

THE THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM

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INTRODUCTION

IF THERE IS ANY SUBJECT in which the infinite God is vitally interested, it is evangelism—the proclamation of the gospel of redeeming grace to a lost and dying world. God loves sinners. He “so loved that He gave” (Jn. 3:16). D. L. Moody declared that there was “an infinite amount of love in that little word ‘so.’” The God of love is concerned for lost men groping in their blindness and perishing in their sin.

In recent years there has been a revival of interest in the subject of evangelism. Even the liberals, who do not accept an orthodox view of evangelism, nevertheless are using the term while investing it with their own meaning. Two world congresses have been held on the subject by new evangelical leaders, primarily under the impetus of Billy Graham. Various conventions, denominational gatherings, and local church conferences have emphasized the ministry of evangelism. For all good and genuine interest in evangelism we can heartily praise the Lord.

However, it would seem that much of the contemporary discussion of evangelism neglects some foundational theological principles which are really vital to its proper understanding. Certain doctrinal matters are considered in contemporary discussions of evangelism, but others are not. In particular, the great Biblical themes of God’s sovereignty, man’s inability, and God’s efficacious grace are hardly ever mentioned in connection with the subject of evangelism. But why should they not be? These are fundamental to a proper evangelistic ministry. They are not merely peripheral doctrines which men can believe if they wish, but which have no necessary connection with evangelism. They are inseparably connected with it! Evangelism is not primarily a study of methodology. Evangelism is the outflow of proper theology.

Some time ago the author was requested to address a conference on world missions on this subject. This booklet is an outgrowth of these messages.

1 WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

WHAT IS EVANGELISM? The answer to that question is extremely important. Obviously we cannot evangelize successfully if we do not understand the nature of evangelism. Our answers must be derived from the New Testament since this is the only authoritative source.

I. Evangelism Is The Propagation of a Divine Message

Paul was one of the chief preachers of the gospel in apostolic times. Facing the opposition of the Judaizers who were seeking to mix the gospel with alien elements, Paul crystallized and clarified the nature of the gospel.

1. A Message Evidencing a Divine Origin

The gospel of saving grace is not a human invention. It is not merely another suggested remedy for the ills of mankind, to be set alongside other options and analyzed and compared. The gospel is not “after man” (Gal. 1:11). That is, it is not of human origin. Paul is emphatic in declaring that the gospel came “by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:12). He had received the gospel from heaven. It was final, fixed, and certain. Anyone who tampered with the gospel was “anathema” (Gal. 1:8–9). The strongest curse was upon such an one.

It is the fashion today in ecumenical circles to seek “rapport” with representatives of the various world religions—to exchange religious ideas and to seek to find some common ground of agreement between people of very diverse theological viewpoints. The gospel of Christ, however, cannot be compared with human religious systems. It is from God. No other religion in this world has a gospel that is from God. Every other is purely human in its origin and therefore impotent to deliver man from his sins. Those who truly believe the gospel must preach it as did Paul—as a divine message without rival.

2. A Message Evidencing a Divine Authority

The apostles of Christ preached the gospel “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (I Pet. 1:12). Theirs was no innocuous religious discussion of academic possibilities. Theirs was the declaration of an authoritative message. They did not preach bashfully or with hesitation or uncertainty. The phrase Peter employs indicates their conviction that their message possessed divine authority. Spirit-filled preachers called men to faith in Christ, demanded that they turn from their sins, challenged the demons of darkness and the rulers of this world, all with the deepest assurance that they were spokesmen of God.

The mood of the age in which we live has caused many evangelicals to shy away from the New Testament concept of an authoritative proclamation. It is felt that the modern mind will not accept strong, authoritative preaching, but that our witness rather must take the form of “sharing,” “rapping,” “interacting,” and “discussing.” While there may be some concepts inherent in these terms that are helpful it is feared that much of the bold, uncompromising, and authoritative proclamation of the gospel which characterized the apostolic church is being watered down today in an effort to “sneak up” on the unsaved with some kind of a sophisticated, apologetic form of evangelism calculated to make the gospel more palatable to the modern unbeliever.

3. A Message Evidencing Divine Power

At the very outset of his masterful discussion of God’s plan of salvation Paul emphatically declares that the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). By this statement he declares that the gospel has inherent power—the power of an omnipotent God is resident in the gospel.

The purpose of the gospel is summarized in two small words—“unto salvation.” Here is a message that has power to transform lives, to bring people who are lost and without hope to a personal possession of “salvation” in Jesus Christ. It does not merely offer them a philosophy of life, a code of ethics, or a chance to “better themselves.” The gospel offers them new life and eternal hope in Christ.

This is truly a divine message which we proclaim. It is the “glorious gospel of the blessed God” (I Tim. 1:11).

II. Evangelism Is the Presentation of a Divine Person

A great scholar of old said, “If we were to sum up the content of the gospel in a single word, it would be Jesus the Christ.” Evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel. The gospel is the presentation of a Person. It is the “gospel of the glory of Christ” (II Cor. 4:4). Anything that detracts from His glory or in any way hinders people from seeing Him cannot

rightly be included in evangelism. Evangelism is not the presentation of ourselves, the glorification of our church, or the magnification of our programs. It is the presentation of a wonderful Person who came into the world to save men from their sins.

1. The Gospel of the Eternal Christ

Paul, in the opening chapter of Romans, states three great facts about the gospel as it relates to Jesus Christ. The “gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1) is “concerning His Son” (Rom. 1:3) who is the “Son of God with power” (Rom. 1:4). The titles, “Son” and “Son of God” point to Christ’s eternity. Some cultists, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, endeavor to refute Christ’s deity by stating that the Bible says He was God’s Son, therefore, He must have been born, must have had an origin, and, therefore, is not the eternal God. Such argument only proves one’s ignorance. The New Testament title—“Son”—when applied to Christ describes His eternal relationship with the Father, not His origin in time. There was never a time when Christ was not the “Son.” “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me; Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Ps. 2:7; cf. also Heb. 1:5). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Timeless One with the answer for the times. The “decree” referred to is God’s eternal decree. The phrase “begotten thee” does not refer to a commencement of Christ’s existence at some point in time, but rather to His eternal coexistence and equality with the Father. He is the great “I am” (Jn. 8:58) with no beginning and no ending, the one who “liveth” and “became dead” and is “alive forevermore” (Rev. 1:18).

2. The Gospel of the Incarnate Christ

The inspired apostle goes on to say that Jesus Christ “was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3). The eternal Christ became incarnate, was made flesh, became a man. Only through such humiliation could He ever provide salvation for a lost world and give us an evangel to proclaim. The eternal Son became the God-man. The “Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14).

Without the incarnation we would all be lost eternally. Christ became man so that He could take men to God. He did not cease to be the Eternal Son when He became a man. He is the God-Man. He is both God and Man, perfectly united in one Person. He was made “a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death . . . that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). He took upon Him flesh and blood that “through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). Without the God-Man there would be no gospel and no evangelism.

3. The Gospel of the Resurrected Christ

The Christ of the gospel was “declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). In our proclamation of the gospel we cannot afford to neglect Christ’s resurrection. There is no good news in a dead Teacher. There is only good news in a Living Savior who overcame death and offers salvation to all who will believe it. Christ is not to be presented as still hanging on a tree. He lives.

It is not without significance that in almost all of the recorded apostolic sermons in the book of Acts there is reference to Christ’s resurrection. It was a great apologetic. It was also part of the evangelistic appeal. The Christ who conquered death can save men from their sins.

The preaching of the gospel is the presentation of a Person—the Lord Jesus Christ. No preaching can truly be called evangelistic that does not lift Him up before the eyes of lost men so that they may see His glory and believe upon Him.

III. Evangelism Is The Proclamation of a Divine Work

A noted theologian stated years ago: “You haven’t preached the gospel to anyone until you’ve given him something to believe.” The gospel is not a challenge to man’s efforts nor an invitation to diligent work. It is a message from God to be believed. Paul presented it this way: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3, 4). This statement, and its surrounding context, help us to understand better the nature of the gospel.

1. A Substitutionary Work

Paul says simply: “Christ died for our sins.” The force of the preposition “for” as used by Paul is substitutionary. He means to tell us that Jesus Christ died in our place. He took upon Himself the judgment for our sins. He became our substitute.

