

Can We Talk?

"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house ..."

Acts 20:20

A lot of people in the Lord's church would admit that there is something peculiar happening. Perhaps it is more apparent to some than others, but most would agree: many churches are not growing! Once you remove the factor of children who grow up "in the church" and obey the gospel, the conversion rate is very small. The average member of the church has heard 4,000 sermons, sung 20,000 songs, participated in 8,000 public prayers ... and converted zero sinners. It seems as if the days of "*souls being added to the church daily*" has dried up and "went south."

In some ways, the situation is difficult to understand. People's hearts and natures are pretty much the same as they were 50 or 100 or 1,000 years ago. The gospel still is the "*power of God unto salvation*" (Romans 1:16). Finally, preachers in the church today are faithful in preaching the gospel. If all these statements are legitimate, then what is the problem?

One of the biggest causes of poor numerical growth is a lack of effective methods to "*seek and save that which was lost.*" We live in a day where the Internet, newspapers, radio, and television can reach incredible numbers of people. The question remains: why are these methods not converting souls to Christ? Please do not misunderstand me. These methods are helpful to spreading the gospel, but they cannot carry the entire burden of preaching and teaching to lost souls! Look at the thousands of dollars that are being spent each year by congregations for these programs. But the fact of the matter is that they are giving back very small returns in terms of saved souls.

It seems that the vast majority of Christians have never dreamed that the command in Matthew 28:19-20 is personal. The command is individual to every child of God. It is our responsibility to go into our own personal world and declare the soul-saving message of the gospel to every creature. How can we claim on one hand to love Jesus with all our might and on the other hand refuse to encourage and invite people to our services? Even the babe in Christ can see that we are not consistent in this very vital area. With the advent of so many great methods of communication, our attitude has changed to "If we cannot go, we can send someone in our place, build a website, get a nice logo, put an ad in the newspaper or buy a 30 minute radio broadcast." This attitude is wrong! We have one command, and that is

to go! That command cannot be obeyed by proxy; it can only be obeyed in person.

The most urgent need in the church today is for Christians who can and will talk to people about their soul's need and about Jesus Christ who satisfies that need. In Luke 14:23, God commands us to go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that His house may be filled. Sad as it may seem, little of the burning passion for men's souls as seen in Jesus and the early Christians is to be found among Christians today. People now feel like this is the "preacher's job" or they want to "build the church" because of selfish glory instead of the intense desire to see men saved because they are lost. History tells us that after the first century, when Christians were being killed because of their beliefs, the church grew. Perhaps the devil learned a lesson. Today he is not persecuting us; he is lulling us to sleep. That is his method for destroying the church in our generation. The character of the church is tested in times of comfort and affluence as well as in times of crisis and persecution.

Proverbs 11:30 says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise." Can our lack of "soul-winning" be an indication of our lack of spiritual wisdom? No greater, more enduring work can be undertaken than converting souls to Christ. But true growth can never happen unless all of us set our minds to teach the gospel on a one-to-one level! One or two "fired up" Christians in each congregation cannot carry the load. It takes everyone! Use the opportunities and enthusiasm of other faithful Christians to get out and invite people you know to our services. That can give us the first and best chance to convert people to God's kingdom.

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