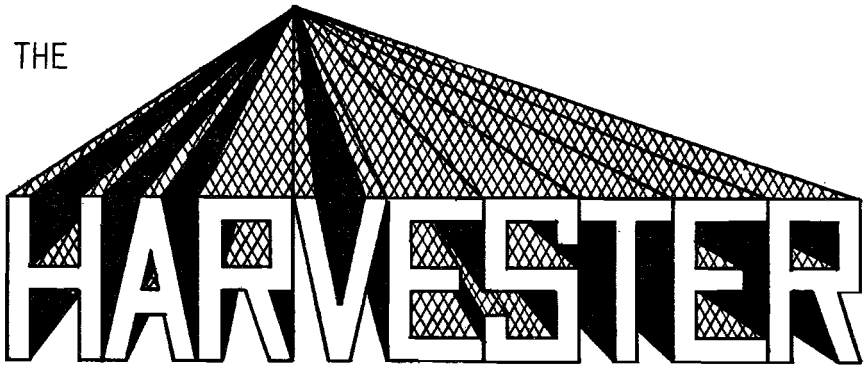


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*"Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2)*

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December 1987

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## REFLECTIONS ON THE YEAR 1987

As we near the end of another year in our lives, it is an appropriate time to reflect back. How did 1987 turn out for us? Did we make any special resolutions and keep them? Did everything go as planned? No, it hardly ever does.

How did the meeting at your congregation come out? In our area we had some outstanding responses during the summer. Many were baptized and *"the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."*(Acts 2:47) Many also came up for prayers and rededicated their lives to Christ. These were people we knew and loved. And we gave God a thousand thanks and praise for the success of that meeting. The

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new converts were so full of zeal and everybody was uplifted by the services. It was truly a joyous occasion for all involved.

But now the summer is gone, the harvest is past, and the year is almost over!!! (Jer. 8:20) It has been several months since those church meetings took place. The excitement has long vanished away. Are we any better off than before? Tell me, where are those new members today that we baptized during the summer? By reflecting back, we may surprise ourselves to find many of them missing. Think about it! "Why, so-and-so hasn't been to church in quite some time." "Hmm, I didn't realize so-and-so had quit coming 'til just now." "I wonder what ever happened to so-and-so ..."

In fact, many of those who were baptized or restored this past summer are no longer coming to church. We saw them come in but we hardly noticed them leave. *"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"* (Lam. 1:12) This is perhaps one of the saddest thoughts to end a year on but we must face the facts.

I ask myself, how did this all come about? Why are some people so *"hot"* when they are added to the church but months later become *"lukewarm"* or even *"cold"*? (Rev. 3:15,16) One reason could be that many were not very sincere or convicted to begin with. Several people can get caught up in the emotions of a tender moment. They see a loved one go before the church and feel compelled to go up, too. But as soon as the meeting is over and the sensations have ebbed, they return to their normal state of religious complacency. I have seen it happen many times, although the situation is never realized until many weeks later when the emotional factor is gone. For these people we can offer very little initial assistance. They have to help themselves by first having a sincere desire to serve God. This is something only they can do.

Another reason why many newly-born Christians disappear could be due to the fault of us older members. This is the case I am most concerned with. When any new member is added to the Lord's church, he is in effect a "*babe in Christ*". He must be cared for and nourished and loved just as we would our own children. "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*" (1 Pet. 2:2) This also applies to those who have strayed away from the Lord and desire to be faithfully restored.

Is that what we have done for our new converts this year? Have we taught them the basic principles of the Gospel? We know that a newborn baby cannot eat meat. Since he has no teeth, the baby can only drink milk for its nourishment. Likewise, we cannot expect a new member to know a lot about the Bible. He has to first learn the basics. "*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*" (Heb. 5:12)

Do we try to preach lessons that will be edifying to all, even to the newest members? The purpose of anyone who speaks God's message is clearly stated in 1 Cor. 14:3, "*He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*" Does that describe our sermons?