Certainly the doctrine of Christ’s substitution is plain in the New Testament. We have been redeemed with “the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot” (I Pet. 1:19). Christ is “the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (I Jn. 2:2). Propitiation is that work of Christ in His death upon the cross whereby He completely and eternally satisfied the holy demands of God against the sinner. A holy God dealt with His own Son as He should have dealt with every sinner. He unloosed upon that dying figure on the cross all the thunderbolts of His justice so that believing sinners might be forever free from such terrors. Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet, put it this way: “But he was wounded for our

transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:5). He went on to explain that “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6).

*“Jehovah bade His sword awake;
O, Christ, it woke ‘gainst thee;
Thy blood the flaming blade must slake;
Thy heart its sheath must be—
All for my sake my peace to make;
Now sleeps that sword for me.*

*Jehovah lifted up His rod
O, Christ, it fell on Thee;
Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God
There’s not one stroke for me.
Thy tears, Thy blood beneath it flowed;
Thy bruising healeth me.”*

2. A Finished Work

This fact of a finished work is implied in the phrase, “Christ died for our sins.” It is more completely explained in other places in the New Testament and is plainly seen to be a finished work. What is meant by the term “finished work”? In theology at least three things are included in it: (1) redemption toward sin, (2) reconciliation toward man, and (3) propitiation toward God.

The basic word for “redeem” in the New Testament means “to pay a price.” There are variations of it and also other words which add to the richness of the doctrine. Believers have “redemption through his blood” (Eph. 1:7). “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23, 24). Christ has delivered us from the bondage of sin. He has redeemed us, bought us, and unloosed us. We are “bought with a price” (I Cor. 6:20).

Lost mankind has also been reconciled by the death of our Lord. The references to the work of reconciliation are few, but nonetheless important. The old hymn writer wrote:

*“My God is reconciled, His pardoning voice I hear,
He owns me for His child, I can no longer fear.”*

However, it was not God that was reconciled. He was never Out of adjustment nor in need of reconciliation. It was man who had the need. The lost world was alienated from God. Christ, by His death, reconciled

it to the Father. One of the key passages is this one: “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5:17, 18). Whereas we were far from God Christ has brought us close to God, thoroughly changing our relationship to Him.

The doctrine of propitiation has already been mentioned. This, along with redemption and reconciliation, comprise the “finished work of Christ.” Evangelistic preaching presents such a finished work to the lost sinner. “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God . . . for by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:11, 12). In Old Testament times the priests were continually offering sacrifices which could not take away sins. The Lord Jesus Christ offered the mighty sacrifice of Himself, forever satisfying the divine demands and making possible the presentation of the gospel of good news to lost men.

Salvation is not something man does for God. It is something God has done for man. Many theologians would change the old hymn to read:

*“Jesus paid a part, and I a part you know.
Sin had left a little stain, we washed it white as snow.”*

Better the original text which reads:

*“Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe,
Sin had left a crimson stain, **He** washed it white as snow.”*

3. A Saving Work

Paul declares in speaking of the gospel that it is the instrument “by which also ye are saved” (I Cor. 15:2). The gospel is no theory to be tested, no philosophy to be discussed, nor an ethic to be tried. It is a powerful, transforming, saving message from God. Evangelism results in the salvation of people. The gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes” (Rom. 1:16). It presents the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ who came to save all who would receive Him.

IV. Evangelism Is the Pronouncement of a Divine Ultimatum

There is an urgency in evangelism. There is a demand, an ultimatum, an insistent call to a response.

1. Obedience to the Gospel Demanded

What some modern religious leaders call “evangelism” is really just a sharing of opinions about religion or discussions about societal needs

and how to meet them. Not so with Paul who employed some strong language in describing the fate of those who reject the gospel, and, in the use of such language, sought to motivate those who love Christ to a more urgent effort. “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (II Thess. 1:7–9).

Some, who are confused about the nature of grace and faith, have seized upon the phrase “obey not the gospel” to support their notions that certain acts (such as water baptism) are included in salvation since, say they, obedience implies works of some kind. The phrase as found here and in one or two other places in Scripture, does not refer to any works which must be performed in connection with salvation. “Obey” in this context means “believe.” To obey the gospel is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as one’s Savior. Paul employs the particular word here, no doubt, to emphasize the fact that the gospel is authoritative, and that the gospel appeal demands submission to divine authority. God delivers an ultimatum to the sinner. He must believe or perish. God is not inviting the sinner to discuss terms of surrender, nor to interact on possible alternatives. God is demanding that the sinner come to Christ or be lost forever. We ought to preach the gospel with this note of authority and urgency.

2. Disobedience to the Gospel Punished

The phrases stand stark and clear: “flaming fire,” “everlasting destruction” and “from the presence of the Lord” (II Thess. 1:8, 9). The concept of “everlasting destruction” does not involve annihilation. It refers to “everlasting ruin”—the judgment of God meted out so that all usefulness is lost for eternity. Impenitent sinners will be forever removed from the glorious presence of the Lord and from the display of His grace and love. In stygian darkness will they grope, lost and hopeless.

Conclusion

The very nature of evangelism calls us to evangelize. Men are lost and need a Savior. We are to present God’s Savior to them.

2 THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF NEW TESTAMENT EVANGELISM

EVANGELISM AND THEOLOGY SHOULD never be divorced. They are wedded together inseparably.

Many (not all) evangelists and evangelistic-minded pastors tend to view theologians with a skeptical eye. They are cold, calculating, scholarly type individuals, chasing Hebrew and Greek verb roots while sinners go to hell. They are consumed with theological definitions of soteriological terms while thousands perish. On the other hand, many (not all) theologians and theologically-oriented pastors look with alarm upon those engaged in evangelistic endeavors. They are shallow in their preaching, carnal in their appeals—“full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

One of the basic problems helping to cause this division above-described is that we are often unwilling to face the fact that God gives differing gifts to His people. To some He gives unusual gifts of scholarship. Often a certain type of temperament accompanies that gift. Generally speaking, theologians are not dynamic, forceful, energetic organizers, nor are they normally skillful evangelists. They may be very Spirit-filled men, however, who are doing what God has given them to do. On the other hand, most evangelists (there have been exceptions) are not very skilled in, nor particularly interested in, prolonged and deep theological study. They are generally more action-oriented, they are “doers,” exhorters, and motivators. If they truly possess the gift of evangelism they have a God-given ability to win people to Christ which most theologians do not have.

We need to remember that no amount of human exhortation is going to change an evangelist into a theologian nor a theologian into an evangelist. We need both. Theology must be “knowledge on fire” if it is to be of any practical use, and certainly evangelism must be theological if it is to be used of God in the salvation of sinners. The theological framework of evangelism is vital to its proper understanding.

I. There Is a Personal, Sovereign God Who Is the Creator and Ruler of the Universe

In facing the Athenian populace on Mars Hill, Paul proclaimed to them salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because the Greeks were ignorant of the nature of the true God he couched his evangelistic appeal within a theological framework. He introduced them to the true and living God (Acts 17:22–34).

1. God Is a Person

While this may seem elementary to believers who attend Bible-preaching churches it is not as universally accepted as they might think. Modern rationalism, humanism, and various forms of human philosophy that are currently accepted deny the existence of a God who is a Person. The influx of oriental mysticism into the United States may cause an increase in such denials.

Most of the great world religions do not have a proper concept of the person of God. In evangelizing among the nations of the world, missionaries have faced this problem constantly. Animism, humanism, pantheism, and other errors abound. Certainly Paul emphasized to his audience in Athens the fact of a personal God. The various powers ascribed to God in this chapter would indicate He is a Person (creating, v. 24; sustaining, v. 25; commanding worship, v. 25; determining, v.26; commanding repentance, v. 29; raising Christ, v. 31; judging the wicked, v. 31). His great title—I AM—implies personality and presence (Ex. 3:14). God possesses self-consciousness and self-determination—He is a Person.

2. God Is the Creator

He is the God “that made the world and all things therein” (Acts 17:24). This, remember, is essential background to any proper evangelistic message. If there is no personal God who created all things, then there is no one to Whom we are morally accountable and thus no need for a gospel message of repentance and faith.

The theory of evolution is accepted by large numbers today as a fact. Anyone who contests its truth is viewed, particularly in educational circles, as some kind of pre-scientific relic. Actually, there is no solid scientific evidence for the theory of evolution, as many have pointed out, and it is certainly in direct opposition to the plain declarations of Scripture concerning divine creation.

