

# DOES THE RUBBER MEET THE ROAD?

Most of us are acquainted with the meaning of this statement. We use it to indicate that regardless of our rhetoric, when push comes to shove, we are not getting the job done where it really counts.

There was a time when churches of Christ were known for their evangelistic zeal, and a lot of our members were teaching first principle classes during the course of the week. Many of us will remember using the Tisdell Charts, the open Bible method, or the Miller Film Strips. We will also recall that many souls were added to the Kingdom.

It seems to this writer that today we are much less active in this regard, and conversions languish!. At times, I even hear pejorative remarks about the use of such methods. My feeling about that is a little like that of the Christian who was criticized for the poor personal evangelism method he was using. He acknowledged that even he was not satisfied with it, and asked what his critic was using. His critic acknowledged that he did not have a method, to which the former replied, "Then, I like mine better than yours."

I came across a very interesting book printed by Broadman Press entitled REAL EVANGELISM, written by Bailey E. Smith. The burden of this book was to investigate why churches lose their zest for evangelism. It seems to me that his analysis is pretty much on target, and applicable to congregations that would like to understand why they are not more successful in reaching out to the world.

Smith accuses churches of emphasizing other things at the cost of fulfilling their primary mission which is seeking the lost for Christ. He believes that the Devil has many ways of keeping us so busy that we do not have the time to do those things which attack his kingdom of darkness as Christ has directed. Notice the distracters identified by Smith and see how many of them may be a current problem.

DECEPTIVE DISCIPLESHIP is the process by which faithfulness is achieved by the constant supervision and teaching of a "spiritual leader." The end result is that while the student makes little progress toward maturity, he/she does tend to become more and more like the discipler with his/her quirks, oddities and idiosyncrasies. Often the student becomes the disciple of Tom, Henry, or Mabel, but not of Jesus.

AN OVER EMPHASIS ON SMALL GROUPS may lead to the members being so turned in on themselves and their needs that they have nothing left over for the needs of the world. Groups frequently become like social clubs made up entirely

of members. In the process, they may become so separated from the world that they destroy all opportunity for evangelizing.

**EMPHASIS ON ACHIEVING A STRONGER AND DEEPER SPIRITUAL LIFE BEFORE EVANGELIZING.** As a result, there begins a quest for greater spirituality which becomes a type of religious security blanket leading to self-centered living. In this instance the description of Paul of some who were "Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7), seems indicated. The Christian life and work is largely a case of learning by doing.....it is a lot like learning to swim.

**MOTION WITHOUT MEANING** is Smith's depiction of churches that are filled with many activities that keep members coming and going and crisscrossing each other, but they are not activities which are basic to bringing Christ to the world. He tells of a very intricately made machine at a fair with pulleys, and wheels achieving varied movements and a sign which said "It doesn't do anything, but my, doesn't it work well!" For many churches the main thing seems to be that of asking others to come join their activities. He suggests that instead of asking "Why do people not come to our meetings?", we should ask, "Why haven't I gone to my neighbor?"

**CONCENTRATING ON WINNING RESPECT AND FRIENDSHIP BEFORE EVANGELIZING** to the extent that we get bogged down in an endless process which never leads to a sincere attempt to achieve a harvest for Christ.

**THEORETICAL ERNESTNESS WITH NO COMMITTED WORK** occurs when we substitute words for actions. Sometimes we may look like a luxury liner which keeps advertising a world cruise, but actually never gets out of the harbor. Instead, the tendency is to be constantly exchanging disillusioned old passengers for new ones that we attract. In this instance Smith says, "Courses without causes, are curses."

**DEDICATION TO THE RIGHT WAY OF DOING NOTHING.** It is possible to become satisfied with fine programs, and fine execution regardless of results. In this instance, performance becomes a substitute for obeying the Great Commission.

**SO BUSY WITH OTHER MATTERS THAT WE HAVE NO TIME LEFT FOR EVANGELISM.** This is possible not only for churches, but perhaps especially for Christians. At times it seems we almost intentionally so fill our lives with other commitments that we have little time left for evangelism or other specific works commanded by our Lord.

We are hearing a lot of suggestions about what it is going to take to make the Church more successful. Many of these changes appear to be more cosmetic than effective. Many of us believe that we will never be more successful until we become more faithful.... until we begin seeing that the rubber of our faith meets the road of this lost world by going to work evangelizing for Christ.

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