

FRIENDLY PERSUASION

Dr. John Allan Lavender

1 Cor 9:19-23

The other day I came across a story about a man who met an old acquaintance on the street. He hadn't seen him for several years so he said, "Congratulations! I hear you made \$10,000 in oil in Texas!" His friend answered, "Well, thanks! But there's been a slight misunderstanding. It wasn't \$10,000. It was \$100,000. It wasn't Texas. It was Oklahoma. It wasn't oil. It was wheat. It wasn't me. It was my brother-in-law. And he didn't make it, he lost it!"

It's certainly easy to get confused and mixed up about life isn't it! This is not only a danger for us as individuals, it is a danger for the church, as well.

It's so easy for us to get lost down one of the side alleys of life and completely miss the main reason for our existence.

It's so easy for the church to become little more than an intricate piece of elaborate machinery composed of its own adaptation of spinning wheels and moving pistons with the pastor relegated to the level of an ecclesiastical engineer whose task it is to watch the gauges and control the valves so the blamed thing doesn't get out of hand and blow off too much steam.

It's so easy for the church to become a kind of merry-go-round making lots of noise giving evidence of plenty of motion with large numbers of people getting on and off and a fair amount of money changing hands, but after all is said and done, when the music is over and the merry-go-round has stopped it hasn't gone anywhere.

Billy Rose tells the story of two beggars who were passing Rothchild's Castle. One of them decided to try to get inside and attempt to get a handout. By some strange miracle he actually got in to see the famous banker. Mr. Rothchild greeted him kindly, referred him to his secretary,

who turned him over to the butler, who sent him down to see the porter, who directed him to the gate keeper, who promptly booted him out! The beggar who had remained outside rushed up and said: *Did you get anything?* *Not exactly,* said the panhandler, *but I'll tell you one thing: the organization in that place is terrific!*

Well, the church certainly needs a measure of organization. The King's business should be carried out in a business-like way. The most important enterprise on earth needs to be handled economically and efficiently. But when that has been accomplished, let us not be so naive as to believe that our task is done. We are just beginning! Our *real* mission is not organizational, but spiritual. The *real* reason for our existence is to

Get people into heaven and get heaven into people.

Unfortunately, the church has not always been faithful to this one true calling. There was a time, and not so very long ago, when Evangelism, in Professor James Denney's phrase, was *the disinterested interest* of a comparative few.

The rank and file members of the Christian church pulled their cloaks of complacent self-righteousness tightly about their proud ankles and looked askance at Evangelism, almost as if it were a dirty word.

They looked upon their Christianity as a kind of favorite toy they wanted other people to admire, but not touch. They put it up on a shelf, so to speak, so it would not get damaged and, because they withheld the gospel from the world, they also withheld it from themselves! As a result, the church grew weaker and weaker until her voice could hardly be heard at all. And, as a further result, we have a world that is

sadly,

seriously and

spiritually sick.

A few weeks ago two boys broke open the door of the outside bulletin board which stands in front of the Delmar Baptist Church in St. Louis. Taking the letters of the sermon topic, they rearranged the sacred words into obscene words. Dr. Edwin T. Dahlberg, pastor of that great church, says:

AThis is a picture of what is happening throughout the world.

People are taking the sacred things of life and profaning them until the whole face of the community is defiled.

AThere is a wrong spirit in the heart of humanity,@ he says, Aan evil spirit vulgarizing and vandalizing all which has been precious in the experience of the human race.@

We must have a strong remedy if we are going to cure what Dahlberg calls:

Aour fang-and-claw civilization@.

We must literally be born again, or we are lost! This meansC

The Church Herself Must Be Born Again.

There must be a new birth of

compassion,

concern,

dynamism and

vitality.

We will never turn the tide of history by dishing out a religion that is mealy-mouthed and insipid.

In fact, there is a lesson for us in the words of the dog food salesman who said:

AThe we have the best packaging, the brightest labels, the most aggressive sales force in the industry. The only trouble is the dogs won't eat the stuff!@

The world is hungry for something vital and vibrant. It is seeking an encounter with God which is nourishing. The world needs Christians gripped by a ministry of Evangelism that is alert and alive to the great soul-needs of people today.

The apostle Paul said he was willing to become all things to all people that by any means he might win some.

The great motivation for Paul was

not to build churches, although he did,

not to preach sermons, although he did,

not to feed the hungry, although he did,

not to comfort the sorrowing, although he did,

not to build a better world, although he did,

His motivation was to win people to Jesus.

And that's our real purpose, too:

To reach real people with

the real message of

the real hope which is found in Jesus Christ.

It is not enough that we be evangelical and proclaim the New Testament message, we must be evangelistic and replicate the New Testament ministry!

