

Spiritual Considerations...



Selected articles designed to assist in our Bible study and Christian walk.

Dave Phillips, editor

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Speaking for 'Preachers and Fried Chicken'

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I suppose I should have learned my lesson. I gave in to the stereotype of preachers and chicken by confessing that I enjoy eating chicken. Can you believe it? A preacher that likes chicken. I even have been guilty of encouraging people to bring fried chicken to our fellowship meals. The comments that I have endured over the past several months have been rather predictable. I enjoyed most of them.

But here is my chance to respond from the preacher's point-of-view. I was handed the following article at church by one special lady who (I am sure) meant nothing by it at all. After reading the story in the paper on a recent trip, she thought I might be interested. I was and am. This now affords an opportunity to see things 'from the other side of the table.'

Here is my request. First, read the article in its entirety (without reading the footnotes). I think it is good. Then go back and read my footnotes. You've read a young boy's perspective – now listen to what the preacher *might* have been thinking. By the way, I hope you take this in the light-hearted fashion it is intended. Even as a boy, I liked chicken. I will probably always like chicken. I have found, however, that it goes best with apple pie at church fellowship meals (in case you are wondering). So, bring it on.

Preachers and Fried Chicken

Terry Keeling

Texas, Houston Chronicle Magazine, March 21, 2004, page 4.

"I need you to go out in the back yard and get me a couple of fryers. This is our Sunday to bring the preacher home for dinner, and I need to get as much of it ready as I can before we go to church."

Mother was calling out her instructions from the kitchen. It was early Sunday morning, sometime in the mid-1940's, and we were preparing to go to church, as we did every Sunday morning, at the Evan Chapel Methodist Church in the community where I grew up, near Leona in East Texas.

At that time – and even into the 1950s – it was customary in most country churches for someone in the congregation to take the preacher and his family home for dinner after church. Preachers didn't get paid very much, and this was one of the perks of the job.

We never referred to them as "ministers." They were just "preachers." And by "dinner," I'm referring to the noon meal. The word "lunch" wasn't in our vocabulary at that time.

The preachers expected those dinners, and some say they prepared for it.¹ There was speculation that certain of the preachers might fast all day Saturday in preparation for the free meal coming up on Sunday.² I don't know if this was true or not, but I can remember seeing some preachers put away an unbelievable amount of food at our table.³

When it was our turn to bring the preacher home for dinner, Mother would fix most of the meal early that morning before we went to church. She would have her peas cooked, the potato salad ready, the pecan pie cooked, the corn bread mixed up and ready and the chicken cut up and ready to fry. When we got back to the house after church, all she had to do was warm up the peas, put the corn bread in the oven and fry the chicken.

It seems it was almost always fried chicken that we had for Sunday dinner. Maybe that was because we always had chicken available. In those pre-electricity days, we couldn't store beef. It was either smoke, cured pork – or chicken. Chicken had the advantage of being available on short notice. You didn't have to do anything to it ahead of time. You just went out in the yard and ran down one or two whenever you needed them.

The abundance of chicken may be what led to the almost legendary affinity Methodist preachers (I think the same was true of Baptist preachers as well)⁴ had for fried chicken. I am told that with regard to the world's

¹ I'd say they prepared for it. They had been working all morning!

² It depends on who was cooking. This meal sounded great – and, after all, it is a perk!

³ So you were racing with the preacher, eh? Remind me not to eat with you.

⁴ Some brethren never offered to take the preacher home at all. Ask our own Earl Sain about the time he traveled by train to a small congregation to preach and anticipated someone taking him home – only to find himself at the building alone all

record for the most fried chicken consumed at one sitting, the first 100 spots on the list are held by Methodist and/or Baptist preachers.⁵ I haven't been able to confirm this, but based on my childhood observations, I don't doubt it for a minute.⁶

As mother had instructed me, I went into the back yard and chased down two fryers. Our chickens ran loose, and it took me awhile – they were pretty fast – but I finally caught two of them and wrung their necks. I picked them, cleaned them, washed them off and took them inside to Mother. She cut them up, washed them again and put them in the refrigerator. She had already cooked the peas and fixed the potato salad.

Mother gave my brother, Royce, and me our final instructions on how we were to behave while the preacher was here. He was to get first choice on all the food. We would have to take whatever was left. As soon as she finished all her preparations, we went to church.

Our preacher at that time (I'll call him Brother Smith) was a tall, lanky man who always looked hungry.⁷ He and Sister Smith followed us home as soon as church was over. We all sat down on the front porch and waited while Mother finished up the meal. It didn't take her very long. As soon as it was ready, we sat down at the table, and Mother brought in the platter of fried chicken and set it down right in front of Brother Smith. She knew that's where it would wind up anyway.

Mother asked Brother Smith to say the blessing. Normally, he was pretty long-winded when he preached or prayed.⁸ Folks had been known to drift off to sleep during one of his prayers,⁹ but with that platter of fried chicken right in front of his face, he cut it pretty short.¹⁰

Once Brother Smith started in to eating, he didn't talk very much.¹¹ He was an ambidextrous eater. He could handle a drumstick in either hand. Once in a while, you could even see him with a drumstick in each hand at the same time.

After about 20 minutes, Brother Smith had to loosen his belt a couple of notches. This was about the same time that Mother brought in the second platter of chicken. Finally, we wound up with one piece of chicken left on the platter. Brother Smith had manners. Either that, or it was the stern warning look Sister Smith gave him. At any rate, he wouldn't take it. He looked at it. A lot. You could see little beads of sweat breaking out on his forehead, and he got a little bit of a twitch at the corner of his mouth. But he wouldn't take that last piece of chicken. You could tell it took a whole lot of self-control for him to leave it on the platter.¹²

Royce and I looked at that piece of chicken, too, but we knew better than to take it. It would just have to stay there – at least for now.

After about 40 minutes, most of the food was gone, and we all got up from the table, went outside and sat down on the front porch, to let the food settle for awhile. Brother Smith still didn't talk very much, but he looked pretty contented.

Today, things have changed, as they always do. Nobody takes the preacher home for dinner anymore, but I've often wondered if preachers are still addicted to fried chicken.¹³ Maybe that's something they learned at divinity school. I don't know. I suspect, however, it was simply a case of their making the best of what was available to them. They probably would have eaten just as much of whatever else we might have had.

But I do give Brother Smith credit for leaving that last piece of chicken. About an hour after he left, I sneaked back into the kitchen and ate it.¹⁴

afternoon. He walked several miles to a store where he had enough money to buy two cookies – then walked back to preach that night. This boy's mother was very thoughtful.

⁵ I wonder how far down the list this boy's name appears. Sounds like he is counting chicken legs himself.

⁶ He wasn't just watching preachers – he watched everybody! Makes you think twice about going for seconds at the next potluck, doesn't it?

⁷ Of course, he only saw him on Sunday when he was either working or eating.

⁸ OK, here we go. I'm sure Brother Smith preached with precision and eloquence. Or maybe not.

⁹ Now, how would he know this if his head were bowed when he prayed?

¹⁰ Lyle Lovett has a great song saying "It's time for dinner, now let's go eat!" Brevity is a virtue.

¹¹ The poor guy had been talking all morning – give him a break.

¹² Sure, he had 2 boys watching every move he made.

¹³ Absolutely. KFC, Mrs. Winners, Schnucks... you name it.

¹⁴ There we have it. This poor guy wanted the "preacher's chicken." I hope he's happy now.