Any compromise with proponents of evolution will weaken the Church’s evangelistic message. If God did not create us, but we are rather the products of chance evolution, what right does He have to demand of us allegiance? If all life resulted from fortuitous circumstances, then there is no fixed and authoritative moral law—only

laws that develop out of circumstances and may be changeable and relative.

3. God Is Sovereign

The God Whom Paul presented was no finite being struggling with the problems of His own universe. Nor was He a God somewhat frustrated by sin and sinners and trying His best to overcome both. No, rather He was presented as “the Lord of heaven and earth” (Acts 17:24). He is “Lord”—sovereign Ruler of this universe. He is in absolute control of all things. He is surprised by nothing. “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3). It is this sovereign, powerful God who had commissioned us to preach His Word and to evangelize the lost.

II. All Men Were Created by God and Are Accountable to God

The origin and nature of man is a very important subject vitally related to the mission of evangelism.

1. God Made Man

The Scripture is plain. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). God did not merely breathe into a pre-existing animal form of some sort His divine breath. He created the whole man by His Almighty power. Man is a special creation of God. Christ used this fact as a foundation for His discourse on marriage and the home (Matt. 19:4). The fact that man is God’s special creation lends more meaning to the task of evangelism. God made man for Himself. He longs to have fellowship with him, to instruct him, and to bless him. Man, however, is estranged by sin and these things are not possible apart from personal salvation through the blood of Christ.

2. God Will Judge Man

Man is not free to do as he pleases. If man were the result of a fortuitous accident which produced intelligent life, then he would be the “Master of his fate” and the “Captain of his soul.” However, he was planned and created by God Himself. This is the background of Paul’s thinking when he announces: “And the times of this ignorance God overlooked; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world by that man whom he hath ordained (Acts 17:30, 31).

III. God Has Revealed Himself to Man

God has not remained a silent witness to man’s plight. God has spoken to man. This is fundamental to all evangelism. Obviously if God

has said nothing intelligible to man then man can hardly be expected to know what God expects of him and to do it.

The physical universe is a sermon from the Creator. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1). No "dim light of nature" is this. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:30). The marvelous structure of the physical universe eloquently testifies to the genius and power of the God who made it.

The Word of God is also addressed to man though man in his blindness cannot grasp its message apart from divine illumination. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (or, "God-breathed," II Tim. 3:16). God has spoken in a world of mystifying beauty. He has also spoken in a Book of wondrous power—the Bible. Probably no more succinct description of evangelism in action could be given than that found in Acts 8:35: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Fruitful evangelism is inseparably connected with an inspired book containing the good news of God—the Bible.

God was not finished, however, in giving His message to men. "God . . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2). God has written His love and His grace in the spotless life of the God-Man and upon the blood-stained cross at Calvary.

Salvation will never be secured through the pursuit of philosophy nor obedience to a man-made system. Man must know the true God as He has revealed Himself. Much modern philosophical and theological thought does not accept the fact the God has ever revealed Himself to man. For this reason the doctrine of personal salvation is obscured in most contemporary systems. If God has not spoken, or if it is doubtful as to what He has said, then obviously there is no authoritative answer for the burning question in the human soul: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:31).

IV. Men Are Utterly Lost, Doomed for Eternal Hell, and Unable to Come to God Except through Divine Grace

One of the clearest passages in the New Testament on the matter of sin and salvation is Ephesians 2:1–7. The condition of the sinner is plain, he is "dead in trespasses and sins" (v. 1). This is a very important statement by Paul. Men are not merely injured, inconvenienced, or hindered by sin. They are "dead" in sins. They are dominated by the lusts of their sinful nature, are by nature disobedient continually to God, and are completely given over to a way of life which is displeasing to the Lord (v. 2).

Such men, godless and rebellious, are doomed to eternal punishment. They are “children of wrath” (v. 3), indicating their certain rendezvous with an angry God who will punish them for their sins. They have “no hope” (v. 12). One is reminded of Dante’s *Inferno*, his pictorial description of hell, wherein is found the inscription over the door of the lake of fire: “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.” These shall be “tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever (Rev. 14:10–11).

That the resurrection of lost sinners from the grave of sin can only be wrought by divine power is evident in the divinely-inspired explanation: “Even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved)” (Eph. 2:5). Salvation is the “gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Even the faith by which the sinner believes is bestowed upon him by divine grace as is indicated in this text.

V. God Has Chosen Some to Be Special Recipients of His Grace, and He Will Bring Them to Himself

Evangelism is not merely a chance scattering of spiritual seed followed by an accidental harvest. God intended to save certain men and evangelism is the carrying out of His plan. The first chapter of Ephesians sets forth the work of the entire Trinity in the believer’s salvation—God the Father choosing, God the Son purchasing, and God the Holy Spirit sealing.

Two great concepts grip the attention. God’s sovereign purpose as expressed in the phrase, “His will” (Eph. 1:5), and God’s saving power as denoted in the phrase “his grace” (Eph. 1:6). Paul declares that God chose some people to be saved before the foundation of the world, that is, in eternity past (Eph. 1:4). He made this choice, not upon the basis of anything actual or potential that lay within the chosen, but rather “according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5). God simply decided to do it. He needs no reason but that given—it was His good pleasure.

Those whom He has chosen He will bring. God never leaves things half-done. He completes whatever He undertakes. Scripture refers to believers as “the called.” Paul, for instance, speaks of “them which are called” (I Cor. 1:24). Calling is a powerful, effectual operation of the Holy Spirit whereby God’s elect are brought to Jesus Christ. It is more than merely an invitation which may or may not be heeded (though general invitations are given in Scripture). It is a compelling attraction, a conquering power. God’s elect are “called,” that is, they are brought by supernatural, divine power into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

VI. The Lord Jesus Christ Offered Himself as a Sacrifice for Men's Sins, and He Invites All to Receive Him as their Savior

This truth is not contradictory to the one previously stated. The fact that God has chosen some does not deny the fact that God invites the world. Admittedly, the two things are impossible for human intellects to reconcile completely. How can God choose some while still inviting all? That this question would be asked is understandable. The problem confounds our reason. However, both are true because God's Word presents both. While we may not understand **how** both can be true we must accept the fact that they are true because the Scripture so teaches.

We have already seen that God has chosen some to salvation before the world was ever formed. Paul, however, also presents the other side of the coin in I Timothy 2:1-7. God is not a heartless fiend, damning souls by eternal fiat without any concern for their welfare. God is a God of love and mercy "who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (2:4). God desires the salvation of all. Obviously He does not "will" the salvation of all in the sense of eternally purposing it. If He did, then all men would inevitably be saved. God, however, has a strong desire, a yearning for lost men, that they might receive His grace in Christ.

This God who loves all men provided a salvation for all men. The Son of God "gave himself a ransom for all" (2:6). The "all" refers to all men everywhere. Christ is the "propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I Jn. 2:2). The Lord Jesus Christ bowed under the weight of sin upon the cross and was made to "taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). The fact that Christ provided such a wonderful salvation does not mean of course that all men will avail themselves of it. The vast majority reject it to their eternal doom. Christ's satisfaction was sufficient for all, but efficient only for those who believe.

VII. All Believers Should Be Concerned about Lost Men And Should Be Actively Seeking to Reach Them with the Gospel, But Some Believers Have a Special Gift of Evangelism

All believers are commanded to witness of the saving grace of God in Christ. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). (The word "preaching" is the common New Testament word for "evangelizing.") This is a reference to the evangelistic activity of all the believers scattered from the church in Jerusalem and not merely the apostles, pastors, or special classes of leaders. None of us can escape the injunction: "And ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:28). "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

The secret of the unusual growth of many New Testament churches was the fact that all believers were involved in spreading the good news of salvation. The early Christians were arraigned before the Jewish leaders who said, “. . . behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine” (Acts 5:28). These Christians were not satisfied to merely recite their faith at home or in a church service. They were in the market places, the shops, and the homes throughout the city talking about a wonderful Savior. Such action needs to be imitated in our day when, all too often, evangelism is thought of as an activity performed in a special church service set aside for the purpose rather than as a daily responsibility out in the world of lost men.

While all believers are to be witnesses not all are “evangelists” in the most accurate understanding of that New Testament term. Philip is designated as an “evangelist” (Acts 21:8) and his evangelistic efforts are described in Acts 8:5–13, 26–40. Young Timothy, a pastor, was told to “do the work of an evangelist” (II Tim. 4:5). One of the gifted men given to the church of Christ is the “evangelist” (Eph. 4:11).