In his fine book, Personal Soul Winning, Dr. William Evans writes:

AThe evangelical church is a reservoir of pure water without a pipe running anywhere. If you take the trouble to go *to* it, to climb the embankment, you will get a good drink.

AThe evangelistic church is a reservoir of pure water with a pipe to every heart in the community.

AEvangelical may mean truth on ice.

Evangelistic means truth on fire.

AEvangelical may be bomb-proof for defense. Evangelistic means an army on the march with every face toward the enemy.

AEvangelical sings: >Hold the fort for I am coming!=. Evangelistic sings: >Storm the fort for God is leading!=

AThe need of the church is not more evangelical as a thing to fight for, but more evangelism as the force to fight with.@

And the urgency of our task is immediate. In the well-turned phrase of Curtis Nims:

AMan now stalks the earth with an H-Bomb in one hand and a band-aid in the other.@

And we will not *have* a new generation tomorrow unless we have a re-generation today!

Unless the church starts now to evangelize in earnest, as it has never done beforeCunless she learns the fine art of AFriendly Persuasion@ which includes mastering AA Winsome Way To Win Someone@not only will the world never be saved, it will actually become pagan, for more souls are being born into the world today than we are winning to Christ.

For instance, the other day I came across this very startling statement in Quote Magazine.

AA new church is needed somewhere in the United States every nine hours to take care of the nation=s increasing population.@

And that=s in so-called AFriendly Persuasion@. What about those areas of the earth where there are no Christian churches at all? As the poet puts it:

AWe are not storerooms, but channels,
We are not cisterns, but springs,
Passing our benefits onward,
Fitting our blessings with wings;

Letting the water flow outward
To spread o'er the desert forlorn:
Sharing our bread with our brothers,
Our comfort with those who mourn.©

How, then, should we go about our task? First of all,

Lets Make Sure of Our Motivation.

We need to recognize evangelism as a concern which has been placed upon us by God Himself. Evangelism, you see, is the reproductive process of the Kingdom of God on earth. A process which began when

AGod so loved *people* that He gave His only begotten Son©
and was broadened when Jesus said to a handful of *people*CHis disciplesC
AGo *ye* into all the world and make disciples (of
people).©

When we became children of God,

when we became followers of Christ,

when the germ of spiritual life was born in us,

there also was placed within us the embryonic possibility of being soul-winners. For with our new birth came the equipment with which we can reproduce ourselves, spiritually speaking.

Indeed, we not only *can*, but we *must* reproduce ourselves. It is not an option, but a mandate.

The words of Jesus contain an inescapable imperative

AGo *make* disciples.©

It is a commission.

A command.

An order.

A categorical imperative direct from heaven.

We are to *make* disciples^Cnot in the sense of *forcing* them^Cbut by *creating* them through AFriendly Persuasion.[®] By mastering ^AA Winsome Way To Win Someone[®].

It^s not our job to be ^Athe Great Physician of the soul[®], but it is our job to serve as spiritual interns who know how to introduce others to the ^AGreat Physician[®] who does know how to treat sin-sick souls.

In that sense, evangelism is the task of the entire church. It is the responsibility of all believers. It is the command of God to every Christian. It is a commission from which you and I cannot conveniently beg off. So, to begin with, we must see evangelism for what it really is: a divine imperative. And then, when we have seen our task, we need to B

Approach Our Task with Enthusiasm.

Call it concern.

Call it compassion.

Call it whatever name you will.

It is the spark which ignites people, which stirs their imagination, which opens their eyes to a vision of what they can become in Christ.

Sometimes when I see the staid, stolid, dour expression on the countenance of some Christians when they talk about their church and faith, it is easy to see why there are more people without Christ than ever before, because some Christians seem to have no more passion than an iron stag!

Has Jesus done something for us? Or has He not? Has He transformed our lives and given us peace for today and hope for tomorrow? Or has He not? If not, then let^s quit kidding ourselves. Let^s close up shop and ^Aeat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.[®] But if Christ *has* done something for us, then let^s tell the world with a happy heart, a radiant face, and a joy-filled voice.

Let^s refuse to be fenced in by our inhibitions. Let^s allow the emotion of love for God and

people to reach such a feverish pitch in our lives that it shall conquer all inhibitions like a circus rider bursting through hoops of tissue-paper.

After all, who *are* they who really make a lasting impression upon us in this test pit of humanity we call our world?

AAre they,@ as someone has asked, Athe dwarfed, misshapen persons who cringe before their own shadows? Or are they the expansive, self-forgetful souls who are radiant with love?

AAre they the hard, dull xcritters= whose religion has become cut and dried formality, lifeless Sunday routine? Or are they the warm, eager souls who are happily engaged in bringing cheer in the name of Jesus?@

Let=s get enthusiastic about our faith. Let=s call upon every facet of our personality when we talk to people about Christ and the church. Let=s muster every bit of Awinsome-ness@ at our command so that, by AFriendly Persuasion®, we can break through to them with the happy news that God has done something so wonderful for us, we want them to share it too! And then let=s --

Tackle Our Job with Vision.

