

Personal Evangelism and Blackberries

Last year, I was picking blackberries when an inspiration for an article came to me. Today, however, I went again and was again inspired. It was not the kind of inspiration that Paul had, but it may be worth considering.

As I picked berries, the thought occurred to me that there are many lessons that relate to principles of personal evangelism. **First**, if you are more concerned with being bitten by chiggers, stung by yellow jackets, scratched by briars or other trivial things than you are with picking berries, you will never be a great berry picker. If anything is more important to you than glorifying God by being a fisher of men, you will never be a great soul winner.

Second, you may find them where you least expect. If you are really interested in picking berries, you will discover them by the side of the road or in little patches hidden here and there in the field. It does not really matter if you are ready. First Peter 3:15 says, "But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear."

Third, you get them either when they are ripe and ready or you do not get them. In my 50 years of experience in trying to do personal evangelism, I have noted two significant things, both of which are bad. There are those who are always procrastinating. They plan to try to win some soul for the Lord when the time is ripe. The time never gets ripe, and those who would obey the Gospel if it were presented to them are forever lost. On the other hand, there are those who are so eager to get someone baptized that they "pick them while they are green." A person who "obeys from the heart the form of doctrine which is delivered unto him" (Romans 6:17-18) and then is made free from sin must first be taught. It is true that he does not need to know all that he will learn in the next 50 years, but he has to understand the facts of the Gospel and realize what it means to accept Jesus as Lord. In the 50 years I have been picking blackberries, I never remember picking a green or red one that ever ripened properly. I doubt that I could find many persons who were baptized without having been taught properly who have ever matured properly.

A **fourth** lesson came to me as I was leaving one clump of vines. I had picked all I saw as I was going in, but as I was coming out, I saw almost as many more. The principle is: If you think you have done all the good you can do by using one approach, and have not been very productive, it might be worthwhile for you to look at things from some other angle. This applies not only to the methodology by which you set up a Bible study, but also to the techniques by which you study with an individual.

Fifth, occasionally I found a whole bunch that was ripe, and it appeared they could all be picked with one clutch of the hand. Many times when such is tried, half of them are dropped, and many mashed into a pulp. It is generally better to pick one at a time, so individual attention can be given to its welfare.

Sixth, learn to stick to one bush until you get the maximum good done. If you are always looking around to find more likely places to find berries, it may be you will cover half an acre and not get a bucket full. There are preachers who almost always think the grass is greener or the field is more productive on the other side of the fence, but one needs to try to finish what he starts to the best of his ability before flitting around.

Seventh, be gentle and careful. It is possible that if you step on all the briars that get in your way, or jerk and slash unnecessarily, you will not only destroy many future plants that would be productive, you will actually shake off many berries you could be picking now. Another interesting side effect may be that one of the briars you jerk around may slip loose and slap you across the face with its sharp thorns. Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer each one." There are many other references that teach the same principle. Many of us feel that most of our remarks to those of other religious persuasions should be seasoned mostly with pepper.

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