

Contrary Reality

There may be a gap between what we think we are and what we really are. I may think I am young, gorgeous, brilliant and wealthy. If I feed this self image long enough, and if I get a little help from flattering friends, I may deceive myself into thinking this is real. Doesn't change reality does it?

This is common, and especially in regard to religious profession. We may think we are religious over such a long period of time, we deceive ourselves into believing everything is all right. We do what we have always done and say what we have always said, carrying through life the assumption that we are saved. What we think doesn't change contrary reality.

If your heart hasn't been changed by the gospel of Christ; if your life is not really being lived in Him and according to His teaching, there is a gap between what you think ("I'm saved") and how you are living (the contrary reality).

Or as James said: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless," and "...someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works," (Jas. 1:26 & 2:18).

- by Warren E. Berkley

The Psalmist's Soul-Winning Formula

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You." -- Psalms 51:12,13 (NKJV).

The Psalmist may be saying that if the Lord restores the joy of his salvation then he promises to teach transgressors. Or he may be saying that when the joy of salvation is restored teaching transgressors will naturally follow. In either case, sinners will be converted.

Answers to why we are not converting more to Christ are offered by the dozens. "How to" instructions abound. Several preachers specialize in "soul-winning techniques". "Specials" are held from time to time to consider the matter. Book stores stock books and kits that are supposed to tell us how to make virtually every Christian an effective soul-winner. Yet, all the above combined produce meager results. Even what appear to be spectacular results often turn out to be nothing more than a mirage -- a flash in the pan.

All this somewhat reminds me of a story that I heard several years ago about a company trying to increase its sales. They hired an expensive sales expert to lecture their salesmen on sales organization and technique. Their experienced salesmen and new recruits were required to attend so they, too, could become experts. The expert unveiled his plan. He demonstrated his sure-fire technique. He organized the territories complete with a wall map with pins placed at strategic points to illustrate the salesmen, customers and potential customers. He had refined his program to a fine art. During his lecture he spotted an old salesmen sitting over in the corner who was reputed to have been the top salesman for the company over several years. After, proudly and with fan fare, presenting his technique he asked the old salesman if he had any words of encouragement or advice that he might add to what had been said. The old salesman replied, "Yes, take all those pins out of that map and stick them into the salesmen!"

Could it be that our problem in teaching transgressors the Lord's way and thus converting them to Lord is not so much poor methods, materials, and facilities as it is poor motivation with no proper foundation? It may be that the joy of our own salvation is the missing element. Pep rallies and motivational hype on the subject of soul-winning may stir brethren into spurts of action, even producing some results. A sustained effort and lasting results will likely come from one who really knows both the plan and joy of salvation. Such a one understands what it means to be lost. He knows what it means to be saved. His knowledge is not based on fleeting feelings but on a knowledge of what God's word teaches on damnation and salvation. His joy is not the superficial cart wheel turning, hand clapping, "praise the Lord" shouting variety, but a far deeper joy of thankfulness, knowing that he has been delivered from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. One with such joy understands what it means to no longer be a sinner alienated from God. He understands God's plan of salvation. He understands what the Bible teaches about

being a Christian. His joy is produced by that understanding and his knowing that his life is now in harmony with that understanding. Thus, he wants others to know what he knows and do what he has done to be saved -- and is doing to stay saved. His genuine faith in the promises and blessings in Christ produces the joy of salvation that leads him to teach transgressors the Lord's ways so that they can enjoy what he enjoys.

Brethren filled with the knowledge and joy of salvation will find ways (or techniques) to teach others consistent with their own temperaments and abilities and of those they are trying to reach. Their methods may vary widely but their message and results will be the same - the gospel will be taught and sinners will be converted.

It may well be that the best personal work program that a church can develop is to set about to restore that genuine joy of salvation to its membership by building them up in the faith through teaching.

- by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"I Disagree"

As we study and discuss important religious topics, it is not uncommon for someone to say, "I disagree." This, of course, is not a bad thing considering the fact that there is much false teaching in the world. When someone teaches that which is false, it is essential to "both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). While such disagreements are not pleasant, it is imperative that we defend the truth.

Sometimes, however, there are those who voice their differences but are not willing to prove why. They simply say "I disagree", but they will not explain why or offer proof for their dissenting position. This is neither honorable nor profitable in seeking the truth.

Before you disagree, be sure that you are absolutely certain of what has actually been taught. Many times people misspeak, and others sometimes misunderstand. Check out what the other person said by going directly to that one and by asking for clarification. This will often clear up the issue. Unfortunately some Christians are inclined to spread rumor and innuendo rather than addressing their concerns to the one who has made the questionable statements. This ought not to be.

If error has been taught you must establish it by an appeal to the Scriptures. Personal opinions are not important, and 'I believe' or 'I think' statements prove nothing. 'Book, chapter, and verse' reasoning and 'thus saith the Lord' evidence must be produced. There is no value in saying "I disagree" if you cannot demonstrate why you disagree. This, of course, requires diligent study of God's Word so that we may identify error when we hear it and show what is right instead.

The apostle Paul said "I am set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17). We should be, too. Think!

- by Greg Gwin