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SOUL WINNERS WHO DON'T WIN SOULS

No subject lists higher on the agenda of Mr. Average Evangelical than soul winning.

On the radio, from the pulpit, in Sunday school classes, evangelicals stress the need for reaching out to the lost. You can buy shelves of books on the subject. Some excellent audio visual aids have been produced.

Each year, I travel the full girth of North America, speaking in churches, to layman's groups, at conferences, in college chapels. No need to announce the topic when I come. People know Stanley Tam will talk to them about soul winning.

And it heartens me to see the enthusiasm with which Christians respond to the subject.

Respond to the subject, I say.

Yes, to the "subject." But unfortunately—I should perhaps say tragically—not always to the "project" itself.

Ad libs from people in attendance at my meetings run something like this.

"You really put it right on the line, Mr. Tam."

"It's my daily prayer, to be an effective soul winner."

“I want this more than anything else in my Christian life.”

“But...”

That little three letter conjunction “but,” I’m sorry to say, tends to characterize the performance record of most Christians I meet.

They know they should.

They want to.

They hope to.

The high majority intend to.

But they don’t.

Statistics tend to be cold and uninteresting. In the case of Christians and this business of personal soul winning, statistics unearth some cold, hard facts. Namely that, according to survey’s made among evangelicals, ninety-six percent have never led a soul to Christ.

Maybe you are part of that statistic!

“I want with all my heart to be a soul winner,” you say. “I hear other Christians talk about the joy of leading people to Christ. I want to experience that joy for myself, more than anything I know, but it just doesn’t happen.”

Well, I have some startling and encouraging news for you.

If you are a Christian, one who has been brought from the darkness of sin into the liberating light of transformation through faith in Jesus Christ, you are already a soul winner!

Sounds like I’ve dialed the wrong number?

Not at all!

My contention is as Scriptural as John 3:16. For all your timidity, your reluctance, your excuses, whatever, you are a soul winner right now. Just as sure as

D. L. Moody was. Or Billy Sunday. Or any present day Christian active in bringing men to Christ.

Oh, you may not be a functioning soul winner. That's the other side of the coin. But you *are* a soul winner none-the-less.

Let me clarify.

When one has been genuinely born anew, God tells us, *His Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*¹ Further, He tells us we are to *walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.*² And that we are to be *filled with the Spirit.*³ All of which adds up to the fantastic question: *What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom ye have of God, and ye are not your own!*⁴

*Ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,*⁵ the Bible verifies. The word “sealed” speaks of a mark of identification, a mark of genuineness—God’s “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval,” you might say.

Continuing, concerning this fantastic truth of the Holy Spirit being within you, we are told, *Who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.*⁶

“Earnest” here speaks of what we might call a down payment. At the moment of your conversion, the Holy Spirit enters your life. He is proof positive that you have been transformed from a child of Satan into a child of God!

We have a lot of emphasis today on physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Without these, some insist, you can't really know whether or not you are a Christian. Concerning the testimony of the Lord Jesus through His life here on earth, however, the Bible says: *These are written, that ye might believe that*

*Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.*⁷

The Holy Spirit within you verifies this life, as attested in the Word of God.

Now it is wonderful to “feel” like a Christian. *If any man be in Christ, the Bible assures us, he is a new creation.*⁸ David sang: *Thou wilt show me the path of life. In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*⁹

Yes, the Christian life is meant to be a joyful, spiritually productive experience. But the Bible also speaks of unproductive Christians who shall *be saved, yet as by fire.*¹⁰

The clarity with which the Bible speaks about our purpose, our privileges, as human beings staggers me. I can’t see how anyone, if he’ll read the Bible, can miss the point. We aren’t a mass of genetic accidents milling across the face of the earth but creatures purposefully designed to fulfill a destiny of eternal significance.

Now please read carefully.

The reason I say that, if you are a Christian, you are already a soul winner is very simple. The Holy Spirit—not you or any other human being on earth—is the only one who can bring men to Christ. He—the Holy Spirit—is the soul winner, and He—the Holy Spirit—indwells every Christian.

If, then, you are to have the joy of seeing men won to Christ, it cannot be through your own effort. It must happen through the outflow of the Holy Spirit from your life.

*Do the work of an evangelist, the Apostle exhorted Timothy. Make full proof of thy ministry.*¹¹ In those days, Christians hadn’t been categorized into “laymen” and

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“full time” as we do today. There were no colleges, no seminaries.

I don't oppose Christian training, mind you. If you've read the book *God Owns My Business*, you know something of the stewardship effort extended by our business. Prime target for our stewardship happens to be the training of national Christians for work as pastors, teachers and evangelists.

The only point I'm trying to get across is that Paul and his protege Timothy classified as laity.

Now, of course, proper training can be very helpful to the soul winner. As stated a few paragraphs back, I devote most of my weekends each year to conducting seminars on the subject, trying to help other laymen come to grips with their responsibility and opportunity as children of God.

We discuss methodology at these seminars. Just as successful salesmanship involves tested techniques, a working knowledge of human motivations, so also does personal evangelism.