What is the gift of evangelism? Basically, it is a God-given ability to present the gospel effectively to lost men and women. It is the gift of announcing the “evangel,” the good news. The very existence of such a gift would indicate that there are some believers who are more effective in leading lost people to Christ than others. Many Christians have become discouraged and disheartened because, despite the fact that they witness for Christ regularly, they seldom see definite decisions resulting. They are often told that if they were truly filled with the Holy Spirit they would be leading large numbers to Christ. While we respect the enthusiasm of those who make such statements it would hardly seem that they are justified by Scripture. Some very godly men and women continually speak to others about their need of Jesus Christ but do not personally lead their hearers to a saving knowledge of Christ. This does not mean, however, that their witness is in vain nor that they are spiritually lacking. They may be “sowers” while others may be “reapers.” The difference lies in a gift of God which some possess and some do not. The gift of evangelism is a very precious spiritual gift and should be honored in the churches of the Lord.

VIII. Biblical Evangelism Results in the Baptism of Believers, Their Identification with a New Testament Church, and Their Continued Growth in Grace

Genuine evangelism is not a “one-shot” effort. It has long-term results. It is one thing to count numerous people who walk down an aisle, who sign a card, or who otherwise make some outward response. It is quite another to see these same people many months or years later walking with God in the fellowship of a Christ-honoring congregation of

believers, giving of their means, working for their Lord, and leading their families in the ways of righteousness.

Paul's ministry at Philippi is an example of genuine evangelism. The Lord opened the heart of the businesswomen, Lydia, and she received the message of the gospel (Acts 16:14). She was then baptized (immersed in water) as well as members of her household who had likewise believed (Acts 16:15). The deep change wrought in her heart by the Lord was immediately evident, not only in this act of obedience, but also in her desire to assist the divine messengers in every way possible (Acts 16:15).

It is evident that a church was established in Philippi and that Lydia was apparently a member of it. Paul met certain "brethren" in Lydia's house (Acts 16:40), evidently a reference to other Christians who met there. Paul later addresses an entire epistle to the church at Philippi.

The proper kind of evangelism is not merely concerned with how many went down into the baptismal tank within a given period. The New Testament emphasis is upon how many are continuing to walk with God. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (III Jn. 4). Spiritual growth and resultant maturity are greatly desired by the Lord (cf. Eph. 4:11-16).

Conclusion

Theology pervades evangelism. Evangelism requires theology. Blessed is the church that sees them both within their proper perspective.

3 THE NEED FOR A SUPERNATURAL EVANGELISM

WHAT ARE THE INGREDIENTS for successful evangelism? Will you become a successful fisher of men if you master certain techniques of presentation and argumentation? Is successful soul-winning guaranteed by a unique ability to overwhelm the sinner with your personality and your Bible knowledge and thus bring him to a decision?

The writer stood one day at the ruins of ancient Athens and meditated upon the evangelistic ministry of the apostle Paul in that city. Standing on Mars Hill he proclaimed the message of salvation to men and women who had never heard it previously. They had no background in Biblical truth. They were steeped in paganism. There was no attempt, nor could there have been, to employ stunts and gimmicks. There was plain, Spirit-filled preaching—the declaration of divine truth. The preacher was facing almost unbelievable spiritual darkness. Such darkness and such ignorance, demanded a supernatural power to clothe the words of the apostle and through them to soften hearts and enlighten minds.

We stand before utter pagans today as we preach Christ. The vast majority of our contemporaries have had little or no background in true Bible knowledge and doctrine. We are preaching to a generation of spiritually-disoriented souls. The foreign missionaries, in whatever country they labor, are facing the same. The staggering spiritual darkness of the twentieth century calls for more than a study of fascinating techniques in evangelism. It demands a supernatural empowering of those who proclaim the good news. Contemporary witnesses need to be confronted again with the Biblical doctrine of total depravity so that they might understand how desperate is the condition of every sinner.

I. Total Depravity: Its Commencement

One of the most important passages in the New Testament is

Romans 5:12. The need for evangelism begins right here. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

Without sin there would have been no need for a Savior. Without sin there would have been no need for a cross. Without sin there would have been no need for evangelism. This significant verse describes the entrance of sin into the human race, and sets forth its terrifying results.

1. Adam’s Sin Was an Historic Sin

Adam and Eve were real people. While this fact might seem elementary to many it is hotly denied by learned theologians of liberal and neo-orthodox persuasion. Some believe that the story of Adam is merely a “myth”—a story containing a theological lesson. Thus there was never an actual person called “Adam,” but the story about him conveys certain truths to us today.

Obviously, if Adam was not an historic person, living in time and on this physical earth, then the theological truths presented in Romans 5:12 ff. are really of no significance. The first sin was committed by a real woman and a real man. If this is not true, then the entire revelation of salvation in Christ is a hopeless muddle. And, of course, one could also ask the question, how could a “myth,” a nonexistent person, possibly father sons and daughters as Adam is stated to have done (Gen. 5:3, 4)?

Paul’s statement that Adam sinned presupposes his acceptance of Adam’s historicity. It also directly contradicts the theory of evolution—the notion that man came into being from lower forms of life through a very long process of change. If the Biblical statements concerning Adam are true, then man is a sinner before a holy God and morally responsible to Him. If man evolved from lower forms of life and was not created by God, then he is not a morally responsible being and does not need a Savior. Were this true there would be no necessity of evangelism to inform him of a Savior Whom he did not need.

2. Adam’s Sin Was a Deliberate Sin

Paul, in discussing the relationship of the woman to the man in God’s order, emphasizes the fact that the sin of the first man was deliberate. “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (I Tim. 2:14). Eve was completely beguiled by the devil (cf. II Cor. 11:3). Adam was not. He knew that if he tasted the forbidden fruit he would thus commit grievous sin against God with dire consequences to himself and his posterity. However, he deliberately did that which he knew was wrong (perhaps driven by his love for Eve and his desire to be with her). The human race did not sin in Eve. It sinned in Adam.

3. Adam's Sin Was a Ruinous Sin

We are told that "sin entered into the world" (Rom. 5:12). The sin of Adam became universal. It "went through" to all men in the sense that it permeated the entire human race. This same thought is found in the phrase, "death passed upon all men," that is, it "passed through or extended through," completely penetrating mankind as a whole. No one can escape its clutches. Sin is everywhere present, inserting its ugliness into every human relationship and activity.

The sin of Adam was also particular. That is, it did not merely make all men sinners, but each and every human being actually participated in Adam's sin. The final phrase of Romans 5:12 is pregnant with meaning and engenders theological discussions of far-reaching proportions which we do not intend to pursue in this booklet. It is rendered in the King James: "all have sinned." However, a more proper rendering of the aorist verb which is used would be: "all sinned." It does not mean that all individuals commit acts of sin. It means, rather, that each human being sinned when Adam sinned. This is made the more evident when Paul declares: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come" (Rom. 5:14). From the time of Adam until the time of Moses, when the written law was given, multitudes died who had never heard of God's law nor consciously transgressed against it. James Stifler comments thusly,

In all this long period death came to those who had "not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression;" that is, they had not broken any formal command. Many more irresponsible babes died in the flood than men. If, then, death is the penalty of some law broken and these had none, it follows that they broke that first law: they sinned in Adam. And the statement "for that all have sinned" means this. (*The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 98).

Adam was not merely a bad example which other men followed. He did not merely sin as representing all other men. All other men *actually sinned* in the loins of Adam even as Levi actually paid tithes in the loins of Abraham though Levi was yet unborn (Heb. 7:9, 10).

II. Total Depravity: Its Characteristics

The term "total depravity" is used by theologians to describe the state in which godless men now find themselves. As a result of Adam's sin every person is totally depraved. The term does not imply that every human being is bestial or depraved in his or her actions. Nor does it

mean that everyone is as bad outwardly as he could be. Total depravity is that state of each unregenerate person in which his whole nature is sinful, his will is captive, and his manner of life is displeasing to God, and from which he cannot escape apart from divine grace.

One's view of man's sinful condition is of vital importance to one's view of the nature of evangelism. Some of the greatest theological controversies of past centuries have developed right at this point. Pelagius, a monk in the early church, held that man was in "neutral," and could do either good or bad depending upon circumstances. Augustine of Hippo, a theologian and church leader, opposed him and defended the Biblical doctrine of man's depravity and helplessness. Later on, James Arminius, a Dutch theologian, espoused views about God's sovereignty and man's responsibility which were weak. He was opposed by theologians of the day who championed the doctrine of total depravity, sovereign grace, and the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit. The followers of Arminius carried his views even further and Arminianism led into full-blown rationalism in later years.

