

My Early Experiences

Otis Q. Sellers
(1840-1912)

It is a practice in many evangelical churches and movements to urge a new convert to get busy in “the Lord’s service” just as soon as he makes his initial confession of faith in Jesus Christ. They think it best to make a “Martha” out of every Christian, forgetting that it was Mary who chose the better part, namely, to sit at the feet of Christ and hear His word (Luke 10:38-42).

This happened in my experience. Everyone urged me to serve. No one urged me to study. I earnestly desired to serve the Lord, but I was not interested in the “make work” activities offered by the local church. I launched out, and had not known the Lord many months before I was busily engaged in preaching in street meetings, mission halls, and small churches. Inasmuch as I went from place to place, such work did not require much knowledge or many messages. The half-dozen sermons that I had developed on as many subjects soon became very familiar to me. I was able to give them with all the assurance of an experienced veteran. I had no background of Biblical knowledge, but by stringing together the few things that I did know, condemning the things that I knew to be wrong, commending the things that I knew to be right, adding to all this some anecdotes and illustrations, I was able to satisfy that class of people who have no thirst for knowledge, but who do like to hear a lively message.

This group of non-progressive Christians was predominant at that time. They still dominate the religious world today. It is this group that the time-serving minister must keep in mind as he prepares his message and performs his service. They gave organized religion the character that it displays today. The hireling shepherd feels that it is best to go along with them. Therefore, he does not permit his message to rise above the level of their superficial knowledge. Neither does he say anything that might disturb them or cause them any spiritual exercise. Their childish beliefs must never be challenged.

As I look back upon my first year of Christian experience, I am both amazed and amused at how little one can know and yet satisfy the average audience that has gathered for a religious service. And it was during this first year that I discovered how sudden and violent the reaction would be when a speaker said something that did not fit into well worn patterns of thought.

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