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**Twelve Influential Early
Korean Preachers**

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Twelve Influential Early Korean Preachers

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Han, Sang-Dong (1901-1976)

Chan Hyung Chang¹

My prayer was as follows: 1) Help the corrupted pastors under Japanese rule become renewed by establishing a retreat center, 2) Raise pastors who would share their fate with the Korean Church based on truth by building a seminary, and 3) Build a church by raising evangelists.²

Introduction

At the Yoido Full Gospel Church Rev. David Cho has been sued for misappropriation of church money. At the KumNan Methodist Church Rev. Kim HongDo has transmitted by heredity the church to his son. At the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, a manager Rev. Hwang KyuCheol threatened the people in the meeting with a gas gun. At the SamIl Church Rev. Chun ByungUk has been sued for sexual misconduct. Heredity, moral issues and violent behavior are all current issues in the church which have been criticized by both believers and non-believers.

All the pastors mentioned above once positively influenced the people in and out of the church and they all had been the leaders who were representative of the Korean church. However, if looking at the latter part of their lives and recent behavior, many people admired them not for a life of gradual sanctification but criticized them for a life of deterioration. It's not simply individual problems but it's the barrier to cover the glory of God. It also makes the honor of Christianity fall to the ground.

Accordingly many pastors and those who have consciousness of faith lament deeply concerning such a reality and speak out through the Church Restoration Movement. However the way to restore the church is sometimes a matter of conflicted among them and in the worst case ethical violations appear even among the reformers. The intention is good but if the way is wrong it makes the situation even worse.

In the era of Korean church history following liberation from Japanese imperial rule and the Korean War, there were also the same difficulties and problems among the churches and

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² KIATS ed. *Han, Sang-Dong: Korean Christian Leaders Series* (Seoul: Kiats, 2009), 202.

Christians. Under the abuse of power of false ministers, apostasy, the split of churches, and illegality and corruption arose. The same problems as in recent days existed then, and also there was a Church Restoration Movement. But there was a different way and mode of life for the Church Restoration Movement through the efforts of Rev. Han Sang-Dong, who worked in the Church Restoration Movement his entire life. Rev. Han Sang-Dong had a correspondence between his sayings and his life. Although the contents of the sermon and the teaching of a preacher is good if the life of the preacher doesn't follow his saying, it weakens the message of God. Rev. Han Sang-Dong is a good model of the Church Restoration Movement, who showed the correspondence between saying and life. Such a true Christian is needed at this point in the churches today.

Life and Background

Rev. Han Sang-Dong was born in 1901, but in his early age he was adopted by his uncle, so he wasn't cared for by his original parents. Han Sang-Dong spent his childhood in DaDae port and he was very solitary then, but his adoptive parents were wealthy, so he financially had no difficulties.

When Han Sang-Dong was 7 years old, he began to study Chinese literature in SeoDang.³ In 1910 Han Sang-Dong entered DaDae practical school for studying modern learning. On February 10, 1916 Han Sang-Dong entered DongLae high school after DaDae practical school for six years. At that time DongLae high school was one of the top schools. Han Sang-Dong needed to study more and made a decision to study abroad in Japan. However his parents were against his study, and at last he stopped studying.

In May 1918 Han Sang-Dong became a teacher in DaDae practical school, which is his alma mater. From then Han Sang-Dong had experience to teach. Han Sang-Dong was financially stable, and he married Kim ChaSook on May 31, 1921, and he spent his time as a teacher.

In spring 1924 the day of change came to Han Sang-Dong. Park ChangGeun, who was the minister in the church then, evangelized Han Sang-Dong, and the next year in 1925 Han Sang-Dong was baptized and he became a Christian and devoted himself to the church life.

In 1926 because of the matter of sacrificial rites for ancestors, Han Sang-Dong was excommunicated from his adoptive parents and even from the Han's clan.⁴ Because of his faith about Ten Commandments, especially the second one, idolatry, later it became the motive against Shinto shrine worship.⁵ In September 1927 he transferred his job to JinJu GwangLim school. He, however, had a passion for spreading the Good News, so after one year he quit his job and went to KyungSeong Pearson high Bible school for study.

Han Sang-Dong began to evangelize in HakLim-ri, HaIl-myun, Koseong-kun, South KyungSang province in March 1929.

³ A private school for the study of Chinese classics.

⁴ Sacrificial rites are still very important for non-Christian Koreans.

⁵ The shrine of Japan gods who founded Japan.



