

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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PREACH THE GOSPEL

If we are making an attempt to restore Christianity of New Testament times, we must not forget to imitate their methods of evangelism and making disciples. If the New Testament is a book authored by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, a book for all centuries, the ways that worked then, will also work now.

There is a simple, but yet, dynamic pattern laid out in the Scriptures that will guarantee our acceptance with God as laborers in the kingdom. Our first point to understand is this: our acceptance with God is not dependent upon the number of souls that are harvested, but whether we have planted seed. Paul was just as much a bond-slave of Christ at Athens, where the response was minimal, as he was at Ephesus where the "word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing" (Acts 19:20). We must sow the seed "in season and out of season," when it is convenient and when it is not, when dozens are being baptized and when there are none. How many times have we sowed some seed and then, when we do not see immediate results, we stop laboring steadfastly? How successful would a farmer be if he ceased his labor when he did not receive a harvest immediately after sowing? If we would learn how to measure success, we would not grow weary in well doing. Our job is to plant and water, not to give life. We can no more force a sinner to live, than we can force the green stalk out of the grain. Let us sow in faith,

knowing that His word will not return unto Him void (Isaiah 55:11). The great success story of the church in the first century, which we are to imitate, is not that every person was converted - they were not - but that every creature heard the gospel story (Colossians 1:23; Acts 19:10). The key to successful Christian labor today is to "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58).

The success of Paul's labors is outlined for us in Acts 14:21-23: "And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.' And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they believed." To follow Paul in these five steps will insure God's approval of our labor and most certainly will produce the same results.

If the results are not the same today, we can be sure that something in this plan is being left out. In my judgment, it is needless to talk about the last four points if we are failing to preach the gospel. Many times, the gospel is not preached as it should be by each Christian, simply because we don't think it will work in the twentieth century like it did then. Maybe we think it was easier during a time of miracles. It is true that multitudes flocked after Jesus when He fed five thousand with a few loaves and fishes, but not very many were true disciples (John 6:66). Jesus made it plain that if men would not listen to the writing of Moses, they would not listen even if someone rose from the dead (Luke 16:31). We must comprehend that, in the first century, the gospel was God's power to save, and we have the same gospel today. The power is the same, man is the same, and obstacles are the same. If the results are not the same, it is because we are not sowing.

When the Sanhedrin summoned Peter and John, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:18). If the apostles had obeyed that command, the resurrection of Jesus Christ would have had no power, the blood of Jesus would have been shed for naught, the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ would have died right there. No government official has given such a command today, yet the gospel remains locked in our buildings. We must become convinced of this cause-effect relationship: when first-century Christians taught the word, the number of disciples increased. Compare Acts 4:2 with 4:4; 5:25, 28, 42 with 6:1; and take note of 6:7.

Too often, when our hearts are moved to want to convert the lost, we want to "organize." "Personal" work begins and ends with a "group" meeting at the building to discuss how to visit a cold, two-year-old list of names. Effective teaching of the gospel in the first century did not result from "grouping together," but from being "scattered abroad" (Acts 8:1-5). We must stop emphasizing "how to," and start emphasizing faith as the chief ingredient of successful soul winning. We need to have the same spirit of faith that was in the apostles: "We also believe, therefore also we speak" (II Cor. 3:13). As important as knowledge may be, it cannot replace the spirit of the Samaritan woman who, with limited knowledge, said, "Come, see a man who told me the things that I have done;" (John 4:29), and many believed in Him because of the word of the woman (verse 39). The simple knowledge of the great need of salvation led Cornelius to "call together his relatives and close friends" (Acts 10:24). This is the way that works.

- Darrell Hymel

Do You Feel Insignificant?

My family vacationed in the western part of our country several years ago, visiting the Grand Canyon and driving up the California coast. We visited the Sequoia National Park in California and saw the giant sequoia redwood trees. Near the particular tree named the General Sherman tree, there is a "slice," weighing several tons, from a sequoia that died. Sequoias not only grow to be enormous, they live for a very long time. While a tree is alive, its age can only be estimated, but once it dies and is cut crosswise, its age can be more accurately determined. According to the plaque fastened to this monstrous piece of wood, the tree from which the "slice" had been cut was approximately 2,400 years old when it died.

I don't know how long ago that tree died, but let's assume for the sake of ease that it died in 1990. It follows that this particular sequoia sprouted and began growing in approximately the year 410 B.C. As I looked at this tree "slice," I began to think of all the Biblical and secular history it had spanned during its lifetime. The Jews had recently rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership when this tree was a seedling. By the time it had attained the average height for a Sequoia redwood (in about 80 years) Alexander the Great had already begun his conquest of the known world. It lived through (although on a different continent) the entire inter-testamental period, the life of Jesus and the period of history covered by the book of Acts. It was thriving in America when Europe was plunged into the dark ages and still growing when Columbus set foot on the new world. It saw the beginning of our country and the struggles which have transpired in the United States. Who can say how many people were born, lived and died while this majestic giant stood quietly in the forest?

Sequoias live so long because they are well protected from the natural enemies of trees. Their root systems make them able to withstand long periods of drought. Their bark is actually fire-resistant, helping them to survive forest fires, and contains a chemical called tannin which repels

insects and pests. But, despite all these natural advantages, even sequoias eventually die.

I felt very small and insignificant standing next to these giant trees. And yet, for all their beauty, great size and age, they are not the crown of God's creation. Man is. We are made in the image of God, given a soul which will not die, that is, pass out of existence (Genesis 1:26). God sent His Son to die on the cross, manifesting His great love, not for giant sequoias, but for sinful men. We do not live in this world even as long as the average sequoia, but God has made preparations for our future. Our destiny, however, will be determined by our short stay in this world. Where will your soul spend eternity?

- Allen Dvorak

GOD HAS SPOKEN

Reverence His Name

How long has it been since you've heard someone say, "Oh, my God!" neither prayerfully nor supplicatingly, but idly? Surely, it has not been long, for such language has become so commonplace that even little children have become habitual users of all sorts of profane expressions. Humanistic influence against God, especially by means of television, has all but destroyed any restraint in language with respect to God and His religion. Our society has moved from an area of restraint to an era of unbridled disrespect for sacred and holy things. People have allowed actors, actresses, and other prominent figures to set the standard of language for them.

What can be done about this problem? Men can listen to God instead of men. We can guard our own speech and speak out against profanity and

for respectful language. God has spoken on this matter: To the Jews, God said, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

To Christians, He has said, "Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). And I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

Profanity in language indicates profanity in heart. Men need to clean up their hearts and then clean up their language in accordance. We didn't create God, but God created us; therefore, let us give Him the reverence He is due (Hebrews 12:16, 28,29).

- Gilbert Alexander

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"The Pain of Slander!"* (text: Psalm 7); Sunday evening: *"NEHEMIAH: Rebuilding the Walls and a Nation!"*