

“I Have Kept the Faith”—A Tribute to Dr. Gordon L. Shipp



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Faith Pulpit is issue oriented. We planned it that way and intend to keep it that way! The sudden and unexpected death of our president has caused us to reflect on the direction in which he was leading the College and Seminary, to think about the issues he raised and considered important. We note these issues carefully because we, too, believe they are important, and because they serve as an occasion to remember and honor the godly legacy Dr. Shipp left us. In looking over various articles written by Dr. Shipp, we note that the following issues appear dominant.

I. Dr. Gordon L. Shipp Had a Doctrine-Centered Emphasis

When Dr. Shipp announced the inauguration of the Seminary, he described it as being “dedicated to a conservative, dispensational, premillennial and Baptist thrust” (Presidential Report, undated, spring 1986). In yet another report, he stated: “Our Seminary is distinctively Baptist, sound in its academics and practical in its purpose. We plan to stand here in the heartland of America, waving our banner of Biblical faith and practice. We will pay our bills, train our students well, furnish leaders thoroughly committed to historic Baptist principles and look forward to ‘furthering’ God’s cause and not ‘fainting’ in it” (Presidential Report, December, 1986, pages 1 and 2).

When Dr. Shipp described our position as being dispensational and premillennial, he meant that we believe and teach the next event on God’s prophetic calendar is the Rapture – the catching away of all true believers in Christ during this age. This means we will NOT go through the Tribulation. Our Lord Jesus Christ could return today for His own. What a Blessed Hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 5:9, 10). This also means that there is a future for the nation of Israel (Romans 11:25–29) and that, following the Tribulation, we will return with Christ to rule with Him for a

thousand years on earth (Revelation 20:1–6). The historic Baptist principles to which Dr. Shipp referred include seeing the church as a New Testament entity rather than a continuation of Israel and, therefore, also believing and teaching the separation of church and state, the priesthood of every believer, the right of the congregation to govern itself apart from any interference, believer's baptism by single immersion as an act of obedience rather than as a sacrament, and regeneration as a requirement for membership in the congregation.

When Dr. Shipp described the position of the school as "conservative," however, he meant more than that it believed and taught the fundamentals of the faith, such as the virgin birth of Christ, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary death of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the personal, visible return of Christ. He also meant that the school stood for standards by which music—both in sound and in words—could be judged. He said, "The sound of our singing today betrays a softness and departure from once said, agreed upon standards. Unless the music changes we may well expect that just ahead we will see departure in doctrine and deportment in our endeavors, institutions and churches. We must be certain that we do not allow the lyrics, beat, props, and theatrics of the world to establish a beachhead in our faith and practice. If our sound of music is like the world, we will soon be swallowed by the world" (Faith Witness, January-March, 1987, page 3).

Dr. Shipp's description of the school as conservative includes its willingness to stand for the historic GARBC position on the doctrine of separation, both from the world in our personal lives and from organized unbelief and compromise. Almost five years ago, Dr. Shipp stated: "Faith Baptist Bible College, by the grace of God, will not bend the banner of the historic GARBC position. The position and training provided at FBBC is and will be a 'distinct sound' in support of this banner" (Faith Witness, June–July, 1982, page 3). The Seminary also stands with Dr. Shipp and the College in this position, believing that 2 Corinthians 6:14–18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15 present such a view.

II. Dr. Gordon L. Shipp Had a Practical Service-Geared Emphasis

When Dr. Shipp wrote for that issue of the Faith Witness which described the new Seminary, he said, "Some of FBBC's graduates just completing undergraduate programs desire further training. Many men now in the pastorate recognize the need for further study. Missionaries home on furlough want more training before returning to their fields. Graduates from liberal arts studies who are headed for the ministry need pastoral training. To give what is needed to these endeavors, FBBC is pleased to offer an increased program to 'expound the way of God more perfectly.' Faith Baptist Theological Seminary is dedicated to making good witnesses better witnesses. Our program is pointed toward practical training. The course offerings will continually be fine-tuned to the current needs of the ministry. Seminary study will be directed toward the individual called to be a 'front line convincer' of the gospel. Spiritual eloquence in the delivery of truth will be sharpened" (Faith Witness, April-June, 1986, page 3).

In Dr. Shipp's mind, a Bible college and a seminary help prepare a person who is called of God to serve effectively. The goal is not merely to produce graduates whose minds are full. Instead, the goal is to produce graduates whose minds are full AND whose hearts are enflamed with zeal to witness and to preach.

III. Dr. Gordon L. Shipp Had a People-Oriented Emphasis

Dr. Shipp once quoted part of a letter he had received from a pastor. In that letter the pastor said, "I am contacting your college because I have found your students to be people oriented. They want to serve. This is the type of man I want!" Dr. Shipp said he was happy for this evaluation and listed three things as "necessary for a God-honoring ministry": (1) a towel, (2) a tear, and (3) a tenacity in service. ("From the President's Desk," January, 1985.) These three ideas characterized Dr. Shipp's personal ministry, and they were part of the direction in which he was leading

the school: a towel, the symbol of a true servant (expressed by Dr. Shipp in exhortation and example); a tear, the symbol of a concerned servant; and tenacity, the symbol of a dedicated servant.

Conclusion

Faith Baptist Theological Seminary is determined to remain true to these concerns of Dr. Shipp: a desire for sound doctrine and practice, a Scriptural balance of both teaching and practical service, and an emphasis upon serving people. In this way Dr. Gordon L. Shipp truly will be honored.