

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

If the goal is to obey Jesus and make disciples, wouldn't we be wise to follow His methods for making disciples? They worked quite well for Him. They also worked quite well for the apostles who followed Him.

And how well are modern methods working to make disciples who obey all of Christ's commandments? When studies of American Christians, for example, repeatedly show that there is virtually no difference in the lifestyles of most professing Christians when compared to non-Christians, maybe its time to ask some questions and re-examine Scripture.

Here is great question to ask ourselves: How did the early church succeed so well at making disciples without any church buildings, professionally-trained clergy, Bible schools and seminaries, hymnals and overhead projectors, wireless microphones and tape duplicators, Sunday school curriculums and youth ministries, worship teams and choirs, computers and copy machines, Christian radio and TV stations, hundreds of thousands of Christian book titles and even personally-owned Bibles? They didn't need any of those things to make disciples, and neither did Jesus. And because none of those things were essential then, none are essential now. They could be helpful, but none are essential. In fact, many of those things can and actually do hinder us from making disciples. Let me give you two examples.

Let's first consider the modern essential of having only Bible school- or seminary-trained pastors lead churches. Such was an unheard of concept to Paul. In some cities, after he planted churches, he departed for a few weeks or months, and then returned to appoint elders to oversee them (see, for example, Acts 13:14-14:23). That means those churches, absent from Paul's presence, had no formal eldership for some weeks or months, and that most elders were fairly young believers when they were appointed. They had nothing close to a two- or three-year formal education that prepared them for their job.

Thus, the Bible teaches that pastors/elders/overseers do not need two or three years of formal education to be effective in their ministry. No one can intelligently argue against that fact. Yet the modern requirement continually sends a message to every believer: "If you want to be a leader in the church, you need years of formal education." [1] This slows the process of creating leaders, thus slowing the making of disciples, thus slowing the expansion of the church. I wonder how well the American companies Avon and Amway would have saturated their targeted markets if they required every salesperson to move his or her family to another city to receive three years of formal training before he or she could be released to sell soap or perfume?

"But pastoring is such a difficult and complex task!" some say. "The Bible says we shouldn't put a new convert in the position of an overseer" (see 1 Tim. 3:6).

First, it comes down to the definition of a new convert, and clearly Paul's concept was different than ours, because he assigned people to the office of elder/pastor/overseer who had only been believers for a few months.

Second, one reason modern pastoring is so difficult and complex is because our entire system of church structure and ministry is so far removed from the biblical model. We've made it so complex that indeed, only a few super-human people can survive its demands!

"But God forbid that a church might be overseen by someone without a Bible school or seminary education!" others say. "That untrained overseer might lead his flock into false teaching!"

That apparently wasn't Paul's concern. The fact is that today we have Bible-school and seminary-trained clergy who don't believe in the virgin birth, who approve of homosexuality, who teach that God wants everyone to drive a luxury automobile, who claim that God predestines some people to be damned, or who say without flinching that one can gain heaven without obedience to Christ. The modern Bible school and seminary have often served to further false doctrine, and the professional clergy have served to further it more. Church "commoners" are afraid to challenge them, because the professionals have been to seminary and can pull out more "proof texts." Moreover, those clergy have defined and divided their churches from the rest of the body of Christ by their peculiar doctrines, to the point of even advertising those differences by the very names they place on signs in front of their church buildings, sending a message to the world: "We are not like those other Christians." To add further injury, they label anyone who disagrees with their unchallengeable and divisive doctrines as "divisive." The Inquisition is still very much alive and well, led by men with diplomas. Is this the example Jesus wants set by those who are supposed to be making disciples who are known to the world by

their love for one another?

Christians now choose churches based upon particular doctrines, and having the right theology has become the most important thing rather than having the right lifestyle, all because a biblical model has been abandoned.

[1] The modern emphasis on professionally-trained clergy is in many ways a symptom of a larger disease, that of equating the gaining of knowledge with spiritual growth. We think that the person who knows more is more spiritually mature, whereas he may be less so, puffed up with pride from all he has learned. Paul did write, "knowledge makes arrogant" (1 Cor. 8:1). And surely the person who listens to daily boring lectures for two or three years is prepared to give weekly boring lectures!