Let=s not settle for small gains. Dr. Edwin T. Dahlberg tells of being in a hotel room one night where the conversation in the next room could be clearly heard. Two men were laying plans for the enlistment of 100 men who would spend an hour a piece each week going from door to door for their political party. AWhy, we can take over this town,@ said one of the men. Dr. Dahlberg asks, ACan the church do less?@ Can we be satisfied until, by AFriendly Persuasion,@ we have taken over *our town*Cor at least our *part* of our townCfor Christ?

That=s one reason why, as a church, we adopted a goal of 150 new friends for Christ this year. That=s more than a slogan! If we had been looking for a slogan we would have come up with

some neat turn of a phrase like A157 in >57@. When we talk about 150 new friends for Christ, we are talking about people. Not digits. Not sticks. Not inanimate objects. But living, breathing, seeking, struggling, dying people who are made in the image of God. People for whom Christ died.

We chose 150 as our goal because, while we can't do everything, we can do something and 150 represents more people than we have ever won for Christ in a single year in the history of this church! We wanted a goal which would challenge the noblest and best in us.

Of course, we have our critics. There have been those who have reminded us that quantity is not quality. But, I can hardly get away from the words of Jesus whenCas quoted in John 15 He saidCour task as Christians is to

Abear fruit@ (vs 2a),

that our Heavenly husbandman prunes us so we will

Abear *more* fruit@ (vs 2b),

and that He is only satisfied when we

Abear *much* fruit@ (vs 8).

If God loves all people, then numbers are important, for they represent people!

A sixteen year old boy walked into a drug store and asked the druggist if he could use the telephone. He was granted permission and the druggist couldn't help overhearing the boy=s conversation. He heard him inquire about a job which had been advertised a week before. He heard the boy say,

AOh, I see, the job is filled. Well, tell me, is the boy you hired
doing the job satisfactorily? Is he measuring up to your
standards?@

When the boy got an affirmative reply, he said,

AWell, thank you!@ and hung up the telephone.

As he turned to leave, the druggist said,

ASon, I'm sorry you didn't get that job.®

To which the boy replied,

AOh, I got the job! I'm the boy they hired three days ago and I'm just checkin= up on myself.®

That's the purpose of a challenging goal. It is not totally adequate. But in some measure, it enables us to see how we're doing. How well we are fulfilling our task. How proficient we are becoming in the art of AFriendly Persuasion®. How close we are coming to the command of Christ that we Abear *much* fruit.®

And then, when we are straight on our motivation, filled with enthusiasm and fired by a vision of our taskC

We must Go to Work.

Paul said to young Timothy, ADo the work of an evangelist and fulfill your ministry® (2 Tim. 4:5). And evangelism is work. Project Winsome doesn't invite you to put on tie and tails, but coveralls. AA winsome way to win someone® challenges you to climb stairs and ring doorbells. It calls upon you to leave the comfort of home and trudge through the snow of winter and suffer through the swelter of summer.

Evangelism is work! But it's in doing that work that we prove our Christianity for, as the Bible declares, Afait without works is dead® (James 2:20).

Someone has said that, while the sentiment of Sam Walter Foss about Abeing a friend to man® is wonderful, we will never succeed in introducing people to the Greatest Friend of all while supinely Asitting in a house by the side of the road.® We must go out Awhere cross the crowded ways of life!® We must brush shoulders with the masses. We must lose our life for the sake of Christ, that others may find their life in Him.

I'm not talking about badgering people in a mis-guided effort to bludgeon them into submission to Christ. No. No. No. No! Fundamental to the ministry of Project Winsome is this principle:

¶We do not proceed where the Holy Spirit has preceded us.¶

You cannot force Christ upon people any more than you can open a rose bud with a hammer.

What I am talking about, however, is developing the art of AFriendly Persuasion® so that by recognizing our holy calling as representatives of Christ, we will go forth with vision and enthusiasm to work at the task of wooing people to Him.

What is evangelism? What is this art of AFriendly Persuasion®? It is, as someone has said,

¶The anguished cry of Jesus as He weeps over a doomed city.

It is the voice of Paul saying,

›I could wish that I were accursed from Christ for
my brethren.=

It is the heart-ringing plea of Moses,

›Oh, this people have sinned...forgive their sin...if
not, blot me out of the book which Thou hast
written.=

It is the cry of John Knox:

›God, give me Scotland or I die.=

It is the declaration of John Wesley,

›The world is my parish.=

It is the prayer of Billy Sunday,

›Make me a giant for God.=

It is the sob of parents in the night, weeping over a prodigal child.

It is the secret of a great preacher and a great Christian and a
great church.¶