



UNCONQUERABLE LAYMEN

Many years ago an inquisitor was sent to search out and destroy the Waldenses of Italy. He reported that his task was an impossible one, because as soon as a person became a Waldensian, he immediately set out to win another disciple. "They were all preachers," he said, and so "were unconquerable."

For this same reason every great movement in the history of the Christian church has triumphed. Luther's mighty reform in Germany, Wesley's work in England, and the rapid spread of the first angel's message in America testify to the power of an aroused and missionary-spirited laity. Luther said, "Every Christian man is a priest, and every Christian woman is a priestess, whether they be young or old, master or servant, mistress or maid, scholar or illiterate. All Christians are, properly speaking, members of the ecclesiastical order, and there is no difference between them except as they hold different offices." Jas. A. Hensey, *The Layman and the Itinerancy*, p. 19

In these closing hours of the gospel dispensation, every-member evangelism is still Heaven's chosen means of spreading the gospel. It is not a plan by which that message is to be carried to all men, it is the plan. The great commission includes all, until all have heard. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." 1 Peter 2:9. All are to be priests and priestesses; all are charged to an equal degree with the solemn obligation of showing forth the praises of the One

One who has called them into His marvelous light.

The record of the persecution that arose at Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen furnishes us some knowledge of the priesthood that existed in the apostolic church. We are told that all the members of the church at Jerusalem were "scattered abroad . . . except the apostles." (Acts 8:1.) Then follow these significant words: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." (Verse 4.) The apostles, it is to be remembered, remained in Jerusalem. All others, the lay forces of the church, fled before the persecution, and as they fled, they preached.

Meanwhile, Philip, one of the deacons in the church, "went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." (Verse 5.) While all the laymen were preachers in a general sense, Philip is designated as a preacher in a more definite way. The word here translated "preached," in describing Philip's work, is quite different from the word "preaching" describing the work of the church. One implies a conversational telling of good news. The other, as in the case of Philip, implies a formal declaration of the word. According to the understanding of the term "preached" as held by the first-century Christians, there was presented to the mind the picture of a king's servant driving into the public square with a message from the king: the trumpets sounded, the people came to respectful attention. Thereupon the king's messenger, herald, or "preacher," delivered the king's message to the waiting people. The preacher was regarded as the messenger of the King, and his

message was the message of the king, not his own. It was this word picture that the early apostles made use of to describe the Christian preacher who stood as a herald, or the king's messenger, before the assembled bodies of people.

In applying this form of the word to Philip, a deacon, and in using the more informal word to describe the brethren generally, there is set before us the two classes of preachers and the two methods of preaching entrusted to Christian laymen. All Christians are called to be priests and priestesses of the gospel. Upon every member rests the solemn responsibility to tell others what the Lord has done for him. Some in the church, however, even among the lay forces are called to work in a more public way. As heralds of their King's message, these are required to lift up their voices before assembled bodies of men and women. They are to persuade men, both in public and from house to house, to repent and believe. This is lay preaching. It is the response of the humble child of God to the gift within him, that is given him from above. Surely a revival of the office and work of lay preaching is our great need.

The Apostle Paul, recognizing the importance of the work of the laity, writes: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." 2 Timothy 2:2.

In the book *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 186–187, we read: "When men of promise and ability were converted, as in the case of Timothy, Paul and Barnabas sought earnestly to show them the necessity of laboring in the vineyard. And when the apostles left for another place, the faith of these men did not fail, but rather increased. They had been faithfully instructed in the way of the Lord, and had been taught how to labor unselfishly, earnestly, perseveringly, for the salvation of their fellow men. This careful training of new converts was an important factor in the remarkable success that attended Paul and Barnabas as they preached the gospel in heathen lands."

An able writer and preacher, with a true vision of world evangelism, states: "The world will be evangelized in that generation in which the church rediscovers the spiritual functions of laymen and adjusts its teaching and program of work to call out and utilize the lay forces of the church. The responsibility for leadership and for

training the church rests on the ministry, but the obligation for service rests on all. The mobilization of the lay forces of the Kingdom will be the glorious achievement of a ministry which interprets the gospel in terms of its complete personal, social, and universal implications. The adequate undertaking of the missionary program demands of laymen instant and whole-hearted obedience to the call to consecration and service. A life reaches the maximum of its power when it widens sufficiently so that no human interests are foreign to it." W. E. Doughty, *Efficiency Points*, p. 29



Henry Ward Beecher expressed his conviction regarding the evangelical work by laymen, as follows: "Men ought to preach





“Men ought to preach the gospel who do not make preaching their profession. The judge, the lawyer, the artist, the school-teacher, the physician, the mechanic, the engineer, the day laborer. Whoever has been called to seek his livelihood and to develop his talents in some secular channel, has a sphere for teaching and for preaching which he ought not to ignore nor to neglect. . . . It is preposterous to think of waiting until we have what is called a thoroughly educated ministry. It therefore becomes necessary for men to engage, in the intervals of the regular occupations, in the work of preaching the gospel, who are not highly educated nor ordained.

Any man in any business who loves God and man, and has opportunities and gifts, should preach—and not occasionally, either, but often. There is no reason why men should not feel it to be a part of the duty of every week to make known somewhere the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. If you have the power to do it, who has exonerated you from the obligation of doing it? Are we not to speak of that love which has made life radiant to us? Are we to hold commerce with hope im-

mortal, and keep that hope a secret from others? Are we to be inspired from day to day by the mightiest truths of creation, and shall there be no echo of them sounded out to others? It is your business, being a Christian, to let your light so shine that men, seeing your good works, shall glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Leon C. Palmer, of the Episcopalian Church, refers to the ministry of laymen as follows: “Taking evangelism in its broadest and most inclusive sense, we may say that by ‘lay evangelism’ is meant any conscious, definite effort by a lay man or woman to bring others to the fullness of a Christian life. . . . Lay evangelism is not a special kind of evangelism, nor does it differ in principle from evangelism by the clergy. It is more often private than public, more often individual than collective, more often conversational than formal.”

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