In the nineteenth century an evangelist, pastor, and educator by the name of Charles Finney exercised his ministry in various places in the United States. Influenced by Arminianism, to which he added generous doses of his own ideas. Finney authored a two-volume work in theology which has influenced many since his time. He did not believe that man was totally unable to come to God apart from divine grace, but that each man had the ability to respond to the gospel and that regeneration was primarily an act of the human will and not a direct work of the Holy Spirit. He held many other strange and unbiblical notions and these influenced his outlook on evangelism. Many other illustrations could be given to indicate that one's view of man's sinful condition will have a profound effect upon one's approach to evangelism.

Is man totally depraved, in absolute spiritual darkness, and without ability to come to God? Or, does man possess some power to respond to the gospel? Is his will completely captive to sin? Or can he exert his will for the good? If the latter premises are true, then our approach to a sinner will tend to have certain ingredients. If we can muster sufficient arguments, or exert sufficient pressure upon him, perhaps he will change his ways and come to Christ. What do the Scriptures say about man's fallen condition?

1. Sin Is Corruptness

"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags . . ." (Is. 64:6). The prophet here calls to our minds the hideous form of a leper in advanced stages of the dread disease. Some of his limbs are gone. His eyes are but staring sockets. His countenance is

marred and horrible. Under Old Testament law he was to remain outside the camp and to cry, “unclean” whenever other persons approached.

The word “unclean” which Isaiah employs here describes the filth and stench of leprosy. Sin is spiritual leprosy. The sinner is corrupt and defiled even as was the leper.

2. Sin Is Stubbornness

A vivid description of the sin of Israel is given in the sixth chapter of Jeremiah. Note the following phrases: “as a fountain . . . she casteth out her wickedness” (Jer. 6:7); “their ear is uncircumcised . . . and . . . the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach” (Jer. 6:10); “every one dealeth falsely” (Jer. 6:13).

Their inner spiritual condition was evidenced in their outward and open refusal to obey God. “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein” (Jer. 6:16).

Sin is evidenced in the stubborn refusal of the godless to heed the warnings and invitations of the Lord. “We will not.” This is their reaction. God offers salvation, eternal life, and wonderful peace to those who will receive it, but, “we will not.” Sinners are possessed of a hard and impenitent heart (Rom. 2:5). The idea of stubbornness is contained in this phrase. Their hearts are steeled against the Lord.

3. Sin Is Blindness

The unsaved cannot understand nor appreciate spiritual truth. They have their understanding darkened (Eph. 4:18). Apart from the enlightenment of divine grace a lost man can only say of the new birth, as did Nicodemus of old, “How can these things be?” (Jn. 3:9). Satan has “blinded the minds of them which believe not” (II Cor. 4:4).

Unless a supernatural power brings sight to their blinded minds the unsaved are impervious to all of our specious arguments. The veil must be removed; the darkness must be penetrated. This is done by the Holy Spirit as He uses the Word of God.

4. Sin Is Lifelessness

What is the spiritual state of the sinner? Paul said he is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Thus the sinner is devoid of any spiritual life at all. He is not merely ill or crippled—he is dead. This fact is very important in understanding our task of evangelism.

5. Sin Is Helplessness

The sinner who is dead in sins is completely helpless, “fast bound in sin and nature’s night” as the hymn writer put it. Christ Himself stated

it thusly: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:44). This is a strong declaration. Christ said that no one can come to God apart from a “drawing,” a supernatural moving of God’s Holy Spirit upon his heart. Sin has completely disabled man. It is not a matter of merely persuading him to “make a decision.” His mind and heart must be freed from the shackles which bind him and only divine power can do this. The London Confession of 1677, put forth by English Baptists, declared in the section dealing with sin: “From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.”

And, in another section entitled, “Of Free Will,” the confession states:

Man by his fall into a state of sin hath wholly lost all ability of Will, to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in Sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself or to prepare himself thereunto. (W.L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, pp. 259, 264).

A. H. Strong, the gifted Baptist theologian, put it this way: “Total depravity carries with it total impotence.”

It is true that God invites all men to come to Christ. It is also true that “no man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . .” The truths are not contradictory though they may seem to be to human minds. They are fully reconciled in the infinite mind of God. We must preach the gospel as though every man has the power to respond. We must also preach the gospel with full understanding that no man has the power to respond. It is this balance in approach that made Charles Spurgeon the great gospel preacher that he was. Spurgeon believed that some were the elect of God from before the foundation of the world. He also believed that lost men could not come to God unless they were elect and drawn. But he preached **as though everyone of his hearers had the power to respond**. He preached with urgency, tenderness, and expectancy. We should do the same.

III. Total Depravity: Its Consequences

What are the consequences of total depravity to the human race? What are its implications for evangelism?

1: The Sinner Is Impervious to Human Power and Persuasion

Charles Finney, mentioned earlier as a proponent of man’s ability to turn to God, wrote these words: “The fact is, the actual turning is the

sinner's own act . . . the sinner that minds the flesh, can change his mind and mind God." B. B. Warfield in his masterful article on "The Theology of Charles G. Finney" points out the fact that Finney believed strongly in the power of persuasion to convert sinners because he believed that "obligation is limited by ability; that we are able to do all that we are under obligation to do; that nothing which we cannot do lies within the range of our duty." He cites A. T. Swing who wrote:

The most fundamental of President Finney's reform principles was, that human ability must be commensurate with human duty . . . Sinners ought to respond at once, because they can repent if they will . . . Historically then President Finney stands as one of the most earnest preachers of human ability (B. B. Warfield, *Perfectionism*, p. 173).

Because he had adopted these views Finney saw evangelistic preaching as a kind of an exercise in human logic, presenting powerful arguments such as a lawyer would in order to convince his hearers. We do not argue here against logical and forceful preaching, but it is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit to bring men to Christ. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. 13:23). What does this mean? Simply this. It is utterly impossible by unaided human effort to change the nature of a sinner. He is what he is and he will never change unless a supernatural work of grace is accomplished in his heart.

2. The Sinner Is Doomed to Eternal Hell

The transgression of Adam plunged the entire race into sin and its resultant doom. All of the godless "shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). Hell is the place of eternal punishment for sinners. Its very existence should deepen the concern of Christians for their loved ones, friends, and neighbors who are traveling the broad road of destruction.

Conclusion

Facing a world of lost sinners such as the Bible describes would seem a hopeless task. We preach to men who are hard, blind, careless, rebellious, and utterly oblivious to their need. Thank God, however, for His encouragements and for His provision for all who would evangelize. Christ's command is to "Go" (Matt. 28:19). The very fact that He speaks of teaching and baptizing converts is an indication that we will have converts. His grace will conquer many rebellious hearts and believing sinners will sing the songs of salvation.

4 THE VICTORIOUS EVANGELISM OF A SOVEREIGN GOD

GOD IS THE GREAT EVANGELIST. It was His eternal love that created the “evangel.” It was His marvelous grace that provided the vicarious Substitute whose victory over sin is at the very heart of the good news which we proclaim. It is the “gospel of God” which we preach (cf. I Tim. 1:11).

Despite this fact we face a disturbing picture. On the one hand is the clear command of Christ to evangelize the world. On the other hand is the evident apathy of large numbers of Christians toward this responsibility. In the middle lie multiplied millions of persons in all parts of this world who have never heard the name of Christ, many of whom will live and die without ever hearing it. The vast majority of the world gropes in spiritual darkness. False religions hold entire countries and areas of the world in their sway. The number of truly born-again Christians among the entire earth’s population is infinitesimal. With all of the missionary effort expended and the appeals made, the number of gospel-preaching missionaries is extremely small compared to the world’s population. Outwardly and by human assessment it would appear that the task of evangelism is a monumental failure.

If the ultimate success of Christian evangelism rests exclusively upon the shoulders of men, then it will surely fail. Men are finite. Even Christian men and women at best and with their highest dedication, are very imperfect, erratic, and weak. The finest soul-winners would be the first to admit that they are far from what they should be and what they wish they were.

