

“IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON”

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Growth! We long for the increase. We pray frequently and work fervently to this end, beseeching our God that He might give us the increase. So, why is it that our efforts bear so little fruit? Why are we not bursting at the seams? I can well remember the 1960s (with occasional flash-backs into the 50s), when cottage classes were not only popular, they were powerful and profitable! Even into the 1970s our evangelistic efforts produced a harvest of souls to the glory of our God. But somewhere along the way, things began to change, and it became increasingly difficult to find that good and honest heart willing to listen and ready to obey. In addition, the seeds of liberalism were sown in the 50s and 60s, and we are now reaping the harvest of the tares sown by the enemies of God. Back then we did not have such blatant denial of authority, fellowship with the denominations, and the appeal to the flesh that now plagues our Lord's church. There was a far greater respect for the Scriptures, and a deeper interest in a study of the same on the part of members of the Lord's church. Add to this the full harvest of humanism and we begin to see why growth has slowed and interest in spiritual things has tapered off.

I recently read of a brother in Christ who has been a Christian since 1939. Baptized at a young age, he immediately became active in teaching others while growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. His observation is strikingly familiar. He observed that it has become increasingly more difficult to interest the lost in a study of the Bible. Yes, the devil has done his work, and we are the less fortunate for it.

It should also be observed that fewer individuals are willing to make a deep seated commitment to Christ. Often studies are canceled part of the way through because the student can see where the studies are leading and what it will cost them with regard to change. How shall we react to this changing atmosphere? Paul stated it clearly when he told Timothy, *“I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching”* (II Tim. 4:1-2). One old preacher paraphrased that passage: “Preach it when they want it, and when they don't want it.” Our obligation is to preach and teach. We must leave the numbers business in the Lord's hands and concentrate on our responsibility of getting the word out. The three N's of Noise, Nickels and Numbers (as one brother called it) must not become our modus-operandi. While some congregations are abandoning the old paths to walk in the footsteps of the denominations, let us determine that we will not only walk in those old paths, but that we will proclaim it unto others.

We must never forget that there are three important factors when it comes to saving the lost. There is *the will of God*, who does not want any to perish. There is *the will of the teacher*, who longs for the increase and salvation of those near and dear to him. Finally, there is *the will of the lost individual*. It is the last which has changed in the past twenty years.