Through the support of the women's mission union in South KyungSang province, Han Sang-Dong began to evangelize, but there wasn't remarkable achievement. In 1931 Han Sang-Dong moved from KoSeong to SamRyang, and he once again began to evangelize, but because of a flood he had difficult times, so that year he moved to JinKyo, HaDong-kun in South KyungSang province and cultivated the church there. For the cultivating of the JinKyo church, he went to a mountain to pray, while praying, he experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, his church revived. At that point Han Sang-Dong made a decision to study theology and left to go to seminary in PyeongYang in 1933. When Han Sang-Dong graduated from the school in 1936, he was serving the Cho Ryang church in Pusan. In 1937 he had a calling from MunChang church in MaSan as a successor to Rev. Ju, Gi-Cheol.

When he was serving MunChang church, he was ordained by the presbytery of South KyungSang in 1938. After this event Han Sang-Dong began to speak out to those who hadn't kept loyalty toward God with worshipping at the Shinto shrines, and for his movement the congregation of his church was suffering from the pressure of the Japanese government. But the congregation willingly accepted such a suffering in order to keep their purity of faith, Han Sang-Dong encouraged that movement. For this movement, he was put in jail by the Japanese government in 1940.

According to his chronology, the core of his faith and sermon

Forty's, 1940-1945, In Prison

My ministry is now a restoration movement of the Korean Church, and the movement is about leading repentance of wrongdoing under Japanese politics, and prayer life as well as being a prophetic voice. Another thing is to produce pastors who would sacrifice for the Korean Church by establishing a seminary.⁶

His saying above is reinforcing his calling and his task for the future while he was in jail due to his rejection of Shinto shrine worship.

As I said in the beginning, based on the Bible, Shinto shrine worship is to disobey the second commandment of Ten Commandments, and the rejection of Shinto shrine worship is one of the basic of virtues of a Christian. Thus he was faithful to the Bible. Han Sang-Dong thought how to deal with those who seemed to apostatize through Shinto shrine worship which broke the basic commandments as a Christian.

Han Sang-Dong never thought of forsaking those who were in apostasy, rather he wanted them to repent and to be changed entirely. Accordingly while he was in jail, he planned to found a kind of monastery⁷ in which the corrupted pastors under Japanese politics would be trained and

⁶ Kiats ed. *Han Sang-Dong: Korean Christian Leaders Series*, 203.

⁷ It didn't come true in real.

renewed. Another plan was, instead of PyeongYang Theological Seminary, to found an alternative seminary in order to raise and train the candidates who stand on the truth of the Word of God. Later on that was the very motive of the foundation of Goryeo Theological Seminary. And the last one he desired was to cultivate a church in which the truth would be delivered and the lay person would be raised and trained.

Han Sang-Dong showed the example like one of the prophets in the Old Testament, Elijah who was against the false prophets even before death. It was taken for granted by him that pointing out it was wrong that many pastors disobeyed the word of God through Shinto shrine worship, and he was never afraid of any pressure and persecution.

Fifty's, 1955, Determine to Encounter Loneliness While Doing a Christian Movement

What does a Christian movement mean? It's a movement that shows God to men. If not, it will be satisfying to live a spiritual life individually. There won't be any need for a Christian movement. Who will show our people of the Korean Christendom the living God of Yahweh? Do you know your mission, students? Are you trying to show Jehovah God to men with the things everyone can do, after having secured manpower and money? My hope is that you would become like the lonely Elijah who had fire come down on the altar in his fight against the 850 prophets of Baal.⁸

In prison Rev. Han Sang-Dong made a decision to found a seminary in which the faithful servants of God would be raised and trained. The writing above is well reflected through his decision and his life. Through the story of Elijah, who were alone against many false prophets, Han Sang-Dong strongly extorted his students and at the same time he encouraged them with the ultimate Elijah's victory. In the beginning of his writing Han Sang-Dong said that the human person was too weak to live alone, so had to gather together for more power, and the key of success in the world depended on the number at my side, and those things could give people a place in the higher status in the society but that was not the real success as a Christian. Thus Japan insisted that one body of the nation of Japan was the ideal model of powerful nation in the world. But at last that was proven false by Japan's defeat of war.

Ultimately, Han Sang-Dong said that no matter who one believed or not, the destiny of our life was under the sovereign of God. In other words, if the pastors, who had responsibility to deliver the truth, forsake their consciousness of their faith, and if they choose the logic of this world, at last they will end their life with tragedy as the other cases which have appeared in the Bible. If one make sure that a religious movement is right, even alone, and even against many, but bravely and putting trust upon God, then finally one would achieve the victory like Elijah.

⁸ Kiats ed. *Han Sang-Dong: Korean Christian Leaders Series*, 136.



