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— Our Pastors Speak —



EVANGELISM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LAYMEN

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Scripture Acts 6, 7, 8.

The witness and work of laymen and laywomen has always been a vital factor in the winning of lost souls to Christ and the progress of the church. This can be readily seen in the Scripture we have suggested for reading with this article. We notice a specific requirement for these early lay leaders was that they be men of "Good Report" and "Full of the Holy Ghost". One such man was Stephen; a man with a shining face, who became the first christian martyr.

The Laymen of the Early Church not only relieved the Apostles in the ministering of temporal things, but they were likewise dedicated to a deeply spiritual ministry of Evangelism and Soul Winning. Philip's lay ministry (Acts 8) as well as Stephen's bears this out. Since their time many, many more lay people have made significant marks for Christ on our world. First let us notice that in the Early Church and for a while after there was equality of responsibility. (A) Ministers and Laymen alike shared an equal responsibility in Evangelism and Administration. (B) A compulsion of sharing what Christ had done through providing Salvation rested with equal weight upon them. (C) Later a wall of partition sprang between them with a shift of the major responsibility to the ministry. Now I do not know to whom the blame belongs for this, but it is wrong. Many folk in the church today will say, "We visit homes, hospitals, jails, etc. to try and win people for Christ? Why that is what we hire the preacher to do. That is his field. He is paid to do that." Then there are those who never say this, but by their failure to ever do anything it must be what they believe. J. C. McPeeters, editor of Holiness Methodism's "Herald" said that the shift of responsibility to the ministry, was a "perversion of the Apostolic method and brought great harm to the church." I am thankful that today there seems to be a significant grass-roots effort to recapture the Apostolic method. May it engulf the Reformed Baptists! Secondly notice, Where Lay people have come to life and accepted responsibility great strides have been made. Many ordinary christians are now dynamic personal workers. Many others are doing an abundant number of different labors. The claims of Christ are presented in ways not thought of before or revitalized, to mention a few: recently I was introduced to a "Tithe Coin". A layman from California

who had a burden some years ago started making these coins, imprinting them with a pledge to "Be a faithful Tither." It has caught on in some large churches near us here that have been quite loose in their living. You might be tempted to say, "Fine, but what does this have to do with Evangelism?" Simply this: the man who starts to tithe immediately assumes an interest in the work his money is doing. Need I say more? In the Aroostook County area there is a Laymens Group organized. They meet periodically for prayer and Bible study, then pair off by twos to visit in the vicinity where the meeting is held. Many laymen in that area have received valuable training, not to mention the number of people who have found Christ. One man saved through this lay ministry worked for the same firm I once worked for. He was employed as night watchman. His nights on the job were spent writing hundreds of letters a year, with tracts included, to people far and near. This humble little man has contacted multitudes for his Lord. Let no christian try to excuse themselves from Evangelism, regardless of the limitations that might be involved; for there is something that all may do if there is interest and burden. Another interesting feature is the men for missions movement of the OMS. MFM laymen pay their own way to various fields of the OMS to witness with people of their own vocations. In the World Vision Tokyo Crusade under Dr. Bob Pierce, sixty such men paid their way to Japan to help do personal work and pray. Other men have gone to the field to teach the natives how to farm and do other occupations that require particular skill, to mention only one more lay group: Calves are put out to farmers who will raise them to be sold when grown. The monies realized from such is devoted to the Salvation of Souls. So there are many things the lay person can do. Thirdly, Laymen and Revivals. (A) Where laymen and ministers assume an equal sense of responsibility for Revival, under the compulsion of the Holy Ghost, Revivals Come. The 1857 Revival is a classic illustration of this point. This movement, which resulted in the Salvation of three million souls was largely a lay movement in the beginning. (B) There are many areas where a lay witness is far more effective than the ministers. For example, the average sinful man is put on guard immediately in the presence of a preacher. However his guard is down to a layman, thus a marvelous opportunity to present Christ. (C) To be sure, we have a heart cry for Revival. I am convinced we can have it in our movement if people and preacher alike grip God. Layman, Laywoman you hold a key position in the Kingdom of God. You are more important than you give yourself credit for being, the ministry is expected to provide the leadership to be sure, but you are the manpower. Let us look to the New Year with mutual concern and burden and we will see the Lord work in new ways in our midst.

"Church Pews never skid into a ditch, smash against a telephone pole, or get tagged for speeding. They are a safe place to be on Sunday."

—Ponca City (Okla.) Church Bulletin