

# Evangelists: In Season and Out of Season

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Last week 50 brothers gathered at a retreat center in Maryland to consider the theme "On This Rock." Douglas Arthur, evangelist for the Greater Baltimore Church of Christ initiated this unique event that was limited by space to the first 50 to respond. The focus of the two days was on what God said in the Scriptures to evangelists. Brothers in Christ came from various parts of the US, as well as one brother each from Sweden and India.

Great times of prayer surrounded the preaching and discussions. The speeches centered on these themes:

Passion -- Doug Arthur, Baltimore, Maryland

Vision -- Kip McKean, Portland, Oregon

Campus -- Tom Brown, Los Angeles, California

Teens -- Phil Arsenault, Boston, Massachusetts

Building a Mature Church -- Mike Fontenot, Hampton Roads, Virginia

I first started preaching in 1967 while attending Harding College. Having made most all the mistakes I have seen others make, here are just some personal observations of the fellowship and the messages of the brothers at this recent meeting:

- **Humility:** It was so encouraging to see men who have been humbled by the Lord respond in humility, allowing their faith to be refined by fire. These are not hired hands who ran away or hid in the midst of the storm.
- **Respect:** I am also encouraged at the new spirit of respect for brothers with different opinions while we share the same convictions for salvation and mission.
- **Reconciliation:** When brothers are humble and show respect for God and each other, they reconcile.
- **Conviction:** My opinion is that most of our evangelists and members are still deeply committed to following Jesus as his disciples. It was encouraging to see evangelists challenging each other with God's Word to recommit to Jesus' purpose for them.

Among all of the lessons and the fellowship I experienced, there was a mutual acknowledgement that during the last several years:

- **We planted and watered, but God made things grow.** (1 Corinthians 3)
- **God has disciplined our movement** and we need to respond as his children (Hebrews 12)
- **Satan took advantage** of the moment and destroyed the faith of many (Ephesians 6; 1 Peter 5:8)
- **We must pray for discernment** to determine which is from God and which is from Satan (James 1)
- **We must preach the Word** in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4)

- **We are all servants of Christ to build his church** -- not "I follow Paul" or "I follow Apollos" (1 Corinthians 3)
- **We must get back to planting and watering so that God's can save and heal.** (1 Corinthians 3)

I am sure there are many others who would love to have been there. For me, the fellowship and the lessons were needed and profound. I am enjoying my own evangelism more than I have in years.

In our fellowship we have seen great times of preaching the Word and God's changing lives around the world with the simple, powerful message of the gospel. At times we preached truth without preaching grace. Now some are preaching grace without truth. But God said that Jesus is God come to earth "full of grace and truth." If we don't preach both, we are not preaching Jesus -- and he is the Rock that we must build the church on.

Recently I have heard more disciples longing for their preachers to "Preach the Word." In my opinion, many of our evangelists are fearful of preaching the Word uncertain of the reaction they will receive from disciples. Here is a suggestion:

- **Tell your preacher that you need to hear the Word preached** and that if he goes out on a limb for God, you won't cut it off and you won't let anyone else cut it off either.
- **Preach the Word** whether your preacher does or not. We are each a disciple of Jesus.

Here are some suggestions for those preaching the Word:

1) **Make sure you are preaching the Word of God.** Preach more expository lessons from Scripture and let God speak. Have more confidence in the Scriptures than your outline, personality, humor and illustrations.

2) **Preach the Word to please God.** You will automatically please the people who also want to please God.

3) **Preach the Word whether people are pleased or not.** Paul warned about times when people would go into ear-scratching fits.

4) **Practice what you preach.** "Watch your **life and doctrine** closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

Encourage means to "give courage" to our evangelists. The evangelist is a crucial role in God's church whether in a church or a mature church (Ephesians 4). Our evangelists have been humble before God and us. Wiser and more mature, they are still committed to God's passion -- reconciling people to him. They are not perfect -- only covered in the same blood of Christ that we desperately need every day. Let's give them some truth about preaching grace. And let's give them some grace to preach the truth.