

Seminary is Dangerous

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God used my time at seminary in profound ways. Doctrinal positions were established, ministry partnerships were forged, and a love for the local church was enflamed. If I had it to do all over again, I would go.

However, seminary is also a place where, if the students are not careful, bad things happen. I offer the following dangers of seminary to those either attending or contemplating seminary, for pastors giving counsel to those considering or going to seminary, and to church members who might be aided in their prayer lives for seminarians.



Seminarians can become poor church members

Do you think God is pleased with seminary students whose total involvement in a local church entails showing up for a Sunday morning service, chatting for a few minutes with friends (often fellow seminarians) before and after the meeting, and then going home? Doesn't the New Testament call for significantly more?

Understandably, maximizing the time at seminary is vital, and participation in the life of a local church may be less during this season. Yet seminary students need to be reminded that it is God's will that they be joined to a local body of believers, under the guidance of elders (Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1), and striving to stimulate their church to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24). Perhaps the only way to be an eager church member is to take one less class a semester. That will make your seminary tenure longer, but also more fruitful as you bring your church experiences into the classroom.

Theological positions formulated at seminary can lead to unloving attitudes and behaviors in the church

Everyone agrees that the individual attending seminary is spending more time studying Scripture than the typical churchgoer. Unfortunately, increased knowledge can lead to pride and impatience. Sadly, "You don't know Greek like I do!" has slipped out of the mouth of a seminary student or two. Sweet, godly older ladies are not impressed! My final year in seminary, I was a member of a wonderful little church. The people were some of the most loving Christians I have ever known, and

they were eager to learn and apply Scripture. The leaders of the church admitted that they needed help understanding what the Bible teaches about the church. The pastor carefully and patiently taught them. I, thought, however, that I could walk into a meeting before anyone got there one evening and make fun of one leader's ignorance about a particular matter. "This guy is nice, but he just doesn't get it. He hasn't read the books we have read, has he, pastor?" was my sentiment. What a condescending young man I was. Thankfully, my pastor confronted me about it, and I repented.

Seminarians would be wise to memorize First Corinthians 13, which begins, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."

Talk of "the best preachers" and "the greatest churches" at times can influence seminarians to pursue prestige rather than God's will

Seminarians *should* learn from those God is using. But if they do not guard their hearts, they will desire, and maybe even pursue, fame.

This longing for popularity is not new. Jesus once asked His disciples, "What were you discussing on the way?" (Mark 9:33). Mark 9:34-35 tells us what happened next: "But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.'"

The thought of regularly preaching to hundreds, if not thousands, is very attractive. But the One who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (10:45) would have seminarians follow in His steps, not necessarily those of renowned preachers. Most seminarians should content themselves with the reality that God has probably ordered their days so that they will never get asked to speak at a prominent conference. "A man's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor" (Proverbs 29:23).

Debt

I do not understand why seminaries even let their students incur debt, but they do. And then what happens? "The borrower becomes the lender's slave" (Proverbs 22:7). Taking extra time in seminary so that you don't incur debt is liberating. Without debt, a seminary student is free to go wherever his Master sends him, *whenever* He calls.