

Success in the Lord's Work

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The two elements involved in success in the Lord's work are seen in the following statement from Paul, the apostle:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

Note these elements:

- A singularity of purpose to grow, go forward, progress, and abound in spiritual activity
- The need to let our work be governed by the Lord

Unfortunately, we have not always recognized the implications of these two elements. The following have occurred to me in thinking about this important subject.

Neither a Christian nor a church can grow while content to sit in idleness, but lamentably, this seems to be the only trait in which many of us are steadfast and unmovable. I am sure that if the truth were revealed many of the Lord's churches would be seen to be in the throes of mediocrity, perfectly content with the status quo. Thus, we pride ourselves on being "average" Christians, having "average" contributions (maybe even more than the "Lazy Hollow" congregation across town), having "average" attendance, in short, being an "average" (sometimes even "better than average") church or Christian. Many obviously have not yet been informed that to be average means we are just as close to the bottom as we are to the top! The bad thing about this state of affairs, as I see it, is not so much that it exists now, but that it has come to be a way of life and too many are content for it to exist – indefinitely. When someone suggests some means to improve on the situation, he is as likely to be restrained as to be encouraged.

Obviously, there may be a valid reason for not attempting a given work or plan at a specific time. These are understandable. It seems that often, however, the same time-worn excuses are encountered. After you hear them enough you unconsciously memorize some of them:

- "We have never tried that here before" (perhaps a good reason for trying it now)
- "Not now, perhaps later" (often meaning "No," not now or later)
- "We know someone (always unnamed) who would object"
- "That's not necessary – it wouldn't do any good" (the epitome of open-mindedness)

Where such foregoing reactions are frequently registered, there is little, if any way, for that group to ever abound, much less be **always** abounding. If such expressions do not enthrone tradition, I do not know how it could be done. **We should not be afraid of any scriptural expedient for growing and abounding.** We don't deserve any success if we are afraid of it.

Of course, our work must be governed by the Lord in his Word. If our labor is "not in vain" in the Lord, it surely **is in vain if not** in the Lord. The Lord is the one who must be in control. The first question we should ask about any proposed action (for individual saints or congregations) must be, "Does the New Testament authorize it?" (Col. 3:17).

We should therefore care more for His approval than for that of any man or woman or group of them. Who is really in control of the church where one family or very few families are allowed to negate a whole program of work or set of policies? A program of work is suggested; it is admitted to being good and needed; the elders arrive at a decision and after anxious stares at one another, finally, one finds the words: "We think it would be a good work, but some would object and criticize it, so we had better not try it. After all, we must not offend anyone, they might stop attending worship" (of special concern if the named brother or sister gives generously). When such considerations are allowed to determine policy and work, the wrong "driver" is "behind the wheel."

Such decision-making allows small men to cast large shadows – always a very dangerous occurrence. As earlier indicated, the first consideration of any work should be, "Does the Lord authorize it in His Word? If He does and an individual Christian or congregation has the resources to do it, then let the critics and objectors howl and the rest of you go forward with the work. We must operate and act to please the Lord. If we are not "in business" to please Him first, we are in the wrong "business." The following question from Paul seems appropriate:

For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? or am I striving to please men? if I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

There can never be any measurable success achieved in our Lord's work until we inculcate these two basic elements: the courage to do the Lord's will and the desire to abound, despite the critics.

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