

It Is Written

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SCRIPTURAL TRUTHS FOR CHURCH GROWTH

By Harold Comer

I use the term "growth" to refer to converting souls or growing the population of heaven. Note some key scriptural concepts that are essential to understand.

1. The Power Of Morality: Some believe that the world is so sinful that you cannot convert anyone but a very rare individual. Yet the more sinful the world is, the greater the power of morality! Consider the teaching of Matt. 5:16 and 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:16 where your morality eventually impacts those around you, even those who have mocked and defamed you. This does not teach "morality alone," as you have to do more than merely set an example. People generally will not become a Christian just because they see you refrain from certain behavior. Yet setting the table for conversions can happen when we find the few prospects that are hidden around us - and who may be watching our actions.

The current power and correctness of these Scriptures is shown by research indicating 95% of those converted were first impressed by the good life of a moral Christian they observed. Only about 5% of our converts are "walk-ins" or "seekers." Most growth comes from the people around us who know us (and watch us!).

2. The Importance Of Saying, "Come.": Our biggest failing is that we do not make enough "good noise." Multiple invitations are necessary to find the 1 out of 100 of our associates that is a prospect and to find them during the brief periods when they are looking. This is commanded in the closing words of John to the people in the 3rd largest city of the New Testament world -- Rev. 22:17. This is one very critical element that is necessary to go hand in hand with our morality. Mass media words will not do much. It must be a personal word and personal work that is done well.

We have many great things to talk about but inviting others is a skill that requires practice. What could you say today about prayer, forgiveness, Bible study, Bible preaching or the benefits of morality? Whatever you say will have to be said wisely because most Americans are urbanized and usually skeptical. Jn. 1:35ff and Jn. 4 picture some of the concepts of "urban touches" necessary today.

3. Understanding "Come And See.": When John and Andrew (Jn. 1:38,39) were cautiously trying to observe Jesus after John the Baptizer had recommended Him, Jesus read their caution and met them unobtrusively at their limited level of exposed interest with the simple invitation of "Come and see." It allowed them to withhold their commitment until they were able to check Him out, that is, to "see" for themselves. We must understand modern urban skepticism and give one who "seeks" a chance to "see" for himself.

This means that we must have occasions where friends are invited to visit us for spiritual values that they feel they need. It means we must be patient with them and give them time to observe us without pushing too aggressively. This is a period of "moral certification" where, because they are aware of religious frauds, they want to "watch" us and be sure that we are genuine. That moral certification may take time but we must use that time to increase our contact with them. Many people in the Bible belt have to visit up to twenty times before they will agree to a personal study. (On the East and West coasts, some visitors will agree to a study much quicker because they do not personally know as many religious hypocrites).

4. Seeking God's Help Through Prayer: It is foolish and self-centered to enter this important process without thoroughly involving our Father who eagerly observes our effort (Col. 4:2-6).

5. The Place Of Wisdom Operating Within The Limits Of Truth: One of the most overlooked commandments is that we are to "walk in wisdom towards them that are without" (Col. 4:5). The word "wisdom" does not approve of carnal motivations or unauthorized activities in our work or worship. Those are never wise. There are, however, people to convert if we are willing to pay the price of wise, scriptural effort. Unfortunately, some workers do not seek wisdom and their foolish actions block instead of encourage. When they could wisely reach and teach souls, they try an unproductive approach that wastes time and energy because they have quickly grabbed either an untested or an out-of-date plan.

6. Conversions Can And Do Occur Today!: There are congregations that are getting a good flow of visitors today. Some of these congregations have learned how to track and cultivate "lookers" and help them grow to become genuine prospects. Ten to twenty adult baptisms are happening in local works. The joy of salvation is there for your congregation, for lost souls and...for you!

The Elephant in the Room

By Jefferson David Tant

People use many devices to mitigate or cancel out plain Bible teaching. This ancient practice can be traced to the Old Testament. Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah was dealing with a rebellious people. God told him: "Now go, write it on a tablet before them And inscribe it on a scroll, That it may serve in the time to come As a witness forever. For this is a rebellious people, false sons, Sons who refuse to listen To the instruction of Jehovah; Who say to the seers, 'You must not see visions'; And to the prophets, 'You must not prophesy to us what is right, Speak to us pleasant words, Prophesy illusions. 'Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel'" (Isaiah 30:8-11).

It is hard to imagine a more blatant rejection of God — people who believed in God. But this attitude is not confined to ancient times. We see it in different ways in our generation.

1. "I Don't Go There." A Lutheran Church (ELCA) controversy concerns ordaining practicing homosexuals. An Atlanta trial (January 2007) dealt with Pastor Bradley Schmeling and his "marriage" to another man. A church supporter, James Mayer, was interviewed by a reporter who asked "about biblical verses that condemned homosexuality ... Mayer's posture stiffens. He says: "I don't go there." Problem solved! Just don't open the pages that deal with this sin.

2. "I Don't See It That Way." After a sermon, Yater Tant spoke to a visitor who questioned his use of Mark 16:16. With no comment on the verse, my father turned to it and read, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." The lady responded with "I don't see it that way." She what?! She obviously "saw" what it said, but rather than say "I don't believe it," she softened her unbelief by saying she didn't "see" it that way.

3. "That Was Just Paul's Opinion." When I have asked people about the practice of women preachers, which is condemned in I Timothy 2:12, the response I often get is, "Paul was a woman-hater," or "That's just Paul's opinion." In other words, their opinion is just as good as Paul's.

4. "I Don't Preach Against Sin." This fits well with the people in Isaiah's day. A popular mega-church preacher in our time is Joel O'Steen, who has a 40,000-member church in Houston. When interviewed by an Atlanta newspaper reporter about his popularity, he explained that he just wanted to make people feel good, so he didn't preach against sin. There may have been a huge elephant in the middle of his church building, but his advice would be just to ignore it.

5. "That's Not What It Means." A favorite ploy, when faced with a very clear but disliked verse, is to dismiss it by claiming it doesn't mean what it says. This is a favorite with homosexuals who have to deal with numerous scriptures that flatly condemn homosexuality.

6. "That's Not The Kind Of God I Serve." Those were the words of a young Baptist preacher I talked with, in New Mexico, many years ago. I had asked him if he believed in "salvation by faith only." When he agreed, I asked him to read James 2:24 and explain it. "Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith." He read it, closed the Bible, and admitted he had never read that verse, but that made no difference. Case closed — Bible closed — mind closed.

7. "It's Not In My Bible." One lady argued with Yater Tant that Mark 16:16 was not in her Bible. My father insisted it was and called for her Bible. She was right! She had taken scissors and cut the offending passage out. I guess that's one way to deal with offending scripture.

"Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it" (Jeremiah. 6:19).