

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROY J. HEARN

Dennis Gullede

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article is the first in a series of interviews with men who have proven themselves to be dedicated preachers of the gospel of Christ. These interviews are intended to better acquaint us with some of our finest preachers. In this interview these men were asked to reminisce and instruct for the benefit of all who may read it, but especially for the good of younger preachers.

This series will begin with the editor of *First Century Christian*. Roy J. Hearn was born in Wilmar, Arkansas on November 15, 1911. His family moved to Memphis on December 14, 1925. He graduated from Memphis Technical High School on June 8, 1930 and went to work in September of that same year for \$12.00 a week. This was almost one year after the beginning of the Great Depression. He was the only one in his family of nine who had a job during that difficult time. In 1932, he began courting his present and only wife, Sadie Tisdale. They were married on September 1, 1935. To this union were born two daughters.

Brother Hearn was baptized by H. A. Brown on July 14, 1934. He worked for the Railway Express Company for six years before entering Freed-Hardeman College in September 1940. He graduated from Freed-Hardeman College in 1944 and went on to receive the B.A. Degree from David Lipscomb College and the M. A. Degree from George Peabody College. While a student in Freed-Hardeman College, brother Hearn preached once a month at Roan's Creek church of Christ near Lexington, Tennessee, and received up to \$2.00 a month. His part time preaching efforts took him into various parts of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Texas.

In November, 1948, brother Hearn entered what he calls the most fruitful local work of his life. A county-wide paper was printed with good results. A daily radio program was begun. Sectarianism was strongly attacked. Debates were held. The gospel was preached over the entire Crossville, Tennessee area, pay or no pay. Brother Hearn never considered money nor the size of the crowd when he was asked to preach.

Among the mighty works of brother Hearn's life would be the following: His establishment of the Memphis School Of Preaching in 1966. He retired from the directorship of the School in 1983. The journal, *First Century Christian*, is a monthly paper devoted to exposing liberalism and calling attention to the first century gospel. This excellent paper ceased publication in 1977 and was revived in 1989. Also, his book, *Sermon Outlines By Roy J. Hearn*, was published in 1989.

DG: How long have you been preaching the gospel?

RJH: My first effort at preaching was January, 1936. The preacher was sick, and the elders were frantic. However, I do not count my years of preaching beginning then, though several efforts were made through the years. At the age of thirty years, I went to Freed-Hardeman College in 1941, and began to preach on weekly appointments while there. While I have been trying for all those years, I have only learned to preach within the last ten years!

DG: Can you recall the circumstances of your first sermon?

RJH: As I recall, it was January, 1936. The preacher was sick. The elders asked me to fill in. They were really desperate. Snow was on the ground. I had more zeal than sense, so I preached a strong sermon along the lines of faithfulness. If memory serves me, the elders said

that "in view of Roy's sermon, we will go ahead and have services tonight." (They had planned to cancel, but I did not know it.)

DG: How do you think the emphasis in preaching has changed since you began? Has the change been for the better or worse?

RJH: There is a vast difference between the preaching now (1991) and fifty years ago. There were far more greater preachers, who preached the Bible. As brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr. said: "In those days, finding a liberal in the church was like finding a needle in a haystack. Now you can rake and bale them." In those days, most preachers were truly "men of the Book." They preached the whole gospel without fear or favor or compromise.

In 1991, as far as I can determine, the church of the Lord is facing apostasy. In fact, it is knocking at the door, and I fear has already gained entrance to a number of churches. On every hand, I hear of churches that will not stand for sound, Bible preaching. Many preachers are not using the Bible, but lean more toward grace only, psychology, social gospel, and nearly anything but an exposition of the word of God. Too many are like those of Jeremiah's day who said: "We will not walk therein." (That is, in God's way). Bible colleges are permeated with liberal doctrines and tendencies, and their students are going out and preaching a perverted gospel.

DG: Name three preachers of the past or present who have influenced you the most in your preaching.

RJH: (Not in the order of who did the most.) N. B. Hardeman; H. Leo Boles; E. R. Harper; Foy E. Wallace, Jr.; Gus Nichols; Marshall Keeble; J. A. McNutt; Douglas Perkins; W. Claude Hall; B. C. Goodpasture; J. D. Tant; and likely others.

DG: You have held a number of debates over the years. Which is your most memorable, and why?

RJH: There were two main debates, about equal. One was with Jehovah's Witnesses, B. M. Cole, District Representative. The other was with a Sabbatarian, W. W. McMicken, of the Seventh Day Church of God. I had signed eight propositions with B. M. Cole, but after the first round on the immortality of the soul, he would not debate any more. The last night of the debate I copied the propositions and laid them on his table. He walked off and left them. Since I showed the Witnesses claimed that Christ was merely a man, and when He died He was as "dead as a dead dog," some fellows wanted to pull Cole out of the tent. Then on a Saturday, soon after the debate, the Witnesses got into fist fights with the men of the town. They fought all day, off and on, and called in help from Rockwood, Tennessee. Then, Sunday afternoon, many of the men in Crossville, with clubs and fire hose assailed the Witnesses' meeting place and drove them out of town. (I did not participate in this!)

The debate with McMicken went more smoothly. I had painted thirteen large charts to use in that debate, which was held in the high school gymnasium. I had stretched across the gym a telephone wire. When I used a chart, my helper would hang it up, and it stayed there the whole debate. McMicken referred to it as "Hearn's wash," but he never attempted to answer any of them.

DG: It seems that our brotherhood has seen a decline in debating over the past thirty years or so. Do you agree that this is true, and if so, to what would you attribute the decrease in the number of public discussions?

RJH: (1) Our brethren generally are not preaching a distinctive gospel. (2) There is so little exposing of error, that sectarians won't challenge us. (3) So many churches of Christ are becoming like denominational churches, there is no reason for sects to debate. (4) denominational preachers at large no longer believe the Bible to be God's inspired Word, and

some of our brethren are of the same persuasion. So, why bother? Maybe other reasons could be given, but you are likely worn out with this lengthy reply.

DG: What special word of advice would you like to pass on to young preachers who may read this interview?

RJH: Read the books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus frequently and note what Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 6:11-12. Give diligence to Bible study. Learn as much as possible about other things worthwhile. In conduct, always follow Christ and the apostle Paul. Be honest and *always demonstrate a spirit of humility* [Taken from *First Century Christian*, September 1991].