



THE REFLECTOR

BULLETIN OF CHURCH OF CHRIST • FULTONDALE, ALABAMA • 55068

Israel set back forty years after hearing spy report

EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

"And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we."

--Numbers 13:30,31

The ancient Israelites were faced with the great task of possessing the promised land. Twelve spys were sent to spy out the land. Upon their return ten said, "We can't do it." Two said, "We are well able". Israel should have listened to the minority report. It was God's will. He had already told them to do it, they should have trusted God for the results -- but they did not. It cost Israel forty years delay and hardship in the wilderness before they were allowed to enter the promised land. Such stories should serve as examples for us. (cf. Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:1-13).

God has given us the task of conquering the hearts of our neighbors for Christ. (2 cor. 10:5). Some say, "They won't listen." Others say, "We can do it, if we will preach the gospel and leave the results to God." It is admittedly a big job, but we can take "the land" for Christ if we profit from Israel's example:

1. *We must believe that it can be done--with God's help.*

Israel delayed forty years because she was convinced that it could not be done. (Num. 14:32-35). We may defeat ourselves before we start by lack of trust in God. Let us preach the gospel and trust God will give increase (I Cor. 3:6). Let us learn to do God's will in every area of living and then trust God to take care of the results.

2. *We must keep ourselves separate from the inhabitants of the land.*

God did not want Israel to become mixed with and thus absorbed by the Canaanites (Deut. 7:1-6). He made provisions to prevent this from happening. God does not want Christians to become mixed with and thus absorbed by the world. (2 Cor. 6:14,17; Jas. 1:27). While in the world, they must not be of the world. We must be distinctive in doctrine, in practice and in life. We must be unwilling to compromise truth and right for a moment.

3. *We must learn to be content with solid, even if slow, progress.*

Israel was told in advance that her progress would be "little by little" (Ex. 23:30 Deut. 7:22). God wanted them to take the land --but he wanted them to become solidly entrenched there. It would do little good for them to rapidly overrun the land only to have it become infested with beasts (Deut. 7:22). Some brethren need to learn that we will reap in DUE SEASON if we faint not. (Gal. 6:9). Someone has said that the American prayer is: "Lord, give me patience and give it right now!" I think such is the prayer of many of my brethren. The desire for instant results can cause us to give up and quit or else to modify God's standard for conversion so that it will bring quicker responses. We must build, but we must take heed HOW we build. (1 Cor. 3:10ff).

High pressure programs may produce rapid and spectacular results for the moment--but fail to produce the dept of genuine conversion. Some seem to think that as long as it increases the number that it should be done. Many personal work techniques produce "con-

verts" on paper but also have a high rate that soon return to their old ways. (Such is by no means limited to those we have come to call "liberals".) But, it is reasoned, some of them remain faithful. Yes, but every one that does not remain is just one more reproach upon the Lord's Cause. Doing the best we can enough are going to turn back, thus bring reproach to the church, without our using methods that invite such trouble. We must remember that genuine conversion is often slower than quick emotional response but it does the Lord's cause and the person himself more good.

It is time that preachers began to resist the pressure put on them by some congregations to produce rapid results. Often a congregation will get them a preacher and let him know, in one way or the other, that they expect him to so manage the congregations' program and his own work so that the church will grow in leaps and bounds. The poor fellow then becomes reduced to a kind of spiritual cheerleader and promoter in order to get instant responses. Such congregations need to learn that real solid progress can be produced only by real solid teaching and preaching. They should seek a man that will help them in that kind of program and trust in God for the results to follow.

Likewise, congregations should resist the efforts of a "super-salesman" type preacher who tries to program the church for instant results. His methods might be great to sell soap powders or diet drink, but conversion requires calm deliberation upon Bible teaching. Over twenty years ago I experienced firsthand trying to work with a church that had been built up by a "pepsodent smile" salesman, for a preacher. It was so shot through with worldliness and denominational concepts that even the "milk of the word" was too strong for the majority of them. They had had a spectacular "growth rate" over a very short time--but the conversion rate was near zero.

Impatience for quick progress can cause us to turn to appeals to emotions to the neglect of the intellect. Such will produce responses because it takes less time to jump to a conclusion with emotions than it does to arrive at one by thinking and studying the matter through. But those that have jumped to a conclusion are more apt to jump out of it than those who have arrived there by deliberate teaching.

We want to see people baptized as fast as they can be taught, really taught. But if our neighbors seem to be slow learners, then we must be content with slower progress than we might like rather than turning to gimmicks, salesmanship, showmanship and emotionalism to produce responses--responses that the gospel simply preached will not produce.

Yes, "we are able", but only if we do God's things in God's way. If God says do it, as he did to the Israelites, then do it and let God take care of the results. He has never failed us.

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Can we withdraw from the "withdrawn"?

EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR,

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition he received from us." -- 2 Thess. 3:6.

