

Are We Succeeding With The Gospel?

By Everett Hardin

“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 words we have committed to memory and used them frequently to show what one must do to be saved. But why do we fail in our mission to do what we preach must be done?

During the time it takes to type this article over a thousand souls will pass from time to eternity. Among those who have obeyed the gospel of Christ, perhaps one out of every forty will be faithful unto death to receive the crown of righteousness. This is a discouraging estimate, but the facts are in evidence to support it.

Why is it that we can hold hope for about one out of every forty or fifty thousand souls who depart this life? Why can we not reach these thousands with the gospel and bring them to obey and live by the will of Christ?

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 an increase in material wealth. In a word, man's success is man's greatest achievement and the most popular. Proof of this is the use of numbers present at a service and the amount of the contribution to indicate growth.

But success in 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 the men were about five thousand,”* Acts 4:4. *“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,”* Acts 5:14.

On and on it goes in the divine record: thousands in one day, multitudes were obedient, and they 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. It was without the genius of all the “specialists” we now have in the field of preaching, and without all the gimmicks and devices concocted by professed disciples to “promote Christ.” If it was successful then, it will succeed now.

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 some 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 our mission.

There are a number of reasons why we continue to fail, but I want to discuss two obvious reasons that seem to have permeated the church of the Lord., These need to be eliminated or corrected that we might achieve greater success.

1. The False Idea of Unity. The newly developed concept of unity and ecumenical efforts, including the fellowship with many denominations of the world, is one hindrance. This has developed within the Lord's church within the past few years. It stands to reason that a member of a denominational church sees no point in leaving the denomination, when churches of Christ are engaging in the same practices. Why should they change?

This false concept of unity has weakened the conviction and conscience of many of those who have been baptized into Christ. They no longer feel a need to change religious people in error. If all these are "children of God," why change them?

The pseudo-promoters of denominational unity have little respect for the divine authority of the word of God. They will not draw a line between truth and error because when they do so they are in trouble with their concept of unity. This is one reason we are not growing as in New Testament days.

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 many members of the church and the world. The evils of the world have so infiltrated the habits of professed disciples of Christ that the preaching no longer has 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 told you in times past that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*"

Jesus said that His disciples would be hated by the world, John 15:18-19. He taught them that if the world loved them they would be of the world, because "*the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*"

If one has difficulty defining what worldliness 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, and 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. Every one is of the world who is not in Christ and not "*walking in the light,*" I John 1:7; Mat. 12:30.

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 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 passages that tells what a Christian must be to succeed 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 state of mind that will make for success in a disciple of Christ.

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 you 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 who created him,”* Col. 3:8-10.

It is not enough to put off evil deeds, we are to put on *“kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another...put on love, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to 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 the requirements for the *“new man”* in Christ, we would have less problems with success in preaching the gospel to every creature.
