The preacher . . . is not a professional man; his ministry is not a profession; it is a divine institution, a divine devotion.

E. M. Bounds

We are fools for Christ’s sake. But professionals are wise.
We are weak. But professionals are strong.
Professionals are held in honor. We are in disrepute.

We do not try to secure a professional lifestyle, but we are ready to hunger and thirst and be ill-clad and homeless.

1

Brothers, We Are Not Professionals

We pastors are being killed by the professionalizing of the pastoral ministry. The mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. It is not the mentality of the slave of Christ. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the Christian ministry. The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness (Matt. 18:3); there is no professional tenderheartedness (Eph. 4:32); there is no professional panting after God (Ps. 42:1).

But our first business is to pant after God in prayer. Our business is to weep over our sins (James 4:9). Is there professional weeping?
Our business is to strain forward to the holiness of Christ and the prize of the upward call of God (Phil. 3:14); to pummel our bodies and subdue them lest we be cast away (1 Cor. 9:27); to deny ourselves and take up the blood-splattered cross daily (Luke 9:23). How do you carry a cross professionally? We have been crucified with Christ, yet now we live by faith in the one who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20). What is professional faith?

We are to be filled not with wine but with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). We are God-besotted lovers of Christ. How can you be drunk with Jesus professionally? Then, wonder of wonders, we were given the gospel treasure to carry in clay pots to show that the transcendent power belongs to God (2 Cor. 4:7). Is there a way to be a professional clay pot?

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus (professionally?) so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested (professionally?) in our bodies (2 Cor. 4:9–11).

I think God has exhibited us preachers as last of all in the world. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but professionals are wise. We are weak, but professionals are strong. Professionals are held in honor, we are in disrepute. We do not try to secure a professional lifestyle, but we are ready to hunger and thirst and be ill-clad and homeless. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4:9–13). Or have we?

Brothers, we are not professionals! We are outcasts. We are aliens and exiles in the world (1 Pet. 2:11). Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait with eager expectation for the Lord (Phil. 3:20). You cannot professionalize the love for His appearing without killing it. And it is being killed.

The aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual. They are not shared by any of the professions. It is precisely by the failure to see this that we are dying.
The life-giving preacher is a man of God, whose heart is ever athirst for God, whose soul is ever following hard after God, whose eye is single to God, and in whom by the power of God’s Spirit the flesh and the world have been crucified and his ministry is like the generous flood of a life-giving river.¹

We are most emphatically not part of a social team sharing goals with other professionals. Our goals are an offense; they are foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). The professionalization of the ministry is a constant threat to the offense of the gospel. It is a threat to the profoundly spiritual nature of our work. I have seen it often: the love of professionalism (parity among the world’s professionals) kills a man’s belief that he is sent by God to save people from hell and to make them Christ-exalting, spiritual aliens in the world.

The world sets the agenda of the professional man; God sets the agenda of the spiritual man. The strong wine of Jesus Christ explodes the wineskins of professionalism. There is an infinite difference between the pastor whose heart is set on being a professional and the pastor whose heart is set on being the aroma of Christ, the fragrance of death to some and eternal life to others (2 Cor. 2:15–16).

God, deliver us from the professionalizers! Deliver us from the “low, managing, contriving, maneuvering temper of mind among us.”² God, give us tears for our sins. Forgive us for being so shallow in prayer, so thin in our grasp of holy verities, so content amid perishing neighbors, so empty of passion and earnestness in all our conversation. Restore to us the childlike joy of our salvation. Frighten us with the awesome holiness and power of Him who can cast both soul and body into hell (Matt. 10:28). Cause us to hold to the cross with fear and trembling as our hope-filled and offensive tree of life. Grant us nothing, absolutely nothing, the way the world views it. May Christ be all in all (Col. 3:11).
Banish professionalism from our midst, Oh God, and in its place put passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to all material gain, and unremitting labor to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord.

Humble us, O God, under Your mighty hand, and let us rise, not as professionals, but as witnesses and partakers of the sufferings of Christ. In His awesome name. Amen.

Notes