Have we been a good influence and example? Sometimes the way we live and act can have a profound effect on a younger brother and sister in Christ. What if I did something that caused another person to lose interest in the church? "*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but*

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*to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."*(Matt. 5:13)

Have we been provoking *"unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"*(Heb. 10:25)? Do we really encourage people to attend church or do we wait until they miss a service and then scold them for doing so?

Have we shown a sincere interest in our new members, like calling them on the phone or visiting them when they are sick? Do we truly show them that we care? *"For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one to another."*(1 Cor. 12:24,25)

Of course, there will be some who will fall away of their own desire (despite repeated warnings). *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."*(2 Tim. 4:3,4) We cannot be responsible for these. But what of the ones that could benefit from our help and don't

receive it? We will be held accountable!! Listen to what God told Ezekiel in chapter 3 verses 17-18: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand."

It is so sad that we put so much work in having a successful meeting and then so little effort goes into keeping the new members who are received. We just sit back and expect things to grow by themselves. However, even the farmer knows his job is not finished just because the seed he planted has sprouted out of the ground. There is still a lot of watering and weeding and tilling and harvesting to do before the fruits can be enjoyed.

Maybe it is too late to help some who have already strayed away from the church. But we ought to learn from our past mistakes. Let us determine to do better in the upcoming year. Let us resolve to win more souls to Christ and do all we can to see that everybody makes it to that heavenly home!

RAY McMANUS

## FROM THE SCRIPTURES ...

### ROMANS 12

14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

## AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS

(A Series to Promote Church Attendance)

Unknowingly many of us are looking into a mirror when we read of Moses in the book of Exodus. This is the episode of the burning bush. God had just told Moses that he would deliver the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt (3:10). But notice the reaction of Moses: "I'm a nobody"(3:11); "I don't know the name of the One who is sending me"(3:13); "They won't believe me"(4:1); "I'm a terrible speaker"(4:10). Excuses, excuses... That is something that many are good at. When we have a duty to perform that is not to our liking, we try to wriggle out of it. We think we are coming up with "reasons" when in truth we are dishing out "excuses" (an imaginative explanation of why we didn't do what we knew we should have done).

Just like Moses, we pull out all the stops that we can think of when it comes to church attendance (or absenteeism). I have heard some

dandy excuses why a person could not make it to the church services and I am sure you have, too. We will not discuss any particular ones at this time but perhaps, will save that for a future article.

"A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper."(Luke 14:16-24)

The message of this parable is clear: All the excuses made by those who were invited were NOT acceptable with the lord of the house. He wanted his house to be full! And so the poor and maimed and halt and the blind were more deserving of partaking the feast than those with excuses. Yes, those who were bidden were eventually excused, weren't they?

Could the same be true with the house of our Lord and Saviour? Don't we all with "one consent" make excuses for missing the night

(continued from page 7)

services or a nearby gospel meeting? Oh, no?? Then where were you last night? "Well, I had to ..." "I was with ..." "I was going to go but ..." "I thought that ..." "I felt really ..." Yes, we hear you Moses!

RAY

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GOSPEL MEETING, December 4-6 at West End Church of Christ, Shawnee, Oklahoma. Bro. Sam Dick of Cave City, KY will be the speaker. Come All!

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[Editor's Note: This issue completes our second year of publishing THE HARVESTER. It has been so successful that we can only give God all the praise and credit. Several names were added to our mailing list, bringing our current total to 717. There were also many who expressed satisfaction with several of the articles. If there is a special subject you would like to see written up, then let us know and we will try our best to accommodate you. Constructive criticism is also always appreciated.

At this time I would like to give special thanks to those who contributed articles this year. They are: Harry Cobb, Ken Cobb, J.O. Holmes, Charlie Kirby, Marty Livingston, Mark Parkhurst, and Joe Young. Without their interest and concern, THE HARVESTER would not have survived. If anyone would like to donate an article, please send it to me and I will try to feasibly work them in. Also, now is the time to discuss possible meetings for 1988. When these dates are decided, send this information so they can be announced through this paper.]