Sixty's, 1960, Faith is the Life of Hope

Man is a creature of hope. Without hope man is filled with despair. Hope isn't seen in the world of animals. They just go on surviving. They live by instinct. But man lives with a hope.....when we live in hope we don't live as we please. They are always cautious. They live a life of self-control. They live a life of patience. They live a life of discipline. They live in love.....Dear congregation! I hope that you all become people who hope for the kingdom of heaven. Let's live putting our hope in the eternal life rather than putting the purpose of life in the world. When we put our hope in the next life we can live bearing any difficulties of this world.⁹

When Han Sang-Dong was getting old, close to the latter part of his life, he was telling about not the loneliness of his struggle for keeping his faith, but telling about where our life ultimately was heading for. It is the very putting one's hope in the heaven. If one puts hope in heaven, it would draw the one so as to live as God want she or he to live, not according to the worldly desire. Rather, if the one puts hope in heaven, then his or her life naturally would be drawn to the one who God wants to live. As Han Sang-Dong said, when we put our hope in the next life we can live bearing any difficulties of this world. "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Like Romans says, to those who are waiting for the upcoming glory, although there are difficulties to enter the glory, they have power to overcome any kind of difficulties and can endure all sufferings for hope.

And also the writing above is reflecting the difficulties at that time, it was written around 1960 right after Korean War. At that time, to those who were suffering from extreme poverty, the purity of faith and all kind of good stories were not effective at all to the poor. To them their poverty was their reality and the gaining of wealth was their only concern. Han Sang-Dong couldn't solve the problem of poverty for them, but showing them the ministry of Jesus, telling them the ultimate message of Jesus was also about the good news of the kingdom of heaven. Thus Han Sang-Dong focused on this message, the kingdom of heaven.

Seventy's, 1975, The Will of God and the Will of Human

We Christians should first think about the will of God and the word of God before we think about our own thoughts, opinions or will. The reason is that putting God first is the most correct way of thinking, the most unregretful way of doing things, and the way to happiness. If there is a wish for Christians, it is to fulfill the will of God. Jesus also demonstrated that his wish was to fulfill the will of God.....I see believers stop at nothing to

⁹ Ibid., 68-70.

accomplish their will or intention and fall victim to temptation. Why would they insist on fulfilling their will that wouldn't benefit themselves or others before God even if it becomes actualized? The reason is simple. It is because of corrupted sinful nature.....I am certain that when we abandon our will and contention and think God's will only the Christians world and our country will become brighter and peaceful.¹⁰

The above sermon was written at the end of his life. At that time in Korea there was the movement of *SaeMaEul*.¹¹ All the people in Korea tried to do the best to achieve a better life. All the people in Korea then had a strong will to do no matter what if they live well and escape from poverty. No matter whether believers or not, their only concern was wealth, and they only focused on the result, not the procedure and whether it was morally wrong or not.

The essence of religion is to know God's will toward the world. If a person wants to know and find the value of a human being, without knowing God's will, we can't become a faithful believer and have faith in truth. Not following the way to fulfill our own desire, although we were suffering and we had losses, we should find and follow God's will, and furthermore we should live for the glory of God and live for our neighbors. Then we can find hope and fruit of our life, he said. Han Sang-Dong emphasized that the will of God was the motive of the purity of faith, the power to endure solitary and the courage for keeping faith from all kind of temptation.

Conclusion

The sermon of Rev. Han Sang-Dong is not hermeneutical nor a logical sermon and it is difficult to categorize his sermon to a specific class. However, one thing is certain that the message of his sermon was powerful, for it was transformed and digested in his language through his life. As I mentioned in the beginning, the sermon is effective and powerful when the preacher's life supports the sermon. Rev. Han Sang-Dong is the one of the most influential pastors, as a pastor, a preacher and a spiritual leader in the most troubled era of Korean church history. Moreover, he kept his loyalty to God, but to those who didn't keep loyalty to God, and to those who had the abuse of power, he never competed and spoke out with the same way and life of their secular ways. To him, the Church Restoration Movement is the life not saying. Rev. Han Sang-Dong always embraced all the people whether they were wrong or not. He never judged others but rather loved them for the unity of Christ's church, yet he was responsible for the first big split in the Presbyterian Church of Korea and that his desire for reform actually meant that his new Koshin denomination became the smallest of the major Presbyterian denominations in Korea and the one most marginalized in terms of ecumenical relations.

¹⁰ Ibid., 37-39.

¹¹ Movement for "Live well", the movement was the stepping stone to have achieved the development of recent Korean economy.



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