

# ARE WE SUCCEEDING WITH THE GOSPEL?

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"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15,16).

These are words we have committed to memory and use them frequently to show what one must do to be saved. But why do we fail in our mission to do what we preach should be done? To this question we had better find an answer, and we had better find the right one.

During the time it takes me to type this article over a thousand souls will pass from time into eternity from this continent. Of this thousand who will die while I write this paper, perhaps one soul will have at sometime in the past obeyed the gospel of Christ. Among those who have obeyed the gospel of the Son of God, perhaps one out of fifty will be faithful unto death to receive the crown of righteousness. This is a discouraging estimate, but the facts are in evidence to support the statement.

Why is it that we can hold hope for only about one out of forty to fifty thousand souls who depart this life? Why can we not reach these thousands with the gospel and bring them to obey it and live by the will of Christ? These and a dozen more questions may be asked, but a sober and thoughtful view of the antics and the promotional involvements of the religious leaders of the day will answer these questions.

## *What Assures Success?*

What makes success? The answer depends upon who asks the question and to whom it is asked. By man's standard, success would be that which attracts attention and gets the approval of the masses, and shows increase in material wealth. In a word, man's success is man's greatest achievement and the most popularity. A good proof of this is the use of *numbers present* at a service and the *amount of contribution* to indicate growth of a congregation.

But success by God's standard is that simple and complete obedience to the will of God that makes men "new creatures" in Christ. This godly success is described in such terms as: "then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of men was about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14). "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8: 12).

On and on it goes in the divine record: thousands in one day, multitudes were obedient, and they were multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. All this growth, unmatched by the combination of the greatest machinery of men, was without "the greatest preachers of today" being promoted, and without the genius of the "specialists" we now have in the field of preaching, and also without all the gimmicks

and devices concocted by professed disciples to "promote Christ." If it succeeded then, it will succeed now.

That which will insure genuine scriptural success is the plain, forceful preaching of Christ as the Son of God and man as a sinner. This preaching must include all that is revealed in the New Testament for one to become a Christian, and not add one single thing that is not revealed. The gospel is the power of God to save the believer (Rom. 1:16). It is by obeying the truth that man's soul is purified (I Pet. 1:22).

### ***Why Do We Continue To Fail?***

I do not want to imply that no success or spiritual growth exists. There is a healthy growth in many parts of the country, but by comparison with the first century preaching, and considering the advanced methods of communication we have today, we are failing in the mission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

There are a number of reasons why we continue to fail, but I can attribute the world wide failure to two obvious attitudes that seem to have permeated the entire church of the Lord. Until these are eliminated or corrected we will have very little success.

#### 1. The False Idea of Unity.

The newly developed concept of unity and the ecumenical efforts, including the fellowship with many denominations of the world, is one hindrance. This has developed within the Lord's church during the past 20 to 30 years. It stands to reason that a Methodist sees no point in leaving Methodism when some "Churches of Christ" join with them in their rituals and "good works" by which they confess that Methodists are "children of God" also. Why should they change?

This false concept of unity has weakened the conviction and conscience of the majority of those who have been baptized into Christ and they no longer really feel the need to change religious people in error. Why should they? If all these are "children of God" in various ways, why try to change them?

The pseudo-promoters of denominational unity have little or no respect for the divine authority of the word of God. It would be impossible to expect them to draw a line between truth and error because the moment they do so they are in trouble with their concept of unity. This is one great reason we are not growing as in New Testament days. I am speaking of success as revealed by God, not the success as viewed by men.

#### 2. The Attitude Toward Sin and the World.

The attitude of most people toward sin and the world has left little difference between the lives and influence of members of the church and the world. The evils of the world have so infiltrated the habits of professed disciples of Christ that preaching has no longer any influence upon those

of the world.

Galatians 5: 19-21 lists the works of the flesh and concludes with these words: "of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Romans 6 plainly shows that the person who is dead to sin, buried with Christ by baptism into death, and raised in the likeness of his resurrection to walk in newness of life, should no longer allow sin to reign in his mortal body. If we turn from serving righteousness to serve sin, we become the servant of sin, and the end is spiritual death. This is the whole point of Romans 6.

Jesus said that his disciples would be hated by the world (John 15:18,19). In fact, he taught them that if the world loved them they would be of the world, because "the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

James said: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

If one has difficulty defining what the world is in these passages, John makes it plain: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:15,16). Everyone is of the world who is not in Christ and not walking in the light (1 John 1:7; Matt. 12:30). Paul said of Demas, once a fellow worker, that he "hath forsaken me, having loved this present world . . ." (2 Tim. 4:10).

All these passages establish this one point: No man can give allegiance to the god of this world to any degree and be a true servant of God. But this is the very problem that hinders our success as we try to use the powerful sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

### ***What a Christian Must Be to Succeed***

One of the most concise and direct passages that tells what a Christian must be to be successful is the third chapter of Colossians. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1,2). This is the very first state of mind that will produce success as a Christian.

It is not enough to have the right attitude of mind, righteous conduct must accompany the right goal. We are to "put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:8-10).

It is not enough just to put off the evil deeds, we are to **put on**: kindness, humbleness of mind,

meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another. and forgiving one another . . . put on love, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful . . . Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom . . . And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him (Col. 3: 12-17).

If we could get men and women to obey these requirements for the "new man" in Christ, we would have no problem with success in preaching the gospel to every creature. The will of Christ would be done.

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