

## **The Wednesday Word May 30, 2012: “When Necessary Use Words” ---?**

Francis of Assisi has been attributed with the quote, “Preach the gospel always and when necessary use words.” Whether or not he actually said this is a matter of uncertainty, but that matters not. What matters is that this anti - gospel statement is often heralded by ‘enlightened’ evangelicals, so called, to justify their lack of evangelistic endeavour. They maintain that all we have to do is to live out the Christian life. If we do this, they insist, people will notice how god-like we are and will then convert.

When it comes to this subject, urban legends abound. The heretic, Charles Finney, who in spite of his distorted and twisted denial of the doctrine of forensic Justification is still popular in many quarters, was supposedly so holy that one day, he walked into a factory and just stood there. According to this fable, what happened next was that every worker in the factory came under conviction of sin, stopped working and cried out for mercy.

“Well,” you say, “don’t you believe that story?”

No I don’t!

“Well why not?” you ask.

I’ll tell you why not. I don’t believe it, because it’s not true.

“But how do you know it’s not true?” you inquire.

I know it’s not true for the simple reason, that when weighed by and measured against the gospel it turns out to be false.

Let me explain. Where, for example, do we read in the gospels that Christ walked into places and, just by standing there, converted all the people? Yet, Christ Jesus was pure, holy and sinless. He was God manifest in the flesh. It doesn’t get purer than that! However, His purity and holiness converted no one in the imaginary Finney manner.

Also, Jesus grew up in a home where His brothers and sisters did not believe in Him. His spotless, holy life, evidently, did nothing to move the unbelievers in His family towards salvation. In fact, there is no evidence that His brothers James and Jude got converted until after the resurrection. So much for the theory that our good, good lives will be the source of converting people.

Now, lest I am misunderstood, I of course believe that we should aim, by the gracious power of the Spirit, to lead lives worthy of the gospel. Our lives should bring glory to the Father (Matthew 5:16), should become sound doctrine (Titus 2:1); should be such that no evil thing can be spoken of us (Titus 2:7-8); and should adorn the doctrine of God (Titus 2:10), but, God forbid that we should think that this is the way to get people saved.

For people to get saved, the gospel must be told. In spite of what St. Francis, or whomever said, words are always necessary. The use of words is the New Testament pattern.

Consider the following scriptures:

Acts 8:25; And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to

Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Acts 15:7; --- God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

Eph 1:13; In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation;

Col 1:5; For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

Heb 4:2; For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them;

1 Peter 1:25.-- And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Words are necessary for the gospel, because the gospel is a past historical event. We can't live in a way that effectively communicates events of history. We, of course, can reflect the benefits of the gospel in our life style, but this is not the same as actually preaching the gospel. Besides that, the gospel is not about our experience. It's about the unique, never to be repeated, experience of the God/Man and with all due apologies to St. Francis, it is impossible, therefore, to declare it without words.

And that's the Gospel Truth.