**"EXPERTISE" EVANGELISM**

Jesus once told the Pharisees and scribes, “*You are* ***experts*** *at setting aside the commandment of God*” (Mark 7:9). The bottom line was, they were setting aside a command of God. This is a much-repeated behavior. It reminds me of how some people will work harder at not working than they would ever work, if they simply did the work. God gave a command in connection with the preaching of the gospel: Go and do it (Mark 16:15).

This command to “*go*” is for a specific purpose. But the “going” must be done. The means of travel is not specified; they could walk, ride, travel on land or by sea, but they must go! Could you imagine getting so wrapped up in “fine-tuning” the method of going that you never actually went and preached the gospel? Consider the following story about fishing that makes this point:

Now it came to pass that a group existed that called themselves fishermen and there were many fish in the waters about them. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes and the fish were hungry. Week after week and month after month and year after year, the group that called themselves “fishermen” met in meetings and talked about those called to fish, the abundance of fish, and how we might go about fishing. Year after year, they carefully defined what fishing meant, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing be the primary talk of fishermen. These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings for local fishing headquarters and their plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and that everyone should fish. However, the one thing they did not do…They did not fish!

Large, elaborate training centers were built whose original and primary purpose was to teach fisherman how to fish. Over the years, courses were offered on the needs of the fish, the nature of the fish, how to find fish, and the psychological effects of fishing. Those who taught had doctorates in “Fishology”! But, the teachers did not fish! They only taught about fishing.

Further, the fishermen built large printing houses to publish fishing guides. Presses were kept busy day and night to produce material solely devoted to fishing methods. A speakers’ bureau was also organized to schedule special speakers on fishing. After one stirring meeting entitled, “The Necessity of Fishing,” two young men left the meeting and actually went fishing. One of them actually caught two fish! He was honored for his great catch and was scheduled to appear at all the big meetings to tell how he did. So, he quit fishing in order to have more time to tell his experiences to the other fishermen.

Now it is true that many of the fishermen sacrificed and put up with all kinds of difficulties. Some lived near the water and had to put up with the smell of dead fish. Some had to endure the ridicule of some who made fun of these fishermen’s clubs because they claimed to be fishermen, but they did not fish. And they wondered about those who thought it was of little use to attend meetings and talk about fishing. I mean, after all, were they not following the Master who said, “*Come and I will make you fishers of men*”? Imagine their dismay when someone actually suggested that they were not really fishermen. Yet, it did make sense. Can we rightfully call a person a fisherman if, year after year, he never fishes? Can a person really be following Jesus if he is not “fishing”?

Jesus told his disciples, “*The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest*” (Matthew 9:37-38). Evangelism relates to our stewardship as disciples. The gospel is God’s. He has given it to us to handle faithfully. We have responsibility, both individually and collectively. Our fellowship in the gospel is seen from Philippians 4:15…giving and receiving. Our fellowship in the gospel is active, not passive. Evangelism is to be done, not just discussed. Let each of us examine our hearts that we are never found trying to evade the task of evangelism. An old hymn makes the point: *“When in the better land, before the throne we stand; how deeply grieved our souls may be. If any lost one there should cry in deep despair, ‘You never mentioned him to me!’”*

We cannot “outsource” our responsibilities in evangelism. The individual disciple and the local church are God’s authorized agents to do the work of evangelism. To “outsource” our evangelism amounts to nothing more than working hard at avoiding our work. As the apostle Paul said on another matter, “*Now therefore perform the doing of it*” (2 Corinthians 8:11).

--Roger Bruner