

Do Not Rely On Free Agents

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

Since the beginning of the year, we have examined the Jerusalem church, an example of success in every respect. The greatest demonstration of their success was not size, but continued growth no matter the circumstances. That is the kind of church we need and want to be. We have examined their success and noticed several keys we must emulate. They were devoted to worship, were united, dealt with problems aggressively, did not lose people in the crowd, did not rely on any one person to do everything and were bold in the face of rejection. Further, the Jerusalem church did not rely on free agents. If we will have success, we must not rely on free agents.

Discussion:

- I. The modern free agent pattern vs. the Jerusalem church.
 - A. I have become a part of a system that I do not necessarily like. I am not sure the easiest way to change the system. In our modern day, evangelism has largely become a professional activity. There is a class of preachers traded back and forth among congregations. Preachers have become like free agent pitchers or quarterbacks, trying to find a team. Because of this, preachers are rarely a real part of the congregation. In many churches, they come in for a few years and if things get rough, they leave (or are fired) and look for another team. In these cases, neither the congregation nor the preacher ever feels a real sense of partnership.
 - B. There is authority for someone to be an evangelist and to move frequently. There is authority for an evangelist to want to work with a particular congregation (**Romans 1:13**). Additionally, there is authority for a church to bring an evangelist from somewhere else (**Acts 11:25-26**). These actions were scriptural, but not normative. Instead of depending on a class of free agent preachers from which they may pick and choose, the Jerusalem church worked on developing their “farm team.” That is, they worked on developing the people within the congregation.
 - C. This is not just about preaching, this is about every aspect of the church’s work. The Jerusalem church developed the members from within to accomplish the work of the church. Their main practice was not hiring workers from other congregations to get their work done. Where did the seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom in **Acts 6** come? From within the congregation. Stephen was trained to teach in **Acts 6:8ff**, he did so. Philip was trained to preach and was therefore ready to do so when the Christians were scattered from Jerusalem (**Acts 8:5ff**). Because of their consistent development of Christians and workers, when Philip converted people in Samaria, the church in Jerusalem was able to send two of her original workers and most prominent leaders in the congregation to Samaria (**Acts 8:14**). Considering this example, we must ask what it takes to have this kind of success in developing people within the congregation to work, to preach and to teach.
- II. We must get past the “one evangelist” mindset.
 - A. From the beginning, Jerusalem had 12 evangelists (**Acts 2:14**). Then we know specifically of Stephen and Philip that did work as evangelists, that makes 14. No doubt there were others also, as demonstrated by **Acts 11:20**. We look at Antioch in **Acts 13:1** and learn they had five evangelists. Paul he often carried a company of people with him (**Acts 20:13**). He would pick up some to take with him in various locations (**Acts 16:3**) and some he would leave in areas to continue the work he had started (**Titus 1:5**).
 - B. How did these churches do it? How did they justify it? Did they have 5 to 15 worship services a week to make sure each preacher would preach at least once a week? No, they recognized that the main bulk of an evangelist’s work was not done in the public assembly. In **Acts 2:46-47** we can surmise that since the people were praising God daily from house to house that the evangelists’ work was done from house to house. When we examine Paul, we know definitely that was the case. In **Acts 20:20**, Paul describes his work as an evangelist. He not only worked publicly, but also from house to house. Each of us as members must view our homes as venues for evangelism and edification. Consider Lydia’s example, who, immediately after her baptism, opened her home to the apostles and the brethren (**Acts 16:15, 40**).

- C. Additionally, the fact that Jerusalem, Antioch and others had multiple teachers did not necessarily mean each evangelist received a full salary. No doubt some, even Paul at times, though having the right to be fully supported (**I Corinthians 9:14-15**), supplemented income by working secularly (**II Thessalonians 3:7-9**). But whether or not they were supported by a congregation, these were men who did not view their roles as evangelists as voluntary. That is, they were obligated to do the work, not just try to squeeze it into a busy schedule of secular work and if they couldn't, then no big deal. They were devoted and obligated to God and to His congregation to work as evangelists and the congregation viewed them as evangelists.

