**Have We Been Trained NOT to Win Souls?**

Recently a fiery preacher tells the congregation that they should win souls and plant churches in cities still unreached by the Apostolic message.

 During the message, the audience seemed ambivalent at best, unreceptive at worst, to his appeal.

Aside from an occasional "amen," the people looked stunned. At the altar invitation it occurred that they didn't have a clue how to do what he was telling them to do.

You may as well have thrown them into the middle of the lake without the slightest knowledge on how to swim.

 Then, it started to make sense. They were exactly what we had made them.

·        These were not people of the world.

·        These are the products of our pulpits.

·        They are people who had been trained for three or four generations to stay away from the world.

They are faithful and obedient saints who responded precisely to the teachings of their pastor.

    Neither they, nor their parents or grandparents were drunks.

Their great grandparents may have been godly persons as well.

How could they possibly relate to the raw sinners of the world? The people in our congregations dress modestly and godly because they had been taught to dress that way for three or four generations.

They are trained to have little or no tolerance for scantily-clad people who dressed according to the fashions of the world.

Anybody dressed like that had no business in church. They are not reveling, party animals.

None of them have pupils dilated by illegal drugs, breath smelling of liquor, piercings, tattoos, freaky hair styles, halter tops, painted faces and fingernails or other outward signs of blatant worldliness.

And yet, we strongly admonish these same people to wade out into the middle of a world that practices all these things and somehow relate to them.

Apostolic have been trained to stay away from the worldly crowd, not mingle with it.

"Evil communication corrupts good manners." Why should it be any wonder, then, that they would find it so difficult to enter into the society that revolted them?

Their first reaction is to run from the loose, lewd, drinking, smoking, profane people.

Some of them do manage to stick around for a while, but they begin to preach against all the sin in range of their eyes, ears and noses, a practice that is not usually appreciated by the audience.

This scenario gets enormously complicated when the offending persons are members of the same family.

The body of laity we have created has become a vast study in the law of unintended consequences.

1.     We have trained a bugle corps and sent them to do an infantryman's job.

2.     We have trained an army of supply clerks and have asked them to jump from airplanes with paratroopers.

3.     We have made them line up with "ABC" and then expected them to perform "XYZ."

 We never intended for them to become so use to the padded pews that they would shun the streets in search of souls.

Regardless of our rhetoric to the contrary, the practical outcome of our sermons, exhortations, admonitions and pastoral counseling sessions have equipped our people to sing in the choir, teach Sunday school children, read the Bible and live cleanly and righteously before God and the world.

 It has not prepared them to tackle the real world of lost souls.

A.    Insulation has turned into isolation.

B.     Separation has become segregation.

C.     Outreach looks more like in-reach.

D.    Preaching the word sounds like preaching to the choir.

E.      Sharing the gospel consists of joining hands with the person across the aisle to give them a word of cheer or encouragement instead of reaching the lost with truth.

*Instead of winning the lost we are continually trying to keep the saved, saved.*

Our beacon of light has been confined to sanctuary rather than placed in lighthouses along the shore.

Our worship seeks for applause from the church when it should be looking for its effect on the un-churched.

    Is the gospel so offensive,

    The Holy Ghost so anemic

    Or the influence of the world so powerful that we cannot venture out to win souls?

Is our holiness so shallow, our belief system so weak and our relationship with Christ so tenuous that we cannot interact with unbelievers for fear that they will influence us away from God instead of the other way around?

a.     Are the church walls our only source of protection spiritual?

b.     Is our timid silence the only way to preserve our doctrinal integrity?

c.      Are we so fearful that we will be found out that we refuse to sound off?

Do we seek the shadows instead of the sunlight so we will avoid painful and embarrassing confrontations?

* Who among us will break out of this straitjacket of Pentecostal paranoia?
* Who among us will declare that the Apostolic truth deserves a worldwide hearing?
* Who among us will refuse to leave the witnessing to the door-knocking Jehovah's Witnesses, or the bicycle-riding missionaries of the Mormons?

Our training to live for God is no excuse to hide from the world.

 Our dedication to holiness and righteousness is not so fragile that it cannot be put on display for the world.

We have a divine presence dwelling within our lives that will always be greater than any external threat.

Witnessing, soul winning, outreach and evangelism cannot be seen as somehow dangerous to the church.

They are, in fact, the lifelines of the church. We have no way to fulfill the vision of Christ for the church without a total commitment to reach the lost.

1.     It drove a proper Jew called Simon Peter into a Gentile's house to preach the gospel against the visible opposition of his Jewish cohorts.

2.     It put Paul in the company of thieves, rowdy sailors, demon-possessed people, worshippers of the goddess Diana, snooty philosophers on Mars hill and dank, rat infested prisons.

It leads believers to the edge of fire to pull people out, it ends up in the middle of a murderous rabble to touch prospective hearers and it throws chosen vessels bound before kings.

It is at this point that the old, familiar fears erupt. What? Am I suggesting that we abandon our holiness?

Are we to shed our godly appearances in order to effectively traffic in the corrupt haunts of lost humanity?

Absolutely not, does a surgeon contract cancer to be more adept at excising a tumor?

Does a policeman take a few drinks before breaking up a barroom fight?

Does a counselor destroy his own marriage so he can repair the marriages of others?

All of these interventionists know they must keep themselves free from the troubles of their patient/clients in order to help them.

Soul winners must depend on the Holy Ghost to protect them as they conduct search and rescue missions into hazardous situations.

Let us refocus. Let us abandon our sterile ways of non-soul winning and take up the messy mission of real life outreach.

Let us learn how to mingle with the sinner without being influenced by his sin.

Let us study how to kneel in the dust beside a beaten man whose blood oozes from open wounds instead of kneeling only in the air-conditioned comfort of a carpeted prayer room.

 Let us practice our trust in the keeping power of the Holy Ghost instead of fearfully hiding out in a church sanctuary where nobody threatens us.

Let us follow the example of our Chief Shepherd, who ate dinner in the house of sinners,

Who permitted a woman of ill repute to anoint his feet and wipe them with her hair,

And who hung between two thieves as he departed from this world.

The gospel is rugged. The worst thing that can happen to it is to remain unused, archived and kept from the world. It will work if we will let it.

We are not fishers of men until we catch them.