
Words of Truth

Aquarium Keeping Evangelists

By: Brian A. Yeager

About 12 years ago I was faced with a dilemma when I was serving as an evangelist in Butler, PA. I was working with faithful brethren. There was progress being made continually amongst the saints. However, the community had never opened up to the Gospel. The only Bible studies I had locally were with individuals whom were already Christians. I struggled with the principle Jesus taught to the twelve when they went to preach to the Jews. Jesus told the twelve this: *“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city”* (Matthew 10:14-15).

I struggled with the fact that, as an evangelist, I really had no prospects to teach the Gospel to locally. Sure, there was work to be done amongst the saints, but that is always going to be the case. However, even in this, there were limits I was facing. As an evangelist I am to set things in order and appoint elders in the locations I am serving (Titus 1:5-9). Things were as in order as they were going to get. In Butler, we had no immediate or even long-term prospects for a plurality of elders. Rather than people moving into the community, many were moving out of the community. Thus, the prospect of faithful Christians moving there was slim to none.

Seeing these things as facts, I presented to the brethren in Butler a proposal to move our meeting location to another area within a 30-mile radius. They, based upon their spiritual conviction at the time, thought it more necessary that a congregation remain in Butler. I loved the brethren there. The location was good for my family too (with exception to the winter weather). It was at that time I began thinking of moving and within a year it became a reality as I came here to what appeared to be a much more needy area for an evangelist.

I say all of that to bring some things to light. Not only is this an important thing for me, you, and the congregation here to always examine. It is a greater subject that is ignored by churches of Christ throughout the world. Many so-called “evangelists” are in congregations without anything to set in order, without prospects for elders, and in communities that the Gospel is not being received. They are essentially aquarium keepers. They are just feeding the fish (so to speak) and really are not doing the REAL WORK of an evangelist. Since the days of Jesus the true laborers in the kingdom have been few (Matthew 9:35-38). Is it right for faithful teachers, supposed evangelists, to just be pulpit men (a.k.a aquarium keepers)?

Are Faithful Evangelists Scripturally Right To Just “Fill The Pulpit”

The word of God says that evangelists are worthy of financial support because we are laborers (I Corinthians 9:1-14). Truly, *“the labourer is worthy of his hire”* (Luke 10:1-8). Yet,

any man can fill a pulpit and read off of a sermon outline. It can be time consuming to prepare to preach, but it is not at all the majority of work that is done by true, faithful evangelists. The daily work of a true evangelist involves much more than just putting together a sermon outline or class material (I Timothy 1:1-Titus 3:15). Aquarium keepers get to the point of thinking wherein they feel they are doing the work of an evangelist because they preach a sermon and teach a class. You cannot read through what Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus and come to that conclusion.

Consider for a moment what we know about the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch and what Philip did afterward (Acts 8:26-40). Philip had to be ready to go at a moments notice to teach a man whom had biblical questions. Philip did not wait until a Sunday service. Philip did not spend a week preparing a sermon on Isaiah 53. Philip did not go with a study guide in hand. Philip did not have a church of Christ publication to hand the Eunuch to go home and study on his own. He did not take a video that he had used many times before. He did not set in advance the topics to be discussed. Philip did not pick the location close to his house. He had to be ready to teach, wherever and whenever, without knowing what he was getting into. That is part of an evangelist's work (II Timothy 4:2).

The aquarium keeper is content to just show up at a building at the appointed times. He is content to preach and teach with no goal in mind. He is not concerned with the "work of an evangelist" (II Timothy 4:5). He is only concerned with fulfilling the normal, expected, visible things "preachers do". Here is the problem - the aquarium keeper is comfortable!

The Comfortable Aquarium Keepers

I have known many whom live in an area that they plan to never leave. It is not that they have plenty of work to do into the future (as I do here at the present time). It is that they have moved somewhere, settled in with their family, like the area, etc. They get comfortable with where they live instead of asking if the work of the Lord is being done aright. Ask the evangelist, "why do you live here?" If it is because of friends, family, weather, housing costs, economical reasons, hunting grounds, golf courses etc.; is he really an evangelist? Ask the evangelist, "what Scriptural grounds are keeping you living here?" Brethren, here in El Paso you can presently see the fruit of why I am still here (cf. Matthew 7:15-20). You can see the efforts that are pointing to the future. If those things cease, in me, you need to question why I am here. If it is because Trevor is married and I want to see my children and potential grandchildren, you need to realize I have become an aquarium keeper. Such is unscriptural and will lead to all of us giving an account for such.

Conclusion

By what authority (Colossians 3:17) does a man call himself an evangelist when he is not doing the work? Many so-called evangelists have retired in the pulpit. When an evangelist is no longer necessary in a location or congregation he is no longer doing the work of an evangelist. Men who proclaim to be preachers/teachers/evangelists need to understand that God's judgment on them is going to be greater than His judgment on others (James 3:1). We are God's workers (I Corinthians 3:5-9). We have to question ourselves if we are doing our Master's work or if we are just doing what is comfortable for us. It is nice to feed the fish and watch an aquarium. It is easy. It is not the work of an evangelist.

Milkshakes **(The Need For A Standard Of Authority)**

By: Brian A. Yeager

Without some standard of authority, men end up doing what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6). This is displeasing to God (Deuteronomy 12:8). To do right according to our own thinking is the course of a fool (Proverbs 12:15). We are not capable of plotting our own way and that way being right (Proverbs 20:24 and Jeremiah 10:23). If we attempt to plot our own course we will just end up dishonestly convincing ourselves that we are right when we are in fact not (Proverbs 21:2). We need a standard by which we can know right from wrong.

The word of God is our standard (Luke 4:4 and II Timothy 1:13). The word of God fully equips us to do every good work (II Timothy 3:15-17). More specifically, Jesus Christ and His words are the standard that we are to live by today (Matthew 28:18-20 and John 8:31). It is this standard that we will be judged by when Christ returns (John 12:48 and Romans 2:16). To reject and disobey the standard of the words of Christ is to bring certain damnation upon oneself (II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Consider, from God's word, how we should not trust our own thinking or the thinking of other men when it comes to our souls. Carefully note these inspired words: *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil... He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered... Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of... And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another... For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you. For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ: Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand. But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth"* (Proverbs 3:5-7, Proverbs 28:26, Isaiah 2:22, I Corinthians 4:6, and II Corinthians 10:12-18).

Even when a child is left to himself he does things that bring about shame (Proverbs 29:15). We cannot trip, stumble, slip, and accidently get through life in a way that is pleasing to God. God expects us to do all things in a way that is pleasing unto Him (Colossians 1:10). Thankfully, we have the word of God to light our path (Psalms 119:105). We have the standard, in His word, to know how to walk and please God (I Thessalonians 4:1). We have the standard by which we can test all things and hold fast to what is right (John 5:39, Acts 17:10-11, II Timothy 2:14-18, and I Thessalonians 5:21). The need for guidance is obvious. The source for guidance has been set forth in this study. What we will address in next week's "Milkshake" is how we can use the word of God to guide us through establishing authority.