

ANTIOCH OR CORINTH?

When God created mankind He ordered his creation to "fill the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). The process has been an exciting one! In every generation there have been persons of pioneer spirit for whom a distant mountain was a challenge, and for whom the valleys beyond were an invitation. Their history has been repeatedly romanticized in books and in the media.

When Jesus told His disciples to go into all the world with the Good News, and to teach others to do so as well (Matt. 28:19-20); in a spiritual sense, He was saying again "fill the earth, and subdue it.." However, this time, it was to be in a spiritual sense. Once more, God was challenging men and women to move out of their comfort zone, and demonstrate that same spirit that had been exhibited in the subduing of the physical world.

Paul was certainly a man of pioneer spirit! He could have stayed in Antioch and been a fruitful member of a large congregation in a safe and comfortable place, but he didn't. In fact, in his letter to the Romans he said, "I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation" (15:20). He also gave the reason: it was in order that "they who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand" (15:21). For Paul, every un-evangelized place was a challenge, and every person who did not know the Lord, was an invitation!

The question is, why do we not have more Christians who are motivated by that same pioneer spirit? Having spent many years in the context of our Christian schools, I have repeatedly noticed that most of our graduates gravitate to places where the Church is strong, and few intentionally seek employment where the Church is either weak, or non-existent. It was that way when I was a student! When a friend approached me about joining him in taking the gospel to Italy, it almost scared me to death. I was like a fish on a hook, trying to get free, but not succeeding. Today, after more than a half century, my wife and I still go to Italy, and we count our time there as among the most blessed of our life!

Having for years been concerned about how few Christians there seem to be who have this pioneer spirit, some of us who are involved in Christian education got together to consider the matter. We concluded that what is lacking in the Church is an emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers" (1 Peter 2:4-9). By failing to develop the New Testament

teaching that every body part has a ministry to fulfill, we have gradually become very dependent on what we call "full time ministers." It is clear that if world evangelism is to be done by an already overworked cadre of salaried personnel (many of which spend most of their time serving members), the worker pool for "going to Corinth" will remain very small.

As a result, the idea developed that at the Christian college level we should initiate an educational process designed to promote what is called a "full body" approach to ministry (1 Cor. 12:12-27, Eph. 4:15-16). The content of such course work would feature the Biblical concept that there is a ministry (priesthood) for every body part, a ministry that is decided by the gifts (abilities) given to that member.

It is exciting to know that today, six of our Christian colleges offer an emphasis in what is called "vocational ministry." In order to take these courses, students must have a major by which they will earn their living. At their graduation, they will be prepared to go out like Paul as "tent makers." What is really heartening is that this approach frees young Christians to nations for new works. By choosing Corinth rather than Antioch, they will make it possible for those who have not yet seen, to see, and for those who have not yet heard, to understand. Christ is looking for more who are willing to get out of Antioch and head for Corinth!

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