

RESPECTABLE DISOBEDIENCE

The near total neglect of soulwinning endeavor on the part of our laity in North America is a concern that must weigh heavy upon the heart of every church leader. No church in history has had the wealth of counsel and exhortation regarding the responsibility of every member to be a laborer together with God, to share the gospel and the truth with others. And yet there probably has never been a time when a smaller percentage of the members were involved in this kind of work.

All of this is especially enigmatic for a people known for their emphasis on obedience. The parting command of Christ to His followers was to go and preach the gospel to every creature, to save the lost, to teach them and baptize them. If we take a moment to gain perspective of the whole purpose and concern of God's relationship with humanity, we are compelled to recognize that the central desire of the heart of God is the redemption of lost souls. All heaven has been concerned with little else for the past six thousand years. The greatest drama of all time has been the acting out on the part of the Godhead those amazing chapters in the plan of salvation. That the God who created this world would become a man to save lost men; that He would accept man's guilt and suffer the penalty for sin,—this is the story around which history revolves. Everything the Lord did while He was here among men was a demonstration of His passion to save sinners.

When He called others to follow Him, **He called them to be fishers of men.** He constantly taught that His mission was to seek and save the lost. He assiduously avoided getting bogged down in the endless quibbling of the "righteous" over how they might polish their piety to a coveted luster. Instead, He constantly shared His burden for lost things. He told stories of lost sheep, lost coins, a lost son. Then he concluded His mission on earth by sending His followers out to share with the lost world the salvation they had found.

When you stop to think it through, it is really incredible how anyone can claim to belong to Jesus Christ, can claim to be obedient to His Lord, and live his daily life, week in and week out, without sharing Christ's love for the lost.

We can only wonder at how normal it seems to be shocked at a member's disobedience to God's commandments about healthful living, or Sabbath-keeping, or morality and yet so completely undisturbed at the near total transgression of the one command that was central to the heart and mission

of Christ,—“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” The burden to seek and save the lost identifies the believer with his Saviour more than conformity to any or all of the rest of the commandments of scripture. And the Scribes and Pharisees of all ages have demonstrated conclusively that it is quite possible to meticulously obey all the other commands and not be even close to genuine Christlikeness. How quickly the church is summoned to deal with smoking, drinking, or sinful amusements; even though these are not specifically mentioned in God’s law. We can really summon moral support for decisive discipline when it comes to adultery or working on the Sabbath,—This is clearly spelled out in the ten commandments!

But no embarrassment at all need trouble the member who never involves himself with seeking and saving lost souls! A person can even be a Sabbath school teacher, year in and year out, and never visit the discouraged members of his class to pray with them and restore them to spiritual strength, say nothing of increasing the membership of his class by recruiting unsaved guests and visitors, and this is perfectly respectable!

One may be a church officer, elected by the church body to lead out in some phase of church activity and never spend an hour of time from week to week giving the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, one may be Deacon, which involves ordination and he will never be accused of neglecting his duty, even if for years he never wins a soul. No one will ever embarrass him for this disobedience.

Dare I suggest the inevitable final conclusion that a man may be an elder, ordained as a spiritual leader of the flock, and his failure to be a soul-winner will not disqualify him, either before his election or after. For you see, this disobedience is respectable disobedience!

Perhaps it should be also sadly confessed that with many ministers the work of winning souls is far down on the list of priorities. It doesn’t merit much time in their schedule. Leading out in this kind of work in their church is not one of their burdens.

We are very fond of preaching revival and reformation, even repentance. We talk endlessly about the latter rain and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit for the finishing of the work. We wring our hands and beat our breasts and sigh and cry as we suspect blame to lie in our failure to measure up to the most exacting standards of diet, or Sabbath-keeping, or dress, or whatever. There is a real possibility that like the Pharisees of old we strain at the gnats of legal exactness while we swallow without any effort the camel of disobedience in witnessing! We make quite an impression of piety as we search the writings for some additional act of self-denial that might make us “worthy” to receive the latter rain. The real prerequisite is spelled out in language too plain to be misunderstood: “The Spirit of God will not be poured out on the church while the majority of the members are not

laborers together with God." Christian Service, page 253. There are other statements to the effect that the Holy Spirit is given to be the power through us to reach lost souls, rather than being given to satisfy our personal spiritual needs. The Holy Spirit, like Christ is concerned with saving lost souls. And when we are not about that work we simply don't need any kind of special outpouring. To accomplish the kind of things we are spending our time doing, we don't really need the latter rain.

The scriptures do not indicate that the Spirit of God refused to work with Peter and Paul and the other believers until they had made their characters perfect. But one thing is quite clear throughout Christian history and that is that the Holy Spirit works through those who are working for lost souls. When we get involved in the work that is the central burden of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the power will be poured out upon us to accomplish it.

Sometimes one would get the impression that our concept of finishing the work is simply the heralding of the doctrinal truths of the three angel's messages into the ears of every living soul, so that God will be justified in sending the rejectors of His truth to the lake of fire. Some seem to feel that **then** we will have done our job and the Lord can come.

But perhaps what the Lord is really waiting for, is a people who are really identified with Him, in that they see in every person they meet a potential for eternal life and fellowship with God; a people who are anxious to rescue every lost soul, to share eternal life with every hopeless individual and to get as many people into heaven as we can before this old world ends. Then the work will be finished, and then Christ can gather a people who have truly become like Him.

While I was preparing the material for this manual, a friend with whom I was sharing these principles suggested that I would be deeply interested in some Week of Prayer talks given by Dr. Richard Nies. He loaned me some mimeographed copies, which I read with the deepest interest. Dr. Nies gave his kind consent to printing them in this manual. These articles cannot help but be a great blessing to our thinking as we adjust our minds and methods to this new approach to soulwinning.

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