III. We must get past the “preacher does the evangelizing” mindset.

- A. Having said all the above about the full-time evangelists, we must recognize that Jerusalem had success because people who were not “full-time” evangelists evangelized. That is, though their role within the congregation was not “evangelist” they still proclaimed the good news. In **Acts 8:1**, “those who were scattered” does not speak of evangelists but of Christians in general. They were developed to teach even though they did not fill the role of “evangelist” within the church.
- B. Our modern system of “free agent evangelism” has subtly led Christians to think evangelism is a professional activity. There are men who are trained to evangelize either by colleges or training programs or other preachers. They will get trained and we will hire them to do evangelism for us. It must not be this way. We must all be able to defend the hope that is in us (**I Peter 3:15**).
- C. I know we recognize evangelism is to be done by all and we all plan to do it. That is why we have had two Bible classes in as many years entitled “What Do I Say When?” about answering tough questions that come up in evangelistic situations. That is why the fourth class we ask all new Christians to go through is “God’s Mission For Me,” all about aspects of personal evangelism. But we must make sure good intentions and Bible classes do not become substitutes for personal evangelism. I have been in numerous churches where training classes are run and sermons are preached, but in the end that is all that happens. We must convert our plans into actions. Everyone must evangelize.

IV. We must get past the “church has to train me” mindset.

- A. Should the church as a collective train and develop its members to do the work? Of course. In fact, according to **Ephesians 4:11-12**, God established offices within the church for the express purpose of equipping the saints to work. Do not misunderstand this point as saying we should not have training classes or programs. We should, we have and we will.
- B. However, far too many people abdicate responsibility by pointing fingers at the church and saying it has not done enough to train them. Whether or not the church is doing its work to develop us, we have the responsibility to grow on our own (**II Peter 1:5-8**).
- C. In **I Timothy 4:7**, Paul commanded Timothy to exercise himself to godliness. He was not to rely on some church program. He was to discipline and exercise himself to godliness. **Hebrews 5:11-6:2** says we must grow to become teachers from our own motivation and discipline.
- D. When each of us takes seriously our responsibility to grow and not rely on others to grow us, then, as a congregation, we will have so many developed teachers that if the full-time evangelist was gone, we will have many men who can step up to the plate and the work will continue without a hitch.

V. We must get past the “our preachers are supposed to stay here” mindset.

- A. One cannot help but see that Jerusalem worked hard to develop teachers not only to strengthen the base, but also to send people out. They did not just think about their own congregation. They thought about God’s kingdom as a whole.
- B. Our modern system has set up standards for men that have devoted themselves to preach the gospel that were foreign to scripture. We have people with all kinds of personal opinions about how often a preacher should be away from home. “We’re supporting him, he shouldn’t be away from this congregation more than four weeks out of a year, if that much.” But when the gospel came to Samaria, Jerusalem sent Peter and James (**Acts 8:14**). They were gone from home long enough to preach the gospel in many villages in Samaria (**Acts 8:25**). Additionally, Peter traveled through the country in **Acts 9:32**. He was in Lydda, Sharon and Joppa. Developing

their own members allowed the Jerusalem church to send their strongest teachers out to convert the lost even beyond their own community. That is often unheard of today.

- C. Consider the Antioch church. They had five teachers. Which two did they send out for extended periods of time? Paul and Barnabas (**Acts 13:1-3**). If we had Paul and Barnabas here, would we let them be gone for months at a time to preach elsewhere? Or would we say, "We hired them to preach here, they ought to stay here." No doubt we will have some Simeons, Luciuses and Manaens who do not go out. We must think not only about the work here, but also what developing people here can mean elsewhere.
- D. Finally, keep in mind that some of the effectiveness in Jerusalem came not because they trained people and sent them out, but because they developed people, and when they were forced to "move" they were developed to work (**Acts 8:1, 4**). We will have effect in places that we never dream of simply because we take the time to develop people here who, for one reason or another, end up in other places. But we lose that opportunity if we simply rely on free agents and do not work to develop the farm team.

Conclusion:

Look around you at the farm team. Together, we are the workers through whom God will produce the victory. Let us not be caught up in the rat race of relying on whichever free agent preacher comes on the team. Instead, let's build up the team so we may be victorious because of the work we do through the grace of God.