There tends in every age of church history to be two extremes in the approach toward evangelism. Some, over-emphasizing God’s sovereign election and His efficacious work in the hearts of His elect, put forth comparatively little human effort in seeking to reach the lost for Christ. An example of this extreme would be exemplified in what is known as the “Primitive Baptists” who, because of their unbalanced view of sovereign election and God’s work in salvation, will not employ any means normally associated with evangelistic work such as visitation,

missionary effort, etc. Needless to say the old Primitive Baptists are practically extinct. Churches that will not evangelize will fossilize. However, many other churches who would not be as extreme as this are nevertheless reaching few lost sinners in their area. They are overly consumed with “deep Bible study,” the “doctrines of grace,” or the minutiae of prophecy while thousands perish at their doorstep.

The other extreme is found among those who view the doctrine of sovereign election and irresistible (or efficacious) grace as an abomination and a great deterrent to soul-winning, and tend to emphasize the fact that there are multitudes in hell because some Christians have failed to witness as they should. While there are variations of emphasis and teaching within this position it is generally held by many that God chose no one to salvation in eternity past, but only foresaw those who would respond favorably to a presentation of the gospel and denominated them as the “elect” in the New Testament. Thus election in reality rests upon a human choice of Christ rather than upon a divine choice of the sinner. Because of their strong emphasis upon human responsibility in the matter of evangelism persons holding such views tend to make evangelism the overriding function of the church, and in seeking to produce more and more visible results for their evangelistic efforts some who would hold this position are prone to employ rather bizarre techniques in implementing their goals.

What is sorely needed is a balanced view toward evangelism. The New Testament presents such a view. Evangelism is the responsibility of born-again children of God. Lost people will never hear the gospel unless they hear it from us. “How shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14). God has delivered to His people the wonderful task of telling the good news.

On the other hand, the success of God’s evangelistic plan certainly does not rest upon us poor, stumbling creatures. God will see to it that those whom He intended to save are saved. His purpose will not be thwarted. He will be victorious in His evangelistic purpose. If we fail, He will hold us accountable and deal with us at the judgment seat of Christ. He will also rebuke us through His Word and through faithful teachers and preachers of it. But His work will succeed. All that He planned to save He will save. None will be lost.

I. Victorious Evangelism Began in the Heart of God

It was Jonah, in the misery of his imprisonment and after the consideration of his plight, who cried out from the depths: “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). While the meaning of those words was somewhat different in Jonah’s situation than it would be for us today the utterance certainly embodies a tremendous truth. Salvation is truly of God. He is the Originator of it.

1. God Chose to Allow Sin

Where did sin originate? Was God the author of sin? If He was not the author, then how do we explain its presence when God is omnipotent and could have prevented its appearance? These and many other difficult questions arise in our minds as we consider the subject of evil. Large and learned tomes have been written in an effort to grapple with these questions. It is not the purpose here to give a lengthy discussion, but only to mention what God's Word teaches.

God is not the author of sin. Upon this fact almost all conservative theologians and believers would agree. However, the Scriptures do indicate that sin was in the eternal plan of God. The entrance of sin was no surprise to the Almighty. Without His permission it would not exist. John's statement in connection with his prophecy of the end times is important in this connection. "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). There is a division of opinion among New Testament scholars as to whether or not the phrase, "from the foundation of the world" refers to: (1) the people written in the book, or, (2) the Lamb that was slain. However, whichever interpretation is taken, the verse certainly indicates that sin was in the eternal plan of God. If salvation through a Lamb was planned in eternity past, then it follows that sin was also in view in eternity past.

2. God Chose to Provide a Savior

Further investigation of Scripture enforces the truth that the death of Christ was included in God's eternal plan. Christ was delivered to the cross "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Calvary was no accident. God, in His infinite wisdom, decided to provide salvation for all who would receive it through the merits of His own Son who died bearing the penalty of sin.

3. God Chose to Save His Elect

The New Testament consistently emphasizes the fact that men are saved because God chose them for salvation. Many times believers are referred to as the "elect," the ones picked out or chosen. Christ repeatedly refers to believers in His great priestly prayer as those whom the Father had given Him (Jn. 17:6, 9, 11 et al). It is these who receive eternal life (Jn. 17:3).

Paul viewed believers as chosen of the Lord. "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (II Thess. 2:13). Occasionally one is heard to say that God does not elect anyone to salvation, but only to service. What Scriptural basis there is for such a

statement this writer has never discovered. How could God elect someone to service who He has not elected to salvation? The text here plainly says that believers are chosen “to salvation.”

As mentioned earlier there are some who define election as that act of God whereby He knew beforehand all of those who would respond to the gospel appeal and thus receive Christ as their Savior. The choice of God, according to this scheme, is made upon the basis of foreseen faith and not as an act of the divine will alone. There are several problems with such a view:

(1) The choice to which Scripture refers is an eternal choice and not dependent upon human contingencies.

(2) The choice is according to the “good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:4), in other words, arising solely out of God’s mind and not dependent upon outside influences.

(3) It is definitely stated to be God’s choice, not His foreknowledge of human choice.

Some, misunderstanding the force of the Greek word “foreknowledge,” assert that Romans 8:29 and I Peter 1:2 support the concept that God’s election is based upon foreseen faith in a person. The word “foreknowledge,” however, means far more than merely prescience (information ahead of time). It includes a personal involvement between the one foreknowing and the one foreknown. In Acts 2:23 God’s foreknowledge and His determinate counsel (eternal purpose) are inseparably linked together.

The terms “foreknow” and “predestinate” denote two aspects of the same thing To “know” in the Hebrew sense, means to regard with favor; denoting not merely intellectual cognition, but some kind of interested feeling or affection toward the object It is to be carefully observed that foreknowledge in the Hebraistic sense of “election” means a foreknowledge of the person simply; not of the actions of the person. “Whom he foreknew,” Rom. 8:29, does not mean, “Whose acts he foreknew,” but “Whose person he foreknew.” . . . The holy actions of the elect are the effect, not the cause, of their being foreknown and predestinated (W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, I, 416, 17).

The sum of it all is this: God has chosen for Himself a people. Through the evangelistic efforts of believers He will bring every one of those people whom He has chosen safely home to glory. Not one will be lost. Not one link in the “golden chain” of Romans 8:29, 30 will be broken. Each and every individual whom God foreknew and predestinated will be

glorified and forever enjoy the beauties of heaven. The construction in the original language of the New Testament is very strong in these two verses and proves without question that every person whom God originally planned to save will be saved.

II. Victorious Evangelism Moves through the Hearts of Believers

The immediate reaction that some will have upon reading the foregoing section is this: If God has chosen everyone who will be saved, and if He will bring them without fail to Himself, then what need is there for human effort in evangelistic endeavor? That is a very natural question which can be answered plainly from Scripture.

Within the context of the book of Acts both the sovereign grace of God and fervent evangelistic and missionary effort are set forth. Paul in his missionary travels came to Antioch. He preached Christ there. The inspired historian described what happened. "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:38). Here God's sovereign election is stated to be the cause of the successful evangelism described. Men and women believed the gospel because they had been chosen of God, elected, picked out. The word translated "ordained" means "to order, fix, or determine." It is the same word used in Romans 13:1 of God's appointment of civil rulers. These who responded to the evangelistic appeal were not chosen because they believed. They believed because they were chosen. To some such a statement would seem to be destructive of evangelism. If God has chosen people to be saved, then why should we bestir ourselves to reach them? A study of the surrounding context will reveal the answer to this question.

1. God Works Through Obedient Believers

The text in question is preceded by the account of the missionary call of Barnabas and Saul. The entire assembly of which these two men were a part was evidently involved in both studying the Word of God (note the presence of prophets and teachers), and also waiting upon God in prayer (Acts 13:1, 2). While they recognized that God was sovereign in evangelism they still prayed. Evidently they were praying for more workers among other requests. Successful evangelism begins in the place of prayer. Here were men waiting, longing, looking, expecting God to move, and He answered their prayers. Does the fact that we believe in eternal election obviate the need for persevering prayer? It certainly does not. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:38).

They did not merely study and pray, however. They went. "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts

13:2). “So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed (Acts 13:4). Forth to the fray went men with hot hearts, dedicated men, zealous and committed missionaries. In meditating on the phrase “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed,” which comes later in the chapter, one must not forget those events which led up to that—earnest prayer, the great burden of the local church for a lost world, the commissioning of missionaries to carry the Word of life, and the obedience and departure of these missionaries to engage in their task.

