

Here's How to Have More Baptisms!

I have written before about our emphasis on visible results in evangelism. Too often brethren judge their efforts to teach the lost solely on whether the water is stirred. If it is not, then we talk about how "it didn't work" or even call it a failure. Yet before the Lord we can succeed evangelistically every time. That is right: we can have a 100% success rate. We will hit that number when we measure our efforts by God's standard of faithfulness. *Did I faithfully try to help someone know and understand the Gospel as best I could?* If we did that then God is pleased with us. Isn't that what we want? Remember, God is in charge of visible results, not us. He gives the increase (1 Cor 3:6-7), we just plant.

Want to know what happens when you fall into the trap of wanting visible results? Read on and weep. I have a piece from the bulletin of the famous preacher Rick Warren's Saddleback Community Church. In this article he is urging folks to come to a special one day "Breakfast, Baptism & Class 101 with Pastor Rick" on an upcoming Saturday. The purpose of this special day is to, Rick says, hopefully baptize 3000 in one day. To be clear, Rick doesn't believe or teach that baptism is necessary to salvation, but he still believes it is important and would represent "3000 people affirming their faith and joining our church family on a single day."

That is quite a big number. Rick gives several reasons why folks should not procrastinate but come to this big class and mass baptism. First, "I'm personally teaching Class 101 for the first time in ten years." Second, "I'm personally baptizing after Class and you'll receive a photo & baptism certificates." There you have it: Saddleback is willing to dangle the opportunity to meet a celebrity and even be baptized by one as an inducement to get people in the water. But wait - there's more! The flyer goes on to offer a free magazine subscription and book if you're baptized. Then it details how all who are baptized will have their names entered in "the historical list of Saddleback Pioneer Members." Meet a celebrity, get free stuff and have your name enrolled in the list of The Important People. Can it get any better? Yes it can! The flyer then announces "The class is 1 hour shorter than normal." What more could you want? Baptism light! Who wants a bunch of dull drying teaching anyway?

All of this just shows what happens when we lose our way. Offering goodies and the chance to meet a famous preacher to try and obtain any kind of faith commitment is truly disgusting. Can anyone imagine Peter saying "Get baptized today and you can say you were baptized by an apostle?" Isn't this focus on who does the baptizing the very thing Paul decried in 1 Corinthians 1:11ff? Even worse, to shorten the teaching done before one makes a commitment is absolutely unconscionable. Who cares if you know and understand what you're doing? Apparently Saddleback doesn't. Just get in the water so we can count you toward the big goal! Of course, all of this then leads to Saddleback being able to claim "we baptized 3000 in one day. Look at us!" Yet there is nothing remotely scriptural or Christ-like about this revolting and carnal program.

While such an extreme example of ungodliness is easy to attack, let us make sure we make the application to ourselves. I don't guess I have ever heard of brethren offering a free gift in exchange for baptism (at least not here in the United States) but what about shortening the teaching? Do we make certain people understand what it means to give their life to Jesus in baptism? Do we fully teach on repentance or do we rush to the water hoping things sort themselves out later? Do we pressure someone who isn't really ready to go ahead? It may not be as blatant as what Saddleback does, but if we believe evangelism is a failure without a baptism we are prone to begin using carnal tactics so we can claim "success." To top it off, such invariably then leads to bragging about ourselves as we are so impressed with what we have done. God forbid! "But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor 4:2).

—Mark Roberts

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