

No Confidence in the Flesh

by K.P. Yohannan

The key to being used by God is to lay aside our confidence in the flesh and trust in His power and provision.

Scripture: Philippians 3:4

Topics: "Dependence On God", "Surrendering Self-Reliance"

Description

K.P. Yohannan emphasizes the importance of surrendering our confidence in our own abilities and relying solely on God for effectiveness in ministry. He shares experiences from his visit to Last Days Ministries, where untrained individuals accomplished great things through their dependence on Christ. Yohannan illustrates this principle with biblical examples, particularly Moses and Paul, who both had to relinquish their self-reliance to be used powerfully by God. The sermon underscores that true effectiveness comes not from education or skills, but from a heart fully surrendered to God's will. Ultimately, it is our dependence on God that enables us to bear lasting fruit for His glory.

Transcript

Back in the 80s I had the opportunity to visit with Keith Green and the staff of Last Days Ministries. For a long time, I had received their newsletters and was quite impressed, thinking they must have some of the finest graphic designers working with them. However, during my visit I came to discover that the artists designing the Last Days newsletter weren't trained professionals at all! They were just kids from the streets whose lives had been changed by Christ. Having given up the right to run their own life, these men and women simply served at Last Days Ministries the best they could.

And because of their surrender and dependence upon what Christ could do through them, they were used to do great things. Even though I've seen God use untrained men and women countless times, my eyes still search for the professionals. Just yesterday, I was looking at an application of someone who desired to serve with the Gospel for Asia staff. The first thing my eyes went to was the section about the applicant's education and experience, scanning what kind of training and expertise the person had.

I am not saying there is something wrong with utilizing the gifts that God has given people or recognizing certain abilities--not at all. The leadership at GFA prays for God to bring people with specific skills and talents to work within the ministry. That is legitimate and appropriate. For it is God who gives us different skills, all so that we can use them to glorify His name. To one He gives five talents, to another two, and to another one, expecting us to invest them wisely (see Matthew 25).

But I have seen time and again that a lack of education never hinders God from using an individual. Please understand; I am not making light of education, skills or talents. But I do believe that it is only as we surrender our abilities to Him--give up our rights to own and rely on our strengths--that He can use us to accomplish great things for Him. There are biblical examples of this. Just think of Moses. Having been raised in Pharaoh's house, Moses received some of the best leadership training of his day.

Certainly God ordained this training for Moses, knowing that he could use this later in his life when leading the children of Israel, right? But such is not the case. While Moses was in the desert as a criminal and serving as a shepherd (one of the lowliest of jobs in that day), God began to prepare Moses for fruitful service. How did God do this? By unraveling Moses' confidence in himself, bringing him to the place where he even said, "God, I can't do the job." It was then that God was able to use Moses in a mighty way because he had nothing of his own to rely upon anymore--no previous training, no experiences to fall back on--nothing.

Just simple dependence upon the Lord. The same is true with the apostle Paul. He was an incredibly brilliant, well-trained individual. He studied under Gamaliel, a well-known philosopher and theologian, and was perfect in the Law. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees. History tells us that Paul was trained to perfectly debate and defend his faith. In Philippians 3:4 (NIV), Paul says of himself, "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more and he goes on to list his professional credentials--the things that, under the law, qualified him for service.

Yet after Paul's Damascus Road experience, God did not send him to the Jews where all these credentials would have seemed to be of great value. If I were God, I would have said, "Finally, I have found someone that I can use to impact the whole Jewish nation! Through his abilities, his knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and his power of debate, the Jews will finally come to believe in my Son, Jesus." If I were God, I would have said, "Look at his credentials, his education and his experience!

He is definitely the one to do the work among the Jews." But God didn't do that. Instead, He sent Paul to the Gentiles. That doesn't seem to sound right. Paul could have spoken eloquently with the Jews, confounding them with his wisdom and his ability to decisively argue the facts. He knew all the laws, all the Scriptures, all the history and culture. In order for Paul to reach the Gentiles, he had to lay aside everything he knew so well, leaving him with nothing to fall back on.

In his own words, Paul said, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1, 4-5). It is not that God only uses amateurs, the poor, the uneducated and those who lack ability.

It is that God will only use those who will depend on Him--those who will give Him the glory for is done. The real issue is not how much education we have or do not have. The real issue is whether we are dependent upon God. God wants to use us all--professionals and amateurs alike. But He is not going to bless a work that leads anyone to depend more upon his or her own strength rather than on the strength of God. Throughout his ministry, Paul learned how the "power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7, NIV) and how "our adequacy is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5, NASB), not from our experience or training.

Even after years of preaching and service to God, numerous churches planted and incredible fruitfulness of his ministry, Paul still said, " I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells" (Romans 7:18). In Philippians 3:3 (NIV), he said, "[We] put no confidence in the flesh." May the Lord give us the attitude and understanding that Paul had in this--that we, in our flesh, are incapable of bearing good fruit that remains. But through Him, our lives can bear good fruit and bring glory to God.

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