If we believe that God has elected certain souls to eternal salvation, should we then sit at home by our fireside on visitation night and pray that the lost will be saved? A thousand times—No! If we believe that by God’s eternal decree all those whom He foreordained will be saved, should we then refuse to offer ourselves for foreign missionary service, giving as our excuse the fact that if God desires to save the heathen He will do it without our help? No, again— a million times, No. Such is not the doctrine of the New Testament. Such cannot be the proper response of obedient hearts.

Some are wont to say, “Yes, but I know some hyper-Calvinists who believe these things about which you speak and they are dead and cold, without concern for the lost.” That may be true, and, if it is true, those who manifest that attitude are wrong, dead wrong. However, let it also be said that large numbers can be found who do **not** believe in God’s eternal election, who believe that the salvation of lost men rests primarily upon the human efforts of believers, and **THESE ARE ALSO DEAD AND COLD**. The problem is not found in the theology; the problem is found in the human heart. Some of the greatest missionaries who have ever labored for God were among the strongest Calvinists. They believed in a sovereign God who moves at His will to quicken men’s hearts through the gospel. And yet these men and women blazed trails of gospel light through the darkest continents of earth. They believed in God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. Think of Henry Martyn, William Carey, Henry Burns and many others. Think of many faithful missionaries today who believe in sovereign grace but who are pouring out their lives in foreign lands and in our own home land for the sake of souls. They labor, however, in the sure knowledge that it is God who convicts, who enlightens, who brings out of darkness, and who saves those whom He will.

2. God Works Through the Preaching of His Word

Make no mistake about it. God’s elective decree includes gospel preaching and personal witnessing. Men are not saved in a vacuum. They are saved as they hear God’s Word delivered through dedicated servants.

Perhaps we may recoil at the statement that they were “ordained to

eternal life” and thus “believed” (Acts 13:48). Do not forget, however, that this statement is immersed within a context of preaching. At least nine verses in this chapter declare that God’s Word was preached (13:5, 7, 16, 32, 38, 42, 44, 48, 49). Nor was it merely halfhearted declaration. It was red-hot, evangelistic, urgent preaching. Paul pleaded with the lost to receive Christ (Acts 13:38, 39). He warned them of the consequences of rejection (Acts 13:40, 41). He also held them personally accountable *for* the sin of rejection (Acts 13:46, “ye put it from you”). Fervency and urgency can most certainly accompany the preaching of the gospel. Witness George Whitefield, the great evangelist of early America, who was a strong Calvinist, accepting not only sovereign election but particular redemption, and yet whose manner was one of desperate urgency that men might come to Christ.

Belief in sovereign election does not excuse us from continual and all-out efforts in evangelism. Spirit-filled preaching and earnest personal work are used of the Lord to reach the lost for the Savior.

III. Victorious Evangelism Reaches the Hearts of Sinners

Into the pagan center of Corinth came a little Jew by the name of Paul. He was representative of Jesus Christ in a city that knew nothing of Him. As he walked the beautiful thoroughfares he saw temples, many temples, raised in honor of pagan deities. Above the city was the Corinthian Acropolis where on occasion worship was rendered to false gods. The Agora, the commercial center of the city, was filled with men intent on the pursuit of the almighty dollar as well as large numbers of prostitutes plying their trade. What abysmal spiritual darkness! Certainly any evangelistic effort in such a city would be doomed to failure. God spoke to Paul, encouraging his heart with these words: “For I am with thee, and no man shall set upon thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:10). What a strange phrase! “Much people in this city”? Where were they? All Paul could see were pagans, totally ignorant of the true and living God. Yes, that was true. But the people God had in that city were not yet saved. They were still in sin. They were groping in error. But God had chosen them and purposed to save them. He would follow them, disturb them, convince them, and convert them.

Such a statement reveals the practical importance of the doctrine of election to the work of evangelism. “I have much people in this city.’ Be encouraged, Paul. Your preaching will not be in vain. Were it not for My electing grace your evangelistic efforts would be fruitless. Were it not for the gracious lifting of the spiritual blindness which at this moment envelops the hearts of the elect all your reasonings and efforts would produce nothing. Go now and evangelize with the assurance that your preaching will be blessed with results. ‘I have much people in this city.’”

1. God Graciously Invites Sinners to Trust Christ

The doctrine of election does not interfere in any way with the free proclamation of the gospel. There is no contradiction between God's eternal choice and His universal invitation. Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist of London, put it this way:

"Ah," cries one, "what a sweet thing it is the Savior cried, 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!' . . . Sir, my heart is encouraged when I find it written, 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' But, sir, I dare not come because of the doctrine of election." My dear hearer, I would not say anything harshly to you, but I must express my conviction that this is nothing but an idle excuse for not doing what you have no mind to do; because invitations of the most general character, nay, invitations which shall be universal in their scope, are perfectly consistent with the election of God . . . My business is to give the general call—the Holy Spirit will see to its application to the chosen. Oh, my dear hearers! God's invitations are honest invitations to every one of you (from his sermon, "Election No Discouragement to Seeking Souls").

Yes, God does invite every sinner who will come to rest his soul on Jesus. The call is to "whosoever believeth" (Jn. 3:16). The promise is to "whosoever drinketh" (Jn. 4:14). We can eagerly and honestly proclaim the gospel of saving grace to the entire world.

2. God Powerfully Convicts the Sinner through His Word

It was Peter who arose before the crowd on the day of Pentecost and delivered a stirring evangelistic appeal. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts and sad unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). The word rendered "pricked" is a strong one meaning "stabbed." Their hearts were not merely pricked as by a thorn. They were stabbed with the cutting edge of the inspired Word of God. It was a powerful, painful stroke of the Spirit. God broke them under the preaching of Peter.

It should be noted that one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in this age is to convict men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (Jn. 16:7–11). There is a general conviction of sin which may attend the preaching of the Word but which may not result in salvation. We have witnessed many who have been convicted of the Spirit, but who have refused the gospel despite the fact that they may have been deeply

moved. However, there is a more special and particular work of the Spirit of which we now speak.

3. God Purposefully Calls the Elect Through His Word

How does God insure the salvation of those whom He has chosen? Is it possible that they could hear the gospel, but reject it, turn their backs upon the Savior, and thus undo the eternal purpose of God? The Scriptures teach that God in marvelous grace moves upon the wills of His elect, causing them to believe the gospel, to accept the Savior, and thus to be born again. Many times believers are referred to as “the called” (Rom. 8:28; I Cor. 1:12). The word does not mean “invited” but rather “brought.” Charles Ryrie correctly declares that “the calling is not merely a general invitation but that mysterious yet effectual work of God through the Holy Spirit which brings man to saving faith in Jesus Christ” (*The Holy Spirit*, p. 62). The London Baptist Confession of 1677 states:

Those whom God hath predestinated unto Life, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call by his word, and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ . . . effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his Grace (W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 265).

How does God accomplish His work? Through the hearts and lips of faithful Christian witnesses the gospel is presented. Such was the case at the city of Philippi during Paul’s initial missionary effort there. “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14). God opened her heart! Paul’s evangelistic effort was successful as by divine, supernatural power the hardened heart of a sinner was opened to the Word. God employs human instruments, but it is His own Spirit that brings sight to the blind and life to the dead.

Earlier the “golden chain” of Romans 8:29 and 30 was noted. All those whom God purposed to save will come to the Savior. They are foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified. Who will be in heaven, glorified and blessed forever? Each and every one whom God chose in eternity past!

The Son of God while here on earth issued this great invitation and promise: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Jn. 6:37). Two great truths, difficult for us to reconcile, are here brought together: eternal election—

“all that the Father giveth me”; gracious invitation—“him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” The evangelistic success of the triune God is guaranteed by the promise, “shall come to me.” Every last one of those precious persons who were chosen by the Father in eternity past will come to Christ without fail. They “shall come.” Nothing will prevent their coming. Here is a strong statement of the sovereign, powerful, and effective moving of God which guarantees the salvation of every one of the elect. They “shall come.” Despite their arguments, their backgrounds, or their cynicism. They “shall come”—without question—despite their unbelief, their prodigious efforts to reject the Savior, and their continuous scorn of the arguments of Scripture—they “shall come.” God the Holy Spirit will bring them. He will refute their arguments, soften their hearts, remove their blindness, break down their resistance, and overpower them with grace to bring them to Christ.