A brother or sister "quits the church", or more correctly quits the Lord. Is there anything the church can do beyond urging them to return? Usually when we suggest that maybe the church should consider withdrawing from such a one, we are faced with: "You can't withdraw from those who have withdrawn themselves". We do not believe that those who raise this objection are wilfully trying to avoid responsibility for discipline. I have heard it from some of the finest and more conscientious brethren that I know. But, I do believe that they have a misconception of the withdrawing process.

There is more to "withdrawing yourselves" than making a formal announcement at church and then no longer "using them" in a public way. Many seem to think that since the quitter no longer attends and participates in congregational activities that this constitutes his having withdrawn himself so we cannot withdraw our fellowship since the quitter has already withdrawn himself. But this solution to the problem will not do.

We suspect that part of the problem is that or referring to discipline as "withdrawing FELLOWSHIP". The scriptures refer to "withdrawing YOURSELVES". There is a difference. When one "withdraws HIMSELF" it is true that his spiritual fellowship is withdrawn, but it goes beyond that. One withdraws his PERSON, his COMPANY, or his social ASSOCIATION from the offending party. Surely one can do this even though the brother or sister no longer attends the meetings of the church. Such withdrawal or isolation is designed to make the offender ashamed of his conduct and produce repentance. If Christians refuse to have any social association with such a one and let him know why he can have none then we believe many would feel the pressure and be restored that probably would otherwise be lost. Of course, this severing of company does not preclude contacts for the purpose of admonishing. (2 Thess. 3:15).

I have known many who have "withdrawn themselves" who continue to enjoy the day to day association with Christians. That association has not been severed at all. It is precisely the company ("mixing up with" - Vine's Dictionary) that must be withdrawn. (See 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Thess. 3:14). Such a person can still be "marked" or "noted" by the church and then each member can withdraw his company (association) that the one might be ashamed.

The concept that we cannot withdraw from the withdrawn (meaning one who no longer attends) because he has withdrawn himself presents still another problem. Suppose a brother (or sister) becomes an adulterer but still attends all services, sings, bows in prayer, eats the Lord's supper, etc. (we have known this to happen) -- can the church withdraw from him?

"Of course, they can", you say.

But wait a minute. Does the fact that he still attends regularly and participates in worship not mean that he refuses to be withdrawn from? How can the church withdraw from one who refuses to be withdrawn from?

"But, we can't keep him from coming and participating", you say.

Right!

"We can announce that we no longer fellowship him".

Right again!

"Each member can refuse to associate with him on a day to day basis".

Right one more time!

"After all, we can 'withdraw ourselves' from him even though he is regular in attendance and participates in the worship".

Now, my brother, you are beginning to get the point! If the fact that one quits means that he has "withdrawn himself" and we cannot withdraw from him--if one refuses to quit it must mean that there is nothing further we can do, since he refuses to be withdrawn from. If not why not?

I believe that we can mark and refuse to company with a brother who walks disorderly whether or not he attends services. In fact, the very refusal to attend faithfully is walking disorderly and is grounds for marking and withdrawing ourselves.



A friend told me of a sister who said that she was getting little from her religion. She just didn't understand because she was very active and "said her prayers" regularly. My friend replied, "That may be your trouble, you are just "saying prayers" rather than really praying. Wonder how many of us just "say prayers" rather than really pouring out our hearts to God in prayer.

Often we find some brother or sister living in open sin. Someone criticizes them for it and they become enraged. Often friends and loved ones join in the rage. Whether or not the criticism was fair or not. Whether or not it correctly stated the case. It seems to us that one living in open sin is in a poor position to get upset about the matter. Certainly any criticism should be fair and just -- but the fact remains that there is some grounds for the criticism. Some folks seem to think that it is all right for one to live like Satan but that real Christians will just smile at at him and turn their heads and look the other way and "speak no evil, see no evil, and hear now evil! Pshaw!

We notice where a play is about the appear in B'ham with nude scenes included. Some have protested and it has caused quite a stir at city hall. We admire those who have registered their opposition. The Bible does speak of the "Shame of thy nakedness". We observe that when worldly people want to promote such events that little can or is done to stop them. At this writing, the play is still scheduled inspite of all the protest by civic and religious groups. There is one thing a Christian can do. He can refuse to attend such events and forbid those for whom they are responsible from going. We may not be able to stop the play from running, but we can stop ourselves from running to the play.

Most high school stadiums do not have reserved (numbered) seats. We have seen folks go an hour early to get a good seat, where they wanted it. Some these same people

will come to church at the last minute and complain because they had to go all the way down front with everyone looking at them. There is something about all this that does not make sense. Give me enough time and I think I can figure out what it is.

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VOLUME 18 JANUARY 1978 NUMBER 1

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THE REFLECTOR is published monthly by the church of Christ, 1116 Walker's Chapel Road, Fultondale, AL 35068.

MAILING ADDRESS: 3004 Brakefield Drive , Fultondale, AL 35068.

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Second Class Postage Paid at Fultondale, AL 35068

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