

Phil. 3:14 - I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus

When the early disciples “went everywhere preaching the word” (**Acts 8:4**), they were continuing the things that “Jesus began both to do and to teach” (**Acts 1:1**).

The story of the early church is the story of the Lord continuing to do, through His people, the work that He Himself had begun in His personal ministry.

Someone once said, “Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today”.

1 Cor. 15:58 - Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord

We are urged to “abound” in the “work of the Lord”.

Unfortunately, there are times when discouragement and defeat among the Lord’s people can occur concerning the Lord’s work.

We tend to be discouraged about our own lack of ability to teach the gospel. We tend to be defeated by the apparent rejection of the gospel by almost everyone we meet or because our numbers don’t grow at the pace we might have envisioned.

Much of this discouragement is the result of looking at our work in the wrong way

➤ OUR WORK IN THE LORD IS SOWING THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

- Problems arise, in any endeavor, when we forget what our work is.
- In the Lord, our work is presenting the gospel to as many people as possible.
- Even more accurately, our work is attempting to present the gospel to as many as possible.
- All the Lord has ever asked us to do is “plant” and “water” — it is His part of the work to “give the increase.”
- “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (**1 Cor. 3:6,7**).
- When we assume responsibility for the Lord’s part of the work — a thing that we have no control over — we are bound to become discouraged.
- But when we keep focused on what our work is, this discouragement diminishes.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR WORK IS TO BE MEASURED NOT IN TERMS OF RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL, BUT IN TERMS OF HOW MUCH SEED HAS BEEN SOWN

If we keep focused on what it is the Lord wants us to do, He will bless what we do.

I think it is appropriate for us to “inventory” where we are and determine that we are adhering to what God would have us to be.

When you look at the church, the first place you must look at is the eldership.

1. Elders

- 1.1. Elders are an important part of what Christ has provided for the health of the local church.

- 1.1.1. Unfortunately too many of them fail in their responsibilities and they need to be challenged to their face so they can either “right the way” or they can be removed.
- 1.1.2. Members need to have a thorough understanding of the scriptures to ensure the decisions the elders make are in synch with God’s word.
- 1.1.3. I have challenged elderships through my columns this year. Some of them didn’t like it. **Tough**. I have never dealt with a subject or called men out where there was not concrete scriptural proof of their error. I do not sympathize with elderships who allow their ego and/or ignorance to get in the way of their responsibilities to the church they oversee.
- 1.2. The failure of congregations to select elders who meet scriptural qualifications has led to most of the problems in the church today
- 1.3. The men who are elders need to love God, love his church, and love the members of the family that they have charge over.
- 1.4. Part of the responsibilities these men have is to:
 - 1.4.1. Feed the flock – **Acts 20:28 - Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood.**
 - 1.4.2. Rule and take care of the flock – **1 Tim. 3:4-5 – “...but if a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?”**
 - 1.4.3. Lead the flock – **Heb. 13:17 - Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit [to them]: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief: for this [were] unprofitable for you**
- 1.5. Part of leading the church is to lay out a clear evangelism program
 - 1.5.1. **Proverbs 29:18** says **Where there is no vision, the people perish**
 - 1.5.2. Evangelism comes in many different ways
 - 1.5.2.1. Through the pulpit
 - 1.5.2.1.1. The preacher must begin with a fundamental faith in the word of God. To declare the wisdom of God, one must recognize the scriptures as the infallible, inerrant, and verbally-inspired word of God, and Jesus Christ as the heaven-sent, virgin-born Son of God
 - 1.5.2.1.2. Elders ensure that pulpit evangelism:
 - 1.5.2.1.2.1. Is Bible centered - Jesus not only commanded preaching, he told what to preach.
 - 1.5.2.1.2.1.1. **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” (Mark 16: 15).**
 - 1.5.2.1.2.1.2. **“Preach the word.” (II Tim. 4:2).** Men have not always sought the kind of preaching which they needed.
 - 1.5.2.1.2.1.3. The rebellious people in Isaiah’s day said, **“Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits.” (Isa. 30: 10).**
 - 1.5.2.1.2.2. Is doctrinal - To preach doctrine has to do primarily with proclaiming the fundamental tenets of the faith. **“Whosoever goeth onward *and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son.” (II John 9).** There is a crying need to instruct people in doctrine about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the word, heaven, hell, the resurrection, the judgment, the church, and many kindred matters
 - 1.5.2.1.2.3. Exhorts
 - 1.5.2.1.2.4. Reproves and rebukes
 - 1.5.2.1.2.5. Encourages

1.5.2.1.3. The elders need to assure that they have a man who brings honor to the pulpit and to God by speaking the truth in love, while declaring the whole counsel of God.

1.5.2.2. Through the Bible School program

1.5.2.2.1. The soul-winning program of a church should be comprehensive enough to permit and encourage every member of the church to participate. It should be so wide in its scope, so comprehensive in its plans, so constant in its effort, and so earnest in its endeavor that people everywhere will be impressed with the fact that the church's chief business is to win the lost to a saving knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ

1.5.2.2.2. If the above is to be realized, it is obvious that, above all other phases of the church's activities, the Bible school will be the underlying strength – the foundational force in such a program

1.5.2.2.3. A soul winning Bible school will not come into being nor continue to exist apart from aggressive leadership

1.5.2.3.1. The elders have to determine that sound curriculum is provided in bible classes.

2. Preacher

2.1. Having a gospel preacher is imperative to being the kind of church God wants

2.2. Too many churches have men who fill the pulpit spewing a social gospel, things that don't offend and allow members to walk out the door feeling good about themselves regardless if their life is in synch with God's word.

