

The Challenge to be Faithful

We struggle to come to grips with a church that seems to lose ground against population growth. Congregations are small and finances are limited.

Many books have been written, many opinions have been raised, many more programs have been followed, but it seems as if the ultimate solution is eluding us.

Does it mean that we will remain a stumbling church until the perfect has come with the return of the Lord? No!

The story is told of the man who lost his keys. Someone saw him frantically searching and offered to help. After much trouble the keys were still lost. "Where did you lose it," his helper asked. "Over there, but I thought we'll find it easier here in the light of the street lamp."

It seems we are like this man. We look for answers in the wrong places.

I strongly believe that the victorious Christ, who gave his Holy Spirit and the Holy Word with all those blessed promises to his church, will lead her into victory over her enemy. The final victory, which will crown all battles, will be with the appearing of Him, who is our Warrior, now marching on to destroy his adversaries until He has put them under his feet – eternally (Revelation 19:11-21).

I also strongly believe in the life-giving power of the Word of God (Rom 1:16-17). Our battle to victory in Jesus Christ begins with the message of this Word; the last encounter with the enemy will be with the Word in our hands and upon our lips (Eph 6:17).

The Reformation of the 16th Century restored the place of the Word in the worship and life of the church. I am afraid we have embarked on a road to trade this Word for a popular message, but far inferior to the Bible.

We might argue that we still preach the Word, the Word is still read in worship and that we still adhere to the truth of the Bible. But the problem is that we do not always passionately present it is the gospel unto salvation. It has become a Bible talk, which is more or less received as the preacher's view on a certain issue or paragraph of Scripture.

The sufficiency of this Message is in doubt when we employ all sorts of market-driven (outcome based?) programs to attract the masses; when this fails, we look for something more "attractive" to add to the Word. It seems as if we deem the Bible inadequate to provide the outcomes we work and pray for.

To the Word we might add music, or "worship" as it is referred to in contemporary literature. Seeker-friendly services have become popular in the name of "fellowship" or "reaching out". In these services we sit around coffee tables and try to do almost anything not to offend the seeker. We try to meet the needs of the seeker by setting up a therapeutic session where we deal with self-esteem, self-worth, depression and inter-personal relationships.

In the process we might forget the timeless principles which the Lord teaches us in his infallible Word. There are a few very strong references in the Bible that we might find difficult to understand.

The nature of the Gospel is for some to believe in the Rock of Salvation, while others hear it and stumble (Rom 9:33, 1Pet 2:6-8). The message of the cross of Jesus Christ is to some an offence (Gal 5:11). We do not need to be embarrassed if not all who hear it accept it. Further, we cannot make it acceptable to those whom the Lord did not ordain to eternal salvation (Acts 13:48).

Jesus Christ declared that not all who hear the Gospel will receive it. Hearing they will not hear, and seeing they will not see. Why? It is not given to them. Who gives? God! (Mat 13:11-17; Isa 6:9-10).

The Gospel to one is foolishness and to other a stumbling block, but to others it is the wisdom of God (1Cor 1:22-25).

In preaching the Gospel to some we are an aroma of death, to others we are an aroma of life leading to life (2Cor 2:15-16).

Fact is, the world, Mr and Mrs Average out there (like indeed everyone to whom the grace of Jesus Christ is not revealed through the Holy Spirit by the preaching of the Word [Rom 10:17]), does not realise their need for the Gospel, that is, to be saved by grace on account of the salvation wrought by the Saviour (1Corinthians 2:6-9). To go to the world for it to define its needs is therefore a wrong place to look for the keys of successful Gospel ministry.

We should not be trapped into the argument that the world will not be attracted to the old-old story of Jesus and his love, and therefore we need to package it differently to meet their needs.

Should we then preach the Gospel only to the saved? Should we aim our activities only at the saved? No! Our Lord is sending us to the alleys, the lane ways, the dark corners of this world, to unbelieving nations, to everyone. But He gave us our commission: making disciples, baptising them, and teaching them to observe all things He has commanded.

It seems as if the church is still faithful in the second aspect of her work (we love to baptise!). When and if we get to discipling, that's where we stop. When it comes to teaching, we shy away. As a matter of fact, teaching doctrine has become a definite "No-no" these days. The result is that people repent, without knowing what from and whom to; people have "fun" in worship, but remain Biblically illiterate; they feel better after a service of worship, but they are not better equipped for service in the most holy faith.

The result? The church has no impact on the world anymore. The opposite is conspicuously true: the world is having more and more impact on the church.

Do we long to see the church move forward under the victorious banner of the victorious Lord? I surely do! Let's then remain faithful in preaching the uncompromised message of salvation of sin in the blood of the Lam – and Him only.