GOD'S WORK DONE IN GOD'S WAY...

Posted on May 27, 2011 by Eddie

Category: Observations

This is the first, in what *might* turn out to be a series on famous missionary sayings.

God's work, done in God's Way will never lack God's Supply

This phrase is famously the motto of James Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission (later OMF).

In a sense, the phrase is so self evidently true that it is hard to argue with. Quite simply, God is sovereign and he will do whatever is required to achieve his purposes. The way in which the China Inland Mission grew and developed during Hudson Taylor's lifetime gives a vivid demonstration of why he so firmly believed this motto. In our own way, Sue and I have seen the principle at work over the twenty five years since either of us had a regular paying job.

However, despite this, I am far from convinced that the statement is actually very helpful in day-to-day life. In missionary circles, I have heard this phrase applied to two types of situation. It will often be used when people are trying to raise money for an enterprise. If the funds are not forthcoming, they will assume that what they are attempting is not God's work, or that they are not doing it in God's way, otherwise the finance would be provided. The converse also happens. If an enterprise or activity is well funded, there is the assumption that it must be God's work being done in God's way - the money is the proof. I believe that both of these assumptions, especially the latter, are rather dangerous

In practical terms, I believe that the statement that "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply" is extremely difficult to work with.

The first issue is that we all too often equate "God's supply" with money. We need money in order to do God's work and as long as we do the work in the right way, God will provide the money we need. However, in Scripture the resources which God provides for his work are much richer and somewhat more intangible than simple cash. Try "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,Â gentleness and self-control" for starters. Without these we are unable to work for God and with them, issues such as finance take a back seat.

The next problem is that it is rather difficult to actually define what God's work is. We tend to equate God's work with the things we do: evangelism, Church planting, Bible translation or what-have-you. However, God's work is far broader than our agenda and in any given situation he may be seeking to achieve something very different to the things which we are aiming at. God calls us to mission not simply to achieve missional goals - he can do this without our help. He calls us so that he can achieve things in our lives and draw us closer to him as we work alongside him. Because God's focus may well be on something very different to ours, it is very difficult for us to say that we know what God's work is.

Equally, it is almost impossible for us to know what God's way to do anything is in a specific context. Obviously we have to avoid things which are unscriptural or otherwise unethical, but that still gives

us a huge range of actions in any context. To say that we are certain ofÂ "God's Way" in any particular context is very, very difficult.

I have known many missionaries who have struggled to raise the financial support needed for them to carry on their work. A blanket application of the "work, way, supply" principle would suggest that they were either not doing God's work or they were not doing it in God's way. However, it is equally true that people in this situation often grow in faith and appreciation for the way that God is at work in their lives. God's "work" was sanctification, his "way" was increasing dependence on him and his "supply" was the financial hardship needed to drive people to that dependence.

I honestly believe that "God's work done in God'sÂ way will never lack God's supply" but I also believe that to claim that we know exactly what God's work, way or supply is in any context is probably rather unwise.