

FAITH COMES BY HEARING

by Tom Wacaster

"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). What an amazing verse, filled with a wealth of truth for our benefit and spiritual growth. The apostles had been beaten for preaching the gospel. Instead of complain, the scripture tells us that they considered themselves "worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name" (Acts 5:41). During that same period of time, internal conflict arose in the Jerusalem when "there arose a murmuring of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" (Acts 6:1). As you well know, the apostles saw the need to appoint deacons to serve tables in order that the "ministry of the word" might continue. Consequently, we are told that the "word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied" (Acts 6:7). Take note of the order. The "word...increased and the disciples multiplied." Cause and effect are thus presented. Until we grasp that simple lesson, growth will continue to elude us and precious souls will enter eternity without ever hearing the soul-saving message. This is precisely why brethren have seen the necessity of keeping the Great Commission on the front burner of their work. Congregations that have grasped the significance of that Divine order (hearing, believing) are usually out front leading the effort to take the gospel to foreign fields and emphasize evangelism at home.

This order is suggested elsewhere in the New Testament. "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word" (Romans 10:17). "The sower went forth to sow his seed...The seed is the word of God...and that in the good ground, these are the good and honest heart, having **HEARD** (emphasis mine, TW), hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:5, 11, 15). That is the Divine order and any attempt to circumvent that order will not produce the desired effect. We think it is significant that according to the Biblical pattern, the physical is subordinate to the spiritual. Serving tables was not neglected; but the apostles recognized the superior need to preach the word. The wisdom of that choice is seen in the principle noted above. It is only through the preaching of the word that growth will come. Temporary "swelling" may occur with emphasis upon the flesh, but genuine, solid, sound, Biblical growth, both numerical and spiritual, can only come through the preaching of the gospel. Our generation must learn this simple truth. Unless every member of the body works together to the planting of the "seed," disciples will not multiply, the church will not grow.

It is also noteworthy that neither EXTERNAL persecution, nor INTERNAL disruption hindered the proclamation of the gospel. External opposition to our preaching the truth should be ignored, for we must obey God rather than men. Internal disruption must be adequately dealt with before progress can continue. It is the later which so often hinders our evangelistic efforts. Murmuring, false teaching, internal strife, etc. so often keep elders and preachers stamping out "brush fires" and, consequently, evangelism is retarded, if not completely stifled. Men of God must deal with those things forthrightly, and scripturally, and get on with the task before them. The great commission must be fulfilled. The gospel must be preached. Then, and only then, will the disciples multiply.