But you can have a house all wired up like a Christmas tree. Unless the switch is on to the power station, however, you could just as well be living in a cave.

So with the Christian.

We have seen that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian.

He indwells you!

Then why are you not winning souls to Christ? The answer is that you have the Holy Spirit but He doesn't have you.

Paradoxical as it may seem, you are a soul winner who isn't winning souls! A potentially high-powered

mechanism standing idle because you haven't turned on the switch and activated the engine.

Talk about the energy crisis here on Planet Earth. We've got a crisis of Heaven's energy that makes us look like oil-rich Arabs by comparison!

Christians are literally squandering the power of God!

Through materialism.

Indifference.

Disobedience.

Now maybe—though I surely hope not—you're among those Christians content to talk about soul winning but never intending to really do anything about it. They speak out in favor of evangelism. Count on them for a few dollars in the offering plate when soul winning agencies need some support. They prefer a preacher who can really lay it on the line—especially Sunday nights when only the saints have assembled.

If you do so classify, at least you have lots of company. I can identify with your feelings, because I spent many years of my own Christian life with the same kind of motivations. You couldn't find a more faithful churchman—active in administrative affairs, in the Sunday school. I never criticized the pastor. I was strong on foreign missions.

Why, if I had died, my family could have written up an obituary that would make me look like a real saint.

But, hopefully, you are another of the sincere Christians I meet who cry out from the deepest reaches of their hearts, "I want to win souls, but I don't know how!"

How?

An important, often tantalizing, word.

Well, let's look at the "how" of winning people to Christ.

The flesh is at war against the Spirit of God. It will not cooperate with the Spirit of God. When you pray, the flesh prays only words; it is thinking about the activities of the day. When the flesh reads the Bible, it is only reading words. It doesn't want to go next door and witness, nor to the shop, the school or the office. The flesh doesn't want to be identified with Jesus Christ. That would be a reproach. It wants to be accepted by the people it works with. It wants to wear nice clothes, drive a nice car, go to nice places. It wants to be entertained and enjoy life. It just doesn't want to witness.

That's why the flesh has to become Master-controlled by the Holy Spirit. All of its faculties have to become Spirit-controlled. In other words, the flesh must no longer have any say as to what the body will do.

For example, my hand is a wonderful part of my body. It seems that everything I do, I need my hand. When I get up in the morning, I need it to dress with. When I eat breakfast, I need it to eat with. When I go to work, I need it to drive with. When I sit at my desk, I need it to write with. But, actually, the only value the hand is to the body is when it is controlled by the head. If the hand would get puffed up and say, "I don't need the body any more," and it goes here and goes there and takes money out of my pocket without permission, it would need medical attention.

Isn't that just like the average Christian?

We don't lack for activity, we're inundated with it—and right in the heart of the ebb and flow of church affairs.

But have you taken time lately to inventory your activities? We carry a lot of items in the plastics division of our business and have had to learn that floor space and subsequent shelf space have a per-square-inch value which must not be wasted. If a product doesn't move, we *move* it—out.

Obviously, good business procedure dictates that I can't keep a product on the shelves if it isn't making money for the company.

And listen, fellow Christian, shouldn't it be far more important for me to allow no activity in my life, however noble that activity may be, if it hinders me from winning people to Christ? We are to be *not slothful in business*.¹² The Bible tells us. Our corporations net hundreds of thousands of dollars in profits every year, and we try to use that money wisely for the Lord's glory, but money and profits and all the rest are peanuts compared to the wise use of personal time and talents.

And a Christian can only wisely use his time and talents when he is Master-controlled by the Holy Spirit!

My grandfather was a magician. He and my grandmother would go in a horsedrawn spring wagon to the one room school houses in the early pioneer days of Ohio and put on entertainment for the people of the community.

When we grandchildren were young and my grandfather was old, there were long-remembered evenings when he would be in a good mood and drag out his trunk of tricks to perform for us.

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We would sit eyes agape.

There was one performance I cannot forget. He had a stage where two dolls performed. He called them Punch and Judy. They were puppets. He had a place where he hid his hands with strings going to the dolls. He could throw his voice. The stage hid my Grandfather. When he would begin to manipulate his fingers and speak, we children felt as if the dolls were alive. They would do anything and say anything my grandfather wanted them to do and say, because he controlled them.

I never forgot that.

For this is what I want to be—Master-controlled by the Holy Spirit living within me. I want Him to manipulate my hands and feet. I want Him to speak through me. I want Him to win souls through me.

I want to be a soul winner who wins souls!

Don't you?

Notes

¹ Romans 8:16.

² Romans 8:1.

³ Ephesians 5:18.

⁴ I Corinthians 6:19.

⁵ Ephesians 1:13.

⁶ Ephesians 1:14.

⁷ John 20:31.

⁸ II Corinthians 5:17.

⁹ Psalms 16:11.

¹⁰ I Corinthians 3:15.

¹¹ II Timothy 4:5.

¹² Romans 12:11.