2.3. Note Christ's motivation

2.3.1. **John 17:4 - I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do**

2.4. Paul

2.4.1. **2 Cor. 4:5 - For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake**

2.4.2. He called Timothy in **1 Tim 6:11, "thou, O man of God"**

2.4.3. Paul always diverted attention away from himself to the sacred message of the Lord

2.4.4. We have too many today who want to try and prove their "intelligence" and get cute when preaching the word

2.5. One preaches:

2.5.1. To save his own soul

2.5.1.1. **Phi. 3:8-15 - Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, [even] that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I could not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing [I do], forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye are otherwise minded, this also shall God reveal unto you**

2.5.1.2. And the souls of others

- 2.5.1.2.1. **1 Tim. 4:16 - Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee**
- 2.5.1.3. Those who preach should be **“sober in all things, suffer hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill their ministry,”** (2 Tim. 4:5) and have the Lord and souls uppermost in their mind (v. 6-16)
- 2.6. Unimpeachable character
 - 2.6.1. Paul’s command to Timothy
 - 2.6.1.1. **1 Tim. 5:22 - Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure**
- 2.7. Dedicated to preaching the word with integrity and loyalty
 - 2.7.1. He must be absolutely sincere and genuine in his preaching
 - 2.7.2. Integrity demands loyalty to the pure Gospel
 - 2.7.2.1. **2 Tim. 3:14-17 - But abide thou in the things, which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. And that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture inspired of God [is] also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete furnished completely unto every good work.**
 - 2.7.3. God’s message does not change just because someone I know is caught in sin
 - 2.7.3.1. One who can’t hold to this teaching needs to quit preaching!
- 3. Solid foundation of members. Those members need to have:
 - 3.1. Proper attitudes toward God
 - 3.1.1. Love - **Matt. 22:34-38 - But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, gathered themselves together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, trying him: Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.**
 - 3.1.2. Faith; trust - **Heb. 11:1, 6 - Now faith is assurance of [things] hoped for, a conviction of things not seen; And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing [unto him]; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that seek after him**
 - 3.1.3. Thankfulness
 - 3.1.3.1. **Col. 3:17 - And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him**
 - 3.1.3.2. **Eph. 5:20 - giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father**
 - 3.2. Proper attitudes toward themselves
 - 3.2.1. Humility - **Rom. 12:3,16 - For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith; (16) Be of the same mind one toward another. Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to things that are lowly. Be not wise in your own conceits**
 - 3.2.1.1. Humility includes the willingness to serve, to do even “menial” tasks
 - 3.2.2. Teachability - **Prov. 15:31, 32 - The ear that hearkeneth to the reproof of life Shall abide among the wise. He that refuseth correction despiseth his own soul; But he that hearkeneth to reproof getteth understanding**
 - 3.2.2.1. Teachability includes:
 - 3.2.2.1.1. An eagerness to learn and grow.

- 3.2.2.1.2. The ability to learn from correction, to profit from advice and criticism.
- 3.2.2.1.3. The old as well as the young needs a teachable attitude.
- 3.2.3. Honesty or willingness to admit mistakes and correct them - **Jas. 5:16.**
- 3.3. Proper attitudes toward their brethren
 - 3.3.1. It is a family — one in which the spiritual welfare of each brother and sister is the concern of each of the others
 - 3.3.1.1. **1 Thess. 5:14 - And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all**
 - 3.3.2. Love
 - 3.3.2.1. **1 Pet. 2:17 - Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king**
 - 3.3.3. Cooperation, willingness to work together.
 - 3.3.3.1. We need to be able not only to work, but also to work together.
 - 3.3.4. Appreciation for others and their work
 - 3.3.4.1. **1 Thess. 5:12, 13 - But we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves**
 - 3.3.4.2. True appreciation for others will eliminate destructive criticism, gossip, etc.
 - 3.3.4.3. **Phil. 2:1-4 - If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; [doing] nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself**
 - 3.3.5. What the Lord's work is about is cooperation
 - 3.3.5.1. **Phil. 1:27 – Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ: that, whether I come and see you and be absent, I may hear of your state, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel**
 - 3.3.5.2. **Eph. 2:19-22 - So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit**
 - 3.3.5.2.1. the emphasis on “together”
 - 3.3.6. Peaceableness
 - 3.3.6.1. **Rom. 14:19 - So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another**
 - 3.3.7. Hospitality; courtesy
 - 3.3.8. Warmth; friendliness; openness
 - 3.3.9. Gentleness; meekness
 - 3.3.10. Forgiveness; forbearance; patience; longsuffering
- 3.4. Proper attitudes toward God's work
 - 3.4.1. Gratitude for the privilege of our work
 - 3.4.1.1. **1 Tim. 1:12 - I thank him that enabled me, [even] Christ Jesus our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to [his] service**
 - 3.4.2. Enthusiasm; eagerness - **2 Cor. 9:7.** Nothing is so easy but that it becomes difficult if done with reluctance.

God will bless our efforts if we keep focused on what it is the Lord wants us to do, He will bless what we do. After all, our “sufficiency” is from God: “And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor. 3:4, 5). If we are willing to sow “bountifully,” God is able to make us have “abundance” for every good work.

We need to be conscious that we are participating in the Lord’s work. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). We need to be praying that God will open doors of opportunity for us to do His work. “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith” (2 Thess. 3:1,2).