Theologians often refer to this teaching of Scripture as the doctrine of “irresistible grace.” Some, noting that the elect can still resist the gospel for a time, prefer the term “efficacious grace,” that grace that is unfailingly effective in bringing the elect to salvation. The term “irresistible” as used by theologians, however, does not mean that there will be no resistance, but that if a person is elect of God, there will be no successful resistance. The majestic, all-conquering, dynamic, and omnipotent grace of God will accomplish His eternal purpose and bring to true saving faith each one of God’s elect. One of Charles Spurgeon’s favorite hymns expresses it this way:

*“Why was I made to hear His voice,
And enter while there’s room,
When thousands made a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?
‘Twas the same love that spread the feast,
That sweetly brought me in,
Else I had still refused to taste
And perished in my sin.”*

4. God Saves the Elect by Grace through Faith

The New Testament declares scores of times that men must believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Paul concisely answered the world’s most urgent question when he said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). The elect, though chosen from eternity past, are not saved until they exercise personal faith in the finished work of Christ.

Salvation is by grace, that is, it flows from the unmerited love and concern of God. Salvation is not earned. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of

works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9). A sinner must see himself as vile and hopeless in God’s sight, and then believe on the Son of God who paid the penalty for his sins. Saving faith is more than mere intellectual agreement. It is the act of casting oneself completely upon the Savior Whom God has provided. The review of “four laws” (or a hundred and four), and a mental assent to the same will produce no new birth. “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:13). The sinner must say as the hymn-writer:

*“Vile, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die.”*

Conclusion

A proper knowledge of God’s sovereign purpose gives an entirely new perspective to evangelism. We are not pleading with men, hoping that we can persuade some of them to turn from their sin to Christ. Foreign missionaries, facing the blackness and Satanic opposition of centuries of superstition and ignorance know that their evangelistic efforts are not dependent upon their own cleverness but upon a sovereign God who will do what He intends to do through His Word. We are participants in the victorious evangelism of a sovereign God. He is moving through the nations of the earth gathering out a bride for His Son. He is speaking, convicting, and wooing His elect. He is gathering out of the continents of earth a “people for his name” (Acts 15:14). He is the successful Evangelist. We are like Manoah and his wife, the parents of Samson, who were spectators at a divine demonstration—“the angel of the Lord did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on” (Judges 13:19).

5 THE QUESTION OF EVANGELISTIC METHODOLOGY

IN RECENT YEARS THERE has been a tremendous interest generated in the United States in evangelistic methodology. Pastors and Christian workers travel vast distances to acquire information on the use of various techniques calculated to gather great crowds and thus insure a successful and evangelistic church. The impression is given (not always intentionally) that an “evangelistic” church is one that employs certain methods successfully and that can report large audiences as a result. Young pastors, hearing of the burgeoning church pastored by some other man, are anxious to copy his methods so they too can experience the same.

Certainly one can say that things are being done in the name of evangelism today that have never been done heretofore. This is not necessarily bad. Too often churches get in a rut and continue with the same old program year after year when changes are clearly needed. However, any new programs or methods should be carefully tested in light of Scriptural principles. Please note the words—“Scriptural principles.” Obviously, the New Testament does not set forth a detailed list of particulars concerning every possible evangelistic method that could be employed. It does give us principles, guidelines, by which we may judge not only these matters but everything else that might pertain to our Christian lives.

It would seem that many in places of Christian leadership have failed to Scripturally evaluate various methods that are being employed in the Lord’s work today. In the rush to become successful some brethren are embracing methods that are dishonoring to God and harmful to His people. Dr. Bob Jones, Sr. often exhorted his students: “Don’t sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate.” It is feared that this very thing is being done by some who mean well but who have failed to give sufficient thought to all of the implications of their programs.

I. The Theological Premises of Evangelistic Methodology

Your **methodology** will have a direct relationship to your theology. Much evangelistic methodology is determined by the theology of the one employing it.

1. View of God

What view of God is held by the pastor or evangelist? Is God truly sovereign? Will He accomplish His purposes? Is God struggling with rebellious sinners, seeking to persuade them to trust Christ as their Savior, while the outcome of the conflict uncertainly awaits an act of human will? Is it really true that God has cast a vote for the sinner, the devil has cast a vote against him, and now the outcome depends upon how the sinner casts his vote? If this is true, then let us seek to muster every available means to get the sinner to vote correctly. Let us put the pressure on him and seek to elicit a decision from him.

On the other hand, if God is truly sovereign as the Bible clearly teaches, and if He is abundantly competent to carry out His eternal purposes, then let us prayerfully and regularly sow the seed of God's Word in the hearts of sinners, let us call them to faith in Christ, let us urge them to flee from the wrath to come, and then let us trust the Lord of the harvest to produce the results. This is not a call for carelessness but for concern; not for inactivity but for missionary zeal. All of our efforts, however, are to be conducted in the blessed knowledge that, after all our work is done it is "God that giveth the increase" (I Cor. 3:7). This is the God who has declared: "I have purposed it, I will also do it" (Is. 46:10, 11).

2. View of Man

Is man totally depraved or is he merely crippled or sick? Is he completely unable to come to God apart from divine grace, or is his will capable of choosing either sin or God? If personal salvation is largely dependent upon the human will, then certain methods may prove to be helpful in persuading that will to respond favorably to God's invitation.

If, on the other hand, the statement of Scripture be true and man is a "bondslave of sin" (Jn. 8:34), then his emancipation will not depend upon the skill of men but upon the power of God. If the unsaved man is by nature a child of wrath and is completely given up to a godless manner of life, his mind and heart darkened by sin, then it will require a divine deliverance.

As one can see, these are momentous considerations. Much of the debate regarding evangelistic methodology springs from differing views of these theological considerations. Generally speaking, those who believe that man's will is foremost in his salvation will tend to employ

certain methods. Those who believe that a person's salvation is initiated and consummated by God may tend to shy away from certain methods because of their theological convictions.

II. The Contemporary Problems with Evangelistic Methodology

There are several diverse areas that need to be considered in viewing the problems connected with contemporary evangelistic methodology.

1. Ecumenism

One of the most serious of all problems is that known as “ecumenical evangelism.” This is a method or approach to evangelism popularized by Billy Graham but also employed by many others. Ecumenical evangelism seeks to combine the efforts of both Bible-believers and non-Bible-believers in evangelistic campaigns. The Billy Graham Crusades have specialized in the ecclesiastical diplomacy necessary to bring together diverse elements with the local religious community. Blatant liberals, Roman Catholics, and other non-fundamentalists have been honored and have taken places of leadership in his campaigns. Such methods are utterly indefensible in the light of God’s Word. Following the unholy alliance between Jehoshaphat (the godly king of Judah) and Ahab (the godless king of Israel), the prophet Jehu addressed this searching question to the former: “Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?” (II Chron. 19:2). In case Jehoshaphat were uncertain of the answer Jehu made it clear: “. . . therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord” (II Chron. 19:2). God was opposed to the union of believers and unbelievers then. He is opposed to it now. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and will receive you” (II Cor. 6:14,17).

The principle of broad cooperation as seen in ecumenical evangelism is completely unbiblical. The ecumenical missionary thrusts of “Evangelism-in-Depth” (and similar efforts by other names) which seek the cooperation of believers and unbelievers are condemned by Scripture. The programs of such groups as Campus Crusade which overlook important theological considerations in the name of Christian charity cannot be squared with the Scriptural teaching on separation and the purity of the church.

2. Accommodationism

By “accommodationism” is meant the concept that in order to win sinners we ought to accommodate ourselves to their lifestyle, their mode of dress, their music, and in general, seek to “play down” the differences between us. This approach is particularly notable in contemporary Christian approaches to music. “Christian rock” has become fashionable in many places, its presence supported by the argument that, if unsaved

youth are listening to rock, we ought to capitalize on this musical taste and employ it evangelistically. Thus in many “coffee houses” and other gathering places the blare of “Christian rock” is heard, ostensibly with the purpose of reaching unsaved youth.

The principle of accommodationism is condemned by Paul in the epistle to the Galatians. There were those in the early churches who desired to be circumcised, and urged others to do so, in order to escape persecution that would come to them if they refused. They proclaimed the principle of accommodation to the practice of others around them. Paul, however, condemned these who desired to “make a fair shew in the flesh” (Gal. 6:12). (The phrase means “to cut a good figure.”) Believers are to live “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,” repudiating the godless character of the world and living separated lives for the glory of God (cf. Titus 