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FISHERS OF MEN

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„And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”
(Luke 5:10)

Time continues moving forward and drawing to end; yet believers have fallen asleep as they have busied themselves with various activities void of a goal of fishing for men.

In Christian bookstores we find fewer books than before on evangelism; in many church libraries it is almost impossible to find books on this topic because it not a priority. In many cases church growth is the result of believers who have changed

churches because of a better program.

There are those who call this “growth”; they write books on church growth and calculate unrealistic statistics; yet this phenomenon is not salvation of souls rather transfer of fish from one boat to another.

Although statistics show that approximately 50% of new believers in the west share their faith (according to George Barna Research in 2004), the same percentage, then, exists

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for those who don't share their faith, which is a great number! Therefore, regardless of opinion, it seems that we are focused more on ourselves, our desires, and activities instead of on evangelism or fishing for men. This is why it is time like never before to make it a priority, take our eyes off of ourselves, and see the harvest that is ready for us; to give our all in order to reach as many for Christ as we can.

► **1. EVANGELISM, OR FISHING FOR MEN, WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST PRIORITIES OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND LATER OF HIS DISCIPLES.**

If we look a little closer at the gospels and Pauline letters, we can see that one of the main priorities of Jesus Christ and His disciples was to proclaim the Good News; their desire was to draw people into God's Kingdom. In the gospels Jesus Christ went from one outreach to another; He healed the sick, cast out evil spirits, and proclaimed

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the gospel – He not only had mercy on them, He did these things so that they would repent of their sin and turn to God.

For example, when He began His ministry we see that He was active; He came to Galilee and preached the Word of God. He didn't go from one seminar to another or to special evangelistic gatherings in the synagogues; as is the unfortunate case with today's Christians who are ready to fellowship among themselves, attend seminars that are not altogether needful, but are not so ready to evangelize. Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mark 1:15-17)

Christ's mission was clear – to save the lost and recruit as many "soldiers" as possible. Because of his "hunting" mentality, the scribes complained because they could not understand why he fellowshipped more with sinners and less with them. "And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, 'How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard it, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did

not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” (Mark 2:16-17)

The Apostle Paul had the same goal and yearning to hunt, like Jesus. Paul was one of the most effective fishers of men’s souls. He was educated in the best schools of that time and was a successful teacher, and speaker of many foreign languages. Yet, after his dramatic conversion the most important thing to him became to know Christ more and to see as many people as possible come to Him. Paul is the ancestor of mission work (it would be good for today’s modern missionaries to look to him as an example). He traveled the entire known world leaving behind him many churches and saved souls. Proclaiming the Good News was an ingredient in his life!

Once he even said to the Corinthians, “...woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:16b) In his letters he wrote about methods of fishing for men. “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak, I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means

save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Paul did all he could in order to save people, he adapted himself to all who did not know Christ, yet did not partake in their sin. We ought to learn something from him, because it seem that today’s modern churches have not placed clear boundaries between the holy and unholy, or perhaps do not know how to approach sinners.

In Jude’s letter he clearly showed us that evangelism and fishing for men are serious things, which ought to be one of our greatest priorities. He said, “...and on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” (Jude 22, 23)

Jesus is coming soon, and we have been given a mandate – not just to keep ourselves for Him, rather to gather the unsaved to Him. If we do not fish for men we will become dead and religious, which is a terrible condition void of the least desire to save those around us. The condition of these churches is terrible, because selfish and ineffective people are found

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there. Personally I believe that if believers or churches have no desire to save the lost, after a time they will die, spiritually and numerically, while in the meantime destroying themselves concentrating only on themselves.

► **2. WHILE FISHING FOR MEN WE SHOULD NOT FEAR, BUT COURAGEOUSLY PERSEVERE.**

When the king of Syria ordered the prophet Elisha to be captured in the city of Dothan, because he had warned the king of Israel of the Syrians and their intentions of war against them, Elisha's servant, because of fear, wondered what he should do, "And it was told him, saying, 'Surely he is in Dothan.' Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So he answered 'Do not fear, for those who

are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." (2 Kings 6:15b-17)

One thing we must know and must not ignore is that there exists a spiritual war for the souls of mankind. They will not be saved without us praying and interceding; they will not turn from their sin just because we are nice to them. Today's problem in the church is that we try to be polished and cultured while adapting to everything in order that people might somehow get saved; all the while avoiding intercession in agony for the unsaved.

Today's modern church doesn't grow as it ought because believers, pastors, evangelists, and workers ignore the fact that it's about saving people not about nice buildings and good programs. God doesn't give results to many because they are too steeped in intellectualism; their desire to be accepted by the world is stronger than their desire for prayer – one of the strongest weapons that has been laid to the side thinking that people will get saved because of personalities and giftings. Here lies the biggest problem, while people may come to the church they will not leave their old life of sin because they are not saved to the uttermost.

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It's like a hunter wanting to hunt animals, but in a painless and "humanitarian" way. Why is it that we have the phenomenon in our churches of half-saved members (if you can actually be "half-saved"); people who have not died with Lord Jesus Christ?

The Word tells us that a wise man is not he who philosophizes or who talks so that no one can understand; nor does a wise man place titles before his name or diplomas on his wall; rather a wise man is one who wins souls. "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." (Proverbs 11:30) Therefore, hunting souls is not a technical thing rather a very serious and spiritual thing; which is why our enemy will do everything he can to discourage and frighten us. It may be hard to believe, but many feel a blockage when they know they should speak up for Christ. The devil wants to bind us up with various unwarranted phobias and fears. He will often tell us that evangelism is meaningless, that people are stubborn, uninterested and that we will not succeed.

