

John 12:32 (Stanley Bruce Anstey) 169699

Questions Young People Ask Regarding The True Ground Of Gathering: Good Questions That Deserve Good Answers, Chapter One: Why Is There Relatively Little Blessing in Our Gospel Efforts? (12:32)

Question

Let's turn to that passage in John 12 and read verses 31 and 32; "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

First of all, before I try to answer this question, we need to understand that this passage is not speaking about the gospel testimony in the Day of Grace. Nor is it speaking of things having to do with Christians gathering for worship and ministry. The context of the chapter is the millennial kingdom of Christ. The Lord had come to Jerusalem and He was being received by the multitude who cried, "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (vs. 13). The people were looking for Him to set up the kingdom at that time and to reign over it in power and glory, with all the blessing promised by the Old Testament Prophets. The Gentiles are also mentioned as coming up to the feast to worship, which is also a great feature of the millennial kingdom (Zech. 2:11; Isa. 14:1; 56:6; Psa. 47:9; Psa. 72:10-11). The Lord saw that in order for all this to be fulfilled, He, as a "grain of wheat," had to "fall into the ground and die" (vs. 24). And if He did, he would bring forth "much fruit." In fact, it was the very "cause" for which He had come to that "hour" (vss. 27-30). But, and if, He was "lifted up" on the cross in rejection, He promised that there would be a day when He would draw all nations to Himself in the Millennium. The world was about to crucify the Lord, but in doing so, it would condemn itself. Thus, the Lord said, "Now is the judgment of this world."

Hence, this passage is not speaking of believers lifting up the Lord in the gospel testimony, but unbelievers lifting Him up on the cross in rejection and derision. The next verse (33) confirms this. It says, "This He said, signifying what death He should die." Furthermore, the drawing of "all men" unto Himself, of which the Lord speaks here, is not referring to people being saved by the gospel in this day, but of all nations of the earth submitting themselves to the Lord in the Millennium. Many of them will not even have faith (Psa. 18:44; Psa. 66:3; Psa. 81:15 - J. N. Darby Trans.). This couldn't be speaking of gospel campaigns that are going on today in evangelical Christendom, for even the greatest and most successful campaigns don't even come close to drawing "all men" to the Lord.

So, this is a good question, but you are using a wrong verse of Scripture in connection with it. I realize that I haven't addressed the question yet, but I think it's important to understand what John 12:32-33 is really speaking about first. Your question is: If we are meeting in the right way as Christians should—and those in the church denominations are not—why do they have so much blessing and we don't! This is a good question and it deserves a good answer.

Answer:

The problem here is that we have made success in the gospel testimony the sign of whether a group of Christians is on the right ecclesiastical ground. This is a mistake. It's quite understandable how a person could come up with this idea though. You would think that if God approved of something, He would identify with it in power, and His blessing would be upon it so that all could see it—but this is not necessarily so.

I believe that there is a good reason why there is much blessing in the gospel in the evangelical churches today and relatively little among those gathered to the Lord's name.

Blessing Through God's Word

Firstly, God blesses His Word wherever it goes out. Paul said to Timothy, "The Word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:9). At that time, he was bound in prison. Blessing had gone out through his labours for a number of years, but now he was set aside. Nevertheless, he was confident that blessing would continue to go out in the gospel, even though he was bound. Paul knew that God could, and would, use others in the spread of the gospel. He understood that the Lord didn't need him to get the message out, though He had used him in the past in that work. Whoever is diligent enough to go out with His Word will have results in the gospel—sooner or later. The Lord said, "So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). Those in the evangelical denominations have been diligent to "preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2), and God is blessing His Word—that is why there is blessing in many denominational churches. We should be thankful for every effort there is among Christians to spread the good news and pray for a great harvest of souls. We mustn't think that blessing in the gospel through the Word is confined to one group of Christians; the gathered saints have no monopoly on the Word of God going forth.

As mentioned, to equate blessing in the gospel with ecclesiastical correctness is a mistake. A person might look at the various church organizations and think, "God must approve of the denominations because He is using them to save people." It may look like God is using the evangelical churches in Christendom, but it is not those man-made organizations He is using—it is His Word that He is using. As I said, God can and does use His Word for blessing wherever it is ministered. If a so-called Pastor or Minister preaches the Word to his audience, the Spirit of God will take it and apply it to souls, and they will get saved. It is undeniable that people have been blessed in these places. But, it is not a sign that God approves of man-made denominational order. A person could take the Word of God into an ungodly place like a tavern, and the Spirit could use it for someone's salvation. But we certainly wouldn't say that God is using taverns! It doesn't justify their existence. (I'm not equating an ungodly tavern with denominational churches but just illustrating my point that God can use His Word anywhere.)

It's a fact: God blesses His Word wherever it is given out, and by whomever gives it out. In Philippians (chapter 1) Paul speaks of some who were preaching the Word with wrong motives—and yet God was still blessing it! Again, that doesn't mean that God approves of His servants who preach with ulterior motives; it just shows that His Word will be a blessing wherever and however it is given out—even if a person is in a wrong state of soul.

There is More Manpower in the Denominational Churches

Secondly, there is more (observable) blessing in the gospel in the evangelical churches than among the saints gathered to the Lord's name simply because there is a greater number of individuals in those churches engaged in this work. Psalm 68:11 says, "The Lord gave the Word: great was the company of those that published it." I emphasize the word "great" in this verse—a greater number of persons engaged in a work usually translates into greater results. It is quite simple; those in the churches have more manpower, and naturally there should be more results. Those in the evangelical churches are to be commended for their diligence in gospel work. In fact, they put us to shame.

The results we hear about blessing in the churches around us can be rather intimidating, but numbers can be deceiving. Let me give you an example. A friend of ours told us that at his church, there isn't one week that goes by where there isn't at least one person saved! I asked him how many people were in his church, and I believe he said there were about 3500. But suppose, for easy math calculations and for sake of an illustration, it was 5000 people. That means that there would be roughly 50 people saved every year. But suppose we took a zero off that number and there were only 500 people in that church. How many would be saved per year at that rate? It would be five. If we took another zero off that number, and there were only 50 people in that church—about the size of most of the assemblies of the gathered saints—how many would be saved a year at that rate? Well, it would be .5—or one person every two years! Well then, that doesn't sound so intimidating. Their success rate in ratio to the number of people they have is about the same as the gathered saints! So, the next time someone tells me that someone gets saved in their mega church every week, I'm going to say, "Is that all? With all those people you have there, you'd think that you would have more results than that!" So, let's not get occupied with statistics; our first responsibility is to do the will of God, and to leave the results with the Lord. Ultimately, it is God that gives "the increase" in the harvest of souls in the gospel (1 Cor. 3:6).

I would just add one thing here; if you are seriously concerned about the sad results in gospel work among us, maybe you should think about getting involved. Oftentimes, those who criticize this weakness are the ones who seem to do the least.

Summary:

There is more blessing in the gospel in the evangelical churches today than among the "gathered saints," because they have been more diligent in this than we have. And, they have a greater number of persons engaged in that work, and statistically, this usually produces greater results.

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