

Why Go to Seminary?

Dr. Rolland D. McCune, Th.D.

Professor of Systematic Theology

Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary – Allen Park, MI

At times I have found myself having to justify seminary training to college students and others of seminary quality. Their question was not where to attend seminary (where else but DBTS!) but whether to attend seminary at all. After all, it is said, souls are perishing while would-be-pastors and missionaries are sitting in classes; seminary students become spiritual skeletons while getting intellectually fat; the halls of academia will destroy anyone's zeal to serve God; or more is already known of God than can be properly lived in a lifetime, so why add to that? I would like to propose a few basic reasons why one who is called to the ministry should get a biblical, separatist, Fundamental Baptist seminary training.

The first reason is to increase one's knowledge. A graduate level, seminary education should add a whole new dimension in the overall fund of Bible knowledge necessary for the ministry today. A knowledge of the biblical languages is a must if we really believe in the verbal inerrancy of the Scriptures. Because the Bible has but one unified, coherent network of truth, an ignorance of systematic theology is not only tragic but unforgivable. Due to the higher education level of people, along with the ever increasing tide of good biblical scholarship, today's minister must be well prepared to keep abreast of biblical studies and to meet modern man on his own intellectual level with the truth of the Word of God. No amount of self study, praying, hoping, or wishing can substitute for a thorough seminary education.

DBTS is not trying to make Greek or Hebrew scholars, great theologians, or church historians in three years, but it does give a solid foundation of knowledge in these areas that will equip one for the ministry in today's world or enable him to go on to the post-graduate level.

The second reason for seminary training is maturity, in several areas. Three or more years of seminary will greatly improve one's social maturity, his ability to understand and relate to people and their needs. Also there is a mental maturation necessary for today's preacher that simply is not present in most people at 21 or 22 years of age. This includes his attitude towards the ministry, his wife and family, and life in general. Effective seminary training will do wonders for one's decision-making apparatus, the ability to discern the will of God through the Scriptures as applied to a given situation. Too many ministers make sudden life-altering decisions involving themselves, their families, and whole churches on the basis of piety, mysticism, emotion (usually anger or frustration), personal pique, or a childish pique. Many times it is simply a failure to grow up and live in the real world. And then there is a spiritual maturity that the three or four years in the Word of God can bring. Too long we have made the false dichotomy between a "devotional" and an "academic" approach to Scripture, as though there is a different Bible being used in each. Any right handling of the Word will yield the same truth, and all such truth is life altering! The problem is one of attitude. One should love his God far more after a theology exam than after reading a daily devotional ditty. Spiritual maturity increases in

direct proportion to knowledge of and obedience to the Word of God. And what better time to grow spiritually than the years of concentrated study of the Scriptures?

Another reason for solid seminary training is the complex issues facing today's minister. He must know when to say yeas and when to say no to the many calls and invitations to join hands in common causes of all sorts. DBTS is a Fundamentalist school and students are reminded of that heritage. Fundamentalists historically have resisted the inclusive policy of cooperating with the Bible –deniers and with those who are content to walk with compromise. Knowledgeable convictions in these areas are necessary if truth is to be maintained.

Finally, if one is going to pastor a Baptist church or work with Baptist people, he should have a Baptist seminary education. At DBTS we teach Baptist history, Baptist polity, and the historic Baptist distinctives without any apology.

Therefore, after more than forty years of both formal training and teaching on a seminary level, I would urge future pastors and missionaries not to sell themselves and their ministries short with a bob-tailed preparation. Study carefully the principles and implication of Proverbs 24:27, "Prepare they work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house."