The devil will do everything he can to keep us from evangelizing. If need be, he will organize ecumenical prayer meetings, various Christian gatherings, concerts and other interesting church seminars and activities usually with a theme to put us in the center of attention. He does this with the intention of keeping our eyes off of the harvest of souls. This is why it is important

to know that God is greater than our enemy because He has a greater and more powerful army, as in this story with Elisha's servant whose eyes were opened to see the spiritual realm and mighty army of God.

It is true that God and His army stand behind us, so we need not fear people or Satan. Truly "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7) What do we have to fear when we have eternal life? Actually, because of eternal life we ought to begin fishing for men!

The promises and encouragement given to Israel are encouraging for us today to not fear because we have the same God who is always with us. "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... Since you were precious in My sight, you have been

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honored, and I have loved you...fear not, for I am with you." (Isaiah 43:1b-5a)

Other than bringing fear, the devil will try to discourage believers in general from evangelizing. Often after a time of evangelism the enemy will come to us and tell us to quit because our efforts are meaningless, since no one accepted Christ right away. After all, haven't we shared with them twice or three times already? Quitting is one of his tactics. If he can't lead us back into sin then he will try to discourage us and get us to quit being active for Jesus Christ. He will try to get us to believe that people are too hardened to the gospel and that we ought to just leave them alone.

Often the enemy will discourage the local church, after a couple of times of holding an evangelistic event. When no one receives Christ or when the numbers are very small then the enemy will get them to begin debating whether or not it is even needful to evangelize; or he will get them to focus on the wrong assumption that they need to

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find out the main reason for their lack of success. Often after little results the church will close herself off from the outside world, create a subculture, and cease evangelizing. This may not seem to be a problem while there are young people in church, but when they begin growing old and dying then the church is forced to close for lack of members.

The enemy knows that if he stops the church from evangelizing then he has captured her. He doesn't care if she has turned into a social club of like-minded and selfish philosophers, because he knows that after a while, if they do not begin fishing for men, they will begin to hunt each other to extinction.

This is why it is important to trust in the Lord, not to fear, but to persevere knowing that God is on our side. We must be persistent fishers of men who do not give up on our call just because we haven't "caught" anything after a week or two; rather we must continue on, give even more if need be, and affect change in our realms of influence in order to catch our "game". We are responsible to cast the nets on the other side, not giving up on casting nets!

3. FISHING FOR MEN ALWAYS REFRESHES OUR FAITH AND IS BENEFICIAL IN MANY PRACTICAL WAYS.

When hunting or fishing, catching game always brings with it a great feeling. Often

that feeling is personally satisfying, a feeling of victory; the person, now enthused, has a great will and desire to hunt because he witnessed results for his effort.

In a way, fishing for men is similar, in regards to evangelism. I have personally experienced many benefits in proclaiming the Good News. First and foremost it strengthens our faith because it brings life.

A common problem believers have in their walk with God is that they feel bored after a time, which often takes place as a result of not exercising their faith. This is often the case because they believe that faith is intellectual assent.

If faith in God is not shared and if it is not an ingredient in their life then they become bored and will eventually fall away from God. True faith is never passive or dull; in reality it is very active and dynamic, especially when we fish for men; (which is why it is good and healthy for believers to be included in the work of a local church).

Often I see during evangelism or the salvation of a soul that people experience joy in their inner man because of the obvious results of sharing their faith. When we are active in reaching people our faith grows, and with it grows our desire to further evangelize.

Yet, we do not only experience joy but also a feeling of greater value. This does not mean, of course, that our value is based in our works; however, we are, nevertheless, beings that need to actively give of ourselves. At the end of the day, we are called to give of ourselves and I believe that this is a special dynamic of satisfaction. If we do not give of ourselves our faith will become selfish, ineffective, and closed off to only our needs and wants; from which springs cynicism, negativity, depression, and complaining because we are not applying our faith. If we do not apply our faith in believing for the unsaved, after a while we will become spiritually dead. This is why evangelism has many benefits. Faith in God is something that must be shared with others; it is not exclusive, mystical, or depressing.

We often see the rule come to play that when we give of ourselves we receive something in return. For example, when Jesus called the disciples to follow Him and give of themselves, He didn't tell them that they wouldn't receive anything in return. He called them to a practical and

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dynamic faith. They evangelized with Him, healed the sick, raised the dead, and fed the hungry. He promised them that if in faith they left all behind they would see the fruit of that. "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters of rather or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life." (Matthew 19:29)

Although we cannot directly connect this with evangelism, one theory is that they left all not only to evangelize but for other reasons as well, it is clearly obvious that if we give of ourselves and preach the Good News, often we will receive a blessing for our effort, our faith will grow, we will not be so concentrated on ourselves, and we will see our joy, strength and faith renewed.

Finally, the local church will enjoy the blessings of evangelism: their numbers will grow! We will have more disciples, we will be able to develop and use our various

gifts, talents, and callings, we can send out missionaries, have a greater influence in our local area, and have more finances. Therefore, in looking at the matter of fishing for men, we find that we will always gain something good; and the most important thing is that we will be saving sinners from eternal destruction. So, let us not be afraid, let us begin walking in faith, and become fishers of men. "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." (Luke 5:10b)

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