



"True faith drops its letter in the post office box and lets it go. Distrust holds on to a corner of it and wonders that the answer never comes."
—A.B. Simpson

12-Jul-02

We Persuade Men

The apostle Paul writes in [II Corinthians 5:9-11](#):

Therefore we make it our aim . . . to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of [Christ](#), that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. . . .

When [God](#) summoned us to His way of life, He persuaded us with various proofs that He exists, desires a relationship with us, and rules not just the universe but also the affairs of men. As often happens during our first [love](#) ([Revelation 2:4-5](#)), we desire to share our [joy](#) and newfound [truth](#) with others. Most of the time, our early evangelistic efforts fail to produce any new converts to the faith—instead, our efforts usually cause problems in our relationships.

Most lay-members, after one or two failures of this sort, get smart and desist in trying to convert their relatives and friends. They realize that nothing will ever happen without God first calling the other individual and changing his heart by His Spirit to accept the truth ([John 6:44](#); [Romans 2:4-5](#); [8:7](#); [I Corinthians 2:10-14](#); [Hebrews 8:10](#); [Ezekiel 11:19](#)). All our preaching and cajoling will accomplish nothing unless God moves to initiate a personal relationship with him.

Ministers do not have such an easy out. Certainly, in their personal relationships they

CGG Weekly: We Persuade Men (12-Jul-02)

can quit trying to "save" those unconverted members of their families, but in their professional capacity, their job is to "persuade men." In personal conduct, counsel, [sermons](#), and articles, they must devote their energies to showing and explaining why God's way is true and will lead to [eternal life](#) in God's Kingdom.

Today, that is not an easy task. It has never been easy, really, but the current environment makes it harder than it has been historically. For starters, though a high percentage of people say they believe in God, most people are no longer religious but secular. Religion is not a high-ranking concern, and because of this, religious issues fly under their radar and over their heads. They just do not care, and even when they inquire about them, they do not understand them because they lack the background and education necessary to evaluate them properly.

Another problem is competition. It used to be that most people at least treated Sunday, "the Lord's day," as a [Sabbath](#) and devoted most or all of that time to religious pursuits. No longer. Sunday, though it is not God's Sabbath day, is used just like any other day: for work and entertainment. If God receives a few hours on Sunday morning for worship services, most Americans—and Europeans to an even greater degree—think He should feel satisfied that they could spare Him even that much!

Yet a third hindrance is the way moderns think. Too many people, especially younger adults, have absorbed the postmodern, values-neutral approach. This way of thinking considers every idea and belief as equally valid, neither right nor wrong. A person can believe anything he likes—even that the moon is made of green cheese—and he should not be judged as right or wrong. Any god one worships, or for that matter, if one chooses to worship no god, is fine, and no one god or belief system is better than any other.

In such an environment, how can we persuade anyone of the truth? Our success certainly looks bleak.

The answer lies in what Paul writes in [II Corinthians 5:9-11](#): "We make it our aim . . . to be well pleasing to Him." Our judgment does not rest on how many men we persuade but on whether we do the job. We are called to make the witness for God and Christ to the best of our ability and strength. Christ will judge us "according to what [we have] done, whether good or bad." How others react to us and what we say or write matters little; it is "God who gives the increase" ([I Corinthians 3:5-8](#)). As Paul says, one plants and another waters, but what happens to the sprout is not under their control but God's.

Thus, we cannot quantify the results of our persuasion as others can. We cannot see

CGG Weekly: We Persuade Men (12-Jul-02)

the growth of our "business" in statistical form. The true measure of our success will be revealed in God's Kingdom, and even then, we will be unable to claim the glory for it. For in persuading men, we "do all to the glory of God" ([I Corinthians 10:31](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Purpose of the Ministry](#)

by John O. Reid

In this sermon on the Purpose of the Ministry, John Reid identifies four separate ways we are taught: (1.) God's Holy Spirit (John 14:26) imparted to us after our calling (John 6:44) and baptism (2) His Word (II Timothy 2:14-15), (3) through physical observation (Romans 1:20), and (4) through the ministry. The purpose of the ministry is to take members from their point of calling, bringing them to the point where they can be of service to God, edifying them, equipping them for their job of ministering in divine things (Ephesians 4:11-12, I Corinthians 6:2-3), establishing spiritual unity, and bringing them to spiritual maturity or adulthood to the measure of Jesus Christ. The minister serves as a shepherd, teaching not autocratically, but through example (I Peter 5:1-3)

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Who Is Doing the Work of God?](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

What is more important: preaching the gospel to the world or feeding the flock? John Ritenbaugh gives reasons why we should at this time be concentrating on reversing the church's serious spiritual decline before we presume to go to the world.

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