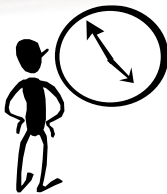


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Time of Assembly



Every other Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.

OR

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

Measuring Acceptability

By Whit Sasser

In II Corinthians 8:12 we read, "*For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.*" This principle of God's word is to be respected, as well as all others. Sadly, there seem to be many areas in which it is being either ignored or forgotten. Let me list a few.

In Our Giving

The primary application, of course, is in this area, as giving is the subject under consideration in the chapter. Today, individuals who give a small amount may be giving "widow's mites" or be sacrificing greatly, in order to give just a few dollars and be giving more than all the rest in God's sight. On the other hand, those who have greater abundance, though giving a hundred dollars, may be unacceptable, due to their not giving according to what they have. Likewise, churches may see their fifty dollars a month support of a gospel preacher as only a "drop in the bucket" when compared to the thousands provided by others, but it is accepted according to what one has, not what he does not have.

In Institutionalism And Sponsoring Church Arrangements

Both of these, at least in part, have sprung out of a mindset that places accountability beyond a local church's ability. We hear T.V. evangelists constantly appealing for donations so that they can "stay on the air'." They have eyes bigger than their pocketbooks and feel that since the work is started, at all costs it must be kept going. Others have begun work that "necessitate" the unscriptural oversight of many church's resources, or the invention of new methods to raise money, or the establishment of church-supported or operated institutions and organizations. Little churches are made to believe that since they cannot do great works alone, they need to pool their funds with others to accomplish such. All of this is

rooted in a **big** is better and **big** is required mindset that is alien to the Bible.

In Judging Others By Our Own Standards

In public worship, are all the men expected to take part in a leading capacity? What do you think of a brother who does not wish to or says that he cannot? Do you judge him as less important or shame him? Those in leading roles are often regarded as indispensable and given higher esteem than the rest, including all of the women. Spiritual development, growth in Bible knowledge, and abilities to serve are other areas where we may judge others by our own selves and not by what God has said. We sing that there is room in the kingdom for the small things that you can do but go away thinking and behaving otherwise. The Bible teaches that there was a one-talent man (Matthew 25), who, though he failed in his use of the money, was not measured by the five-talent man or the one with the two. Jesus said that the good ground produced some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred (Mark 4:8). In another place, He said that even a cup of cold water in His name given would be rewarded (Mark 9:41). On the other hand, He also said, "*For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required*" (Luke 12:48).

In Measuring Success In Evangelism

How successful was Noah in his preaching to others besides his own family? How about many of the prophets of old? Were they displeasing to God because only a few were moved by their preaching to repentance? There may be times when no one will believe the gospel. There may be cities where the Lord has "many people" (like Corinth -- Acts 18:10), but at the same time cities where a few will believe, but where "the many" will not (like Athens? - Acts 17). Our responsibility is in planting and watering. It is God who gives any increase. Therefore our accountability is the sum of our ability plus our opportunity, and that measured by God. But the principle of II Corinthians 8:12 is disregarded when some of the methods and philosophies of the Crossroads or Boston Discipling Movement are employed to produce numbers and when churches are pronounced "dead" if a certain quota of baptisms has not been met in a given year. When unscriptural co-operation between churches is used, when social gospel appeals are made, and when simply baptizing people becomes the goal, with conversion to Christ being overlooked, is a part of the problem our misconception about what God expects of us?

In Determining Local Church Status

When is a congregation "fully established?" The measure is often whether or not they have a full-time preacher (fully supported by the same church) and have a church building (being paid for). If so, they are "self-supporting". But, if they meet in a rented facility and the preacher receives outside support, they are lacking. Paul told Titus to set in order some things that were lacking in the churches of Crete, one of which was the appointment of elders (Titus 1:5), but there is no indication that acquiring a "permanent

meeting place" or the "services of a full-time evangelist" was included. In fact, the Scriptures do not even teach the necessity of having a fully supported, full-time evangelist, or church building for that matter. Some churches may always meet in some "upper room" and never use evangelists in a full-time capacity, but still be accepted of God. They may never be big in number, able to always meet in some brother's house, and little in power, never able to do much, but be pleasing to God, if faithful in what they have. The Smyrna church is described as being in poverty (Revelation 2:9) and the Philadelphia church as having little strength (Revelation 3:8), yet they are the only two out of the seven addressed that are only commended. Of course, it goes without saying, that church buildings and full-time preachers are fine for some, but not a measure of acceptance to God.

In conclusion, let me remind you of the teaching; *"For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have."*

Are You Discouraged?

By Jefferson David Tant

Whit Sasser, a friend who preaches up in Appleton, Wisconsin, recently had a short piece in the church's weekly bulletin titled "[Measuring Acceptability](#)." His good comments have encouraged me to add some thoughts of my own, as well as to build on some writing I have done on the matter of personal evangelism in the past.

As for myself, do I ever get discouraged about the lack of souls added to the Kingdom? The answer is "Yes." I am reminded of earlier years and good numbers of people who were converted after just a few Bible studies, even some after just one study. I remember sitting down with a young woman in Montego Bay, Jamaica. At the end of that one study, she began weeping. Why? Perhaps weeping for joy at learning the truth, and also for sadness at having been deceived.

Then there was the storekeeper and his wife whom I talked with whenever I shopped at their little discount store. After some length of time and pestering them, they finally agreed for me to come to their home for a one-night study. They thought if they agreed to do that, I would then quit pestering them. We had the study. Then they said, "We want to know more." That led to their baptism into Christ not long after.

And there was the young woman I sat with on a bus trip. We had some good conversations. My trip ended in Atlanta, and she was going on to Columbia, South Carolina. I asked for her phone number, as in a few weeks I would be nearby in a gospel meeting. I called her as I passed through Columbia and gave her the address and time of services for the church where I would be preaching. Sunday morning she and her live-in boyfriend came through dense fog for the service. Lunch at the preacher's home. Bible

study. To the church building to baptize the two of them. When the meeting closed, on the way back home, I stopped at the store where she worked. She told me she was taking off work early that day so she and her boyfriend could get married.

I could for some pages, but these few stories illustrate the joy and encouragement that came from people responding to the gospel. People responded to both preaching and personal evangelism. Those days seem to be rarer now in the United States, while in some nations the gospel is warmly received. The Philippine Islands would be such a place where my wife and I have been so encouraged in our work there for over two decades.

So, what about our situation in the United States in the 21st Century? Are there reasons to be discouraged? Obviously so! The decline of belief in God, the rise of violent anarchists, the goal of many educators to destroy any faith in God in their students, etc. These factors, along with others, certainly are discouraging.

Please consider the fact that times like this are not new. How many years did Noah preach? We are not told specifically, but he was building the ark for 120 years, and it would be certain that people would come to watch this idiot building this huge boat when there was no water nearby. Peter called Noah a “*preacher of righteousness*” (I Peter 2:5). And how many souls were influenced by Noah’s preaching? Eight, counting himself. I would think Noah would have been discouraged, but he did not quit.

When you consider the preaching of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the others. Were the people encouraged to follow God by their messages? Obviously, not all were. Consider what the writer of Hebrews said about them. “*They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated*” (Hebrews 11:37). Did they become discouraged to the extent that they gave up and quit preaching and teaching? We know they did not. And consider the apostles. So far as we know, John was the only one who experienced a natural death.

Consider Paul’s writings about his own experiences. “*Are they servants of Christ? --I speak as if insane--I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches*” (II Corinthians 11:23-28).

I could go on, but I am sure you get the point I am making. Being discouraged,

encountering hardships or persecution are not the reasons to give up. All we are asked to do is to spread the gospel, and we leave the rest up to God. And remember, it is not just the preachers that are to spread the good news. The Great Commission gives that responsibility to every Christian. *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)).

The American Dutch Reformed Chinese

By Ed Harrell

Can you interpret that? The Reformed churches grew out of John Calvin’s teachings during the Reformation and, like most other churches of the period, quickly divided along national lines. When Dutch Reformed immigrants came to America they established an independent denomination, making them the American Dutch Reformed church. In the late nineteenth century, this body sent missionaries to China and, according to a paper I recently heard at the meeting of the Southern Historical Association in St. Louis, the converts were known as the American Dutch Reformed Chinese. Absurd? Of course.

The chief absurdity of this is the folly of being anything but a Christian. The religious designations added by men are endless, destructive, and schismatic. Whatever I believe, I would never consent to calling myself anything more or less than a Christian. *“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf”* ([1 Peter 4:16](#)).

Ah, but says someone, I know you are more than just a Christian, you are a conservative Disciples of Christ, Church of Christ, anti, restoration movement Campbellite Christian. But that is not what I am. Such terms may, or may not, tell something about where I came from, but they do not tell what I am. There is nothing wrong with having Dutch origins, or being American, or sending missionaries to China. But woe be to the man who comes out of that an American Dutch Reformed Chinese.

The villain of this pattern of thinking is institutional loyalty. What we call ourselves says much about our loyalties (see [1 Corinthians 1:10-15](#)). Religious denominationism begins in doctrinal debate but it survives by building powerful institutions. Each denomination becomes a self-serving domain replete with offices, money, pastoral jobs, money, boards, money, honors, money, committees, money, and money. Each denomination sells its own brand of nationalistic, ear-tickling orthodoxy in order to survive. Churches of Christ can become denominationalized and institutionalized – and have. But the church of Christ cannot and will not.

I am only a Christian and relate only to a church of Christ. I am nothing more, not an American Christian, not an anti Christian, or a restoration Christian. There is much more to do and say, but such an understanding must be the place to begin.