparation is missing he preaches away from, rather than out of, the text. Instead of presenting and applying the divine truth contained in the text, he relates all kinds of little stories. Is that not offering strange fire before the Lord (Leviticus 10:1-2)?

Faithfulness in office, furthermore, demands that the Word, Law and Gospel, be correctly proclaimed. I shall not speak here of the fact that both must be proclaimed unadulterated, the former in all its severity, the latter in its entire fullness. Rather, I state how, and to what purpose, both should be done by the preacher. Preach the Law in all its severity. Let lightning and thunder descend as from Mt. Sinai; reveal to your hearers the burning wrath of the holy God; let the flames of the fiery, bottomless pit rise up before them. Preach it, however, in fervent love to them in order to preserve them from it. Preach the Law in hatred towards sin, but in pitying love to sinners bought with the blood of the Son of God. Did you ever consider the words of the apostle Paul to his misled Galatians, "My little children, I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (4:19)? Do you feel some of the love and fears which Paul experienced for his Galatians? Do not be surprised if you sense but little love on the part of your hearers if love in your heart has grown cold toward them. Then do not blame them but blame yourself!

Would that we pastors would take to heart the Word of the apostle, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). We know it; we preach it: Christ for us – Christ in our stead. This truth cannot be proclaimed loud and clear enough, especially now, since it is rejected by so many theologians and ministers who empty the Gospel of its real content. Whoever does not proclaim this divine, saving truth is no ambassador for Christ but an emissary of the devil, a ravaging wolf among the sheep of Christ. Woe unto him (Galatians 1:9: "if anyone preaches any other Gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed")!

Let us not forget that we are ambassadors for Christ, and are such only then when we constantly keep His example before us as we proclaim the good tidings. Let us ask ourselves, how would Christ preach if He were standing in the pulpit in our place? Did He ever preach in a mechanical fashion? Was he ever satisfied simply in delivering the sermon? Was He ever unconcerned whether or not His sermon produced fruit? Did He not always and everywhere seek the one thing – to rescue the lost (Matthew 8:11: "many come from the east and the west")? Were not all His words arrows, directed to the heart – cords of love with which He sought to draw sinners to Himself (Matthew 11:18)? Did not His heart throb constantly in saving love towards them? Why were His sermons so powerful, so much different from those of the Pharisees? Not only because of different content, but also because they were presented in a different way – whether He was unmasking the Pharisees and scribes, or whether the publicans and sinners were drawing nigh.

Are we earnestly striving to imitate Him? Do we preach, being fervent (seething) in spirit (Acts 18:25 – Apollos)? In the preparation of every sermon, do we have the one great, sublime goal vividly before our eyes – are we mindful of the entire responsibility of our task – that nothing

less is at stake than the rescuing of lost souls, than their life and salvation? Do we realize that every time this involves calling sinners to repentance, shattering the breastplate of self-righteousness with the hammer of the Law, bringing the proud to bow before the cross of Christ, and rescuing immortal souls with our message?

Do we implore the Lord that He grant us His Holy Spirit, that He place His blessing upon our sermon “that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel” (Ephesians 6:19)? Are we constrained by love to Christ, and by souls committed to our charge (2 Corinthians 5:14)? Should we not be wholeheartedly concerned to meet the challenge as ambassadors for Christ, since we are called by Christ, sent by Him, through whom God makes His appeal, imploring in Christ’s stead, “Be reconciled to God”? If this would come to pass then there would not be so many sleepy preachers standing in the pulpit, and not so many slumbering hearers sitting in the churches. Then in many expiring congregations a new life, a new stirring and striving would emerge. For, as the shepherd, so his flock (*Qualis rex, talis grex*).<sup>6</sup>

The required faithfulness of a steward over God’s mysteries consists in a solemn earnestness and resolve not only against every false doctrine (2 John 10 “receive him not”; Galatians 1:8-9 “any other doctrine – accursed”), but also in uncovering and flaying sin, in striving against every kind of worldliness invading the church. Whoever does not demonstrate this earnestness and grows weary in this strife does not discharge the duties of his office faithfully. The apostle writes, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3). These are the times in which we live. Many find the wholesome, true doctrine intolerable, since it rebukes sin in those who continue therein. They demand pastors who are liberal, who make concessions, who do not rebuke so-called “Christians” when they mingle with the children of the world in theatres and similar places, grow intimate with, and ape the fashionable world. They want to have pastors held in high esteem by the semi-believing and unbelieving world—not old-fashioned preachers, but such as bring them prestige.

Often entertainment and amusement, not edification, are sought in congregations and churches. All kinds of societies are formed, entertainments and concerts are arranged to satisfy the desire for diversion. All kinds of diversion are offered to attract people. In this way it is hoped to fend off worldliness, but instead, doors and windows are opened wide through which it streams into the church. But what benefit is it if, having well entertained and amused themselves the trumpet then sounds, calling them before the judgment-seat of Him who suffered His hands and His feet to be pierced, not for their entertainment, but for the redemption of poor, penitent sinners! Bazaars and sales are arranged, intended for the upkeep and benefit of the church. In this way churches are downgraded to second-hand shops, similar to the temple at Jerusalem, when the moneychangers and sellers of doves carried on a profitable business under the guise of godliness. Is not this an attempt to court the favor and funds of the world?

For what purpose are congregations established and maintained, churches built, and the Word proclaimed? Not in order to make room for entertainment, but to rescue sinners, to preserve souls bought with the blood of Christ from the flames of perdition. And what is the means through which this is accomplished? Not by lectures concerning everything imaginable; not in entertainment and theatre-like performances, but in the proclamation of the divine Word—and

of the divine Word only. Will there really be many standing on the right hand on that great Day who are “kept” with the church through such means, who are thus kept from backsliding to the world? Are they not the ones to whom Revelation 3:15–16 applies (“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth”)? Pastors who do not oppose such a state of affairs with resolution may well consider if they are not the ones of whom Isaiah writes, “His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber” (56:10). To gather large congregations, to build magnificent churches can often be possible without much trouble, especially if one is not particular about the means used. It is quite another thing to build the kingdom of God. This takes place solely through the Word, and only insofar as individual sinners are brought to faith. Whoever does not recognize this as the sole task of his office, and does not keep it before his mind’s eye, preaches for this world and not for eternity. He has forgotten the truth that Christ’s kingdom is a spiritual, eternal kingdom, and has forgotten the Word of the Lord: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

Our preaching should be timely.<sup>7</sup> That does not mean that one should “be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14), preaching the matter and the manner that is pleasing to the hearers, but rather preaching to their needs. Whoever preaches the former permits the hearers to put words into his mouth; whoever proclaims the latter preaches what comes from God. The sermon that is at all times timely reads thus: “Repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15)!

We find this faithfulness only in a pastor who is a “man of God.” Certainly, a pastor should be an ordinary person, without pride and conceit in his congregation. He should be all things to all men, that he might by all means save some (1 Corinthians 9:22). Lordly pride has ever been a snare by which the infernal fisher has caught many “divines,” as church history informs us.<sup>8</sup> The pastor, however, should be a “man of God,” and as such should follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, and fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:11-12).

If he is not a man of God, but a man of the world – if in spite of all his unctious talk the man of the world peeks out from under his ministerial robe,<sup>9</sup> then it is a special wonder of God’s grace if a single sinner comes to a proper understanding through him. According to the exhortation of the apostle (1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7 “a pattern of good works”), the pastor should be an example to all, in everything, in every way, so that the gainsayer can speak no evil about him. If he cannot be an example he is despised even by the world. Someone once was asked, “Do you attend services at the church near your home?” “No.” “Why not?” “Well, the pastor who serves there plays cards.” “But you yourself like to play cards.” “That is true, but the pastor in whom I am to have confidence must be better than I am.” (Romans 14:15-16: “If your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love.”) Such a one is a “religious” worldling, or a worldly “divine” in the pulpit speaking of spiritual, heavenly things! ...

The harvest is great, but the laborers few. Let us pray the Lord of the harvest that He send laborers into His harvest. May He make faithful laborers of those He sends, so that they deliver His message properly, and seek nothing else than the rescue of sinners and the glory of His name!<sup>10</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: This article appears in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 49, Nos. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Editor's Note: Reinhold Pieper (March 2, 1850–April 3, 1920) was born at Carwitz, Pomerania, the son of the town mayor, August Pieper, and Bertha nee Lohff. After Reinhold and his older brother Julius came to America, his widowed mother and four younger brothers immigrated to this country and settled in Watertown, Wisconsin. His mother worked at Northwestern College and the boys attended the school. After completing his studies at Watertown, he entered Concordia Seminary at St. Louis, Missouri, graduating in 1876. His first call as pastor was at Wrightstown, Wisconsin, 1876–78, and later he served in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, 1878–91. Both congregations were members of the Wisconsin Synod. In 1891, he was called as professor of theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, Illinois, and was president of the institution until 1914. He was called to his eternal home in heaven in 1920.

Reinhold's brother Franz Pieper (1852–1931) was the great dogmatician of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, professor at St. Louis from 1878–1931, and president of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod 1899–1911. His brother August Pieper (1857–1946) taught at the seminary of the Wisconsin Synod and is known for his Isaiah commentary. His brother Karl was editor of a newspaper and died at Menomonie, Wisconsin. His brother Anton was a pastor in the Wisconsin Synod serving most of his years in Newton, Wisconsin. His brother Julius was a miller. His sister Minnie (Wilhelmine), the oldest in the family, and his sister Bertha remained in Germany. His mother died in 1893.

Reinhold Pieper was the author of five volumes of sermons, a textbook on homiletics and three volumes of lectures on Luther's *Small Catechism*. Of special interest in his sermon books is his use of Old Testament texts. He probably made more use of Old Testament texts than any other writer in the Synodical Conference of his period. In these sermons he made a considerable use of biblical typology. An example of this is *Simson auf seiner Brautfahrt nach Thimnath ein Vorbild auf Christum* recorded in *Predigten über freie Texte*, Vol. II (Milwaukee: Germania Publishing Company, 1902), 231–241. For a summary of this sermon, see Gaylin Schmeling, "Sermon on Judges 14:1–9," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 38:3 (September 1998): 186–192.

<sup>3</sup> Editor's Note: Wilbert H. Werling (January 26, 1907–January 16, 1990) attended Concordia Seminary at St. Louis, Missouri, graduating in 1930. During his time at the seminary, dogmatics was taught by Franz Pieper in German using only the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament as textbooks, as Dr. Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* was not yet written. Upon graduation Werling served as a missionary in China until he was forced to return to the United States due to tuberculosis in 1936. After serving a number of congregations in the Missouri Synod, he became a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1966. He served both St. Martin's Lutheran Church of Shawano, Wisconsin, and St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Clintonville from 1966–1973. In retirement, he served several congregations in Wisconsin and California. The Chico Lutheran Mission in Chico, California, was founded by him, where he served until his death in 1990. He is the grandfather of Jerome and Erik Gernander, who are pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod today, and of Amy (Gernander) Chandia, who was a volunteer lay assistant in the ELS Chile mission for several years.

<sup>4</sup> This may also be caused in other ways, e.g., by a monotonous, sing-song delivery, through partial reading, and plagiarism of the manuscript, etc. When once a plain, elderly, Christian lady heard a humdrum preacher, she said, "God be thanked that he is not our pastor; he sounds like an old street organ." Did she receive a blessing from the sermon? And as for a plagiarized use of a manuscript – such dishonesty in the pulpit takes away all devotion! When he was a young pastor, superintendent-general Buechsel served a country congregation in Pomerania, and was accustomed to partial reading of his manuscript. This could be observed especially by those seated in the choir loft. One Sunday, as he was again reading his sermon he heard a servant saying to his neighbor aside of him, "He's reading again." Later, said Buechsel, "I owe this servant many thanks."

<sup>5</sup> Erlangen Ausgabe 7:94; W<sup>2</sup> XII, 63.

<sup>6</sup> Literally, as the king (leader), so the flock (crowd).

<sup>7</sup> *Zeitgemäß*

<sup>8</sup> What complaints Gregory of Nazianzus raised against the worldly inclinations, the ambition, and pride of the bishops at the second general council of Constantinople in A.D. 381! And what about the councils at Ephesus in 431 and 449, and at Chalcedon in 451!

<sup>9</sup> *Chorrock*

<sup>10</sup> This translation is from the foreword to *Occasional and Festival Sermons (Kasual und Festpredigten)* by Reinhold Pieper (Milwaukee: Germania Publishing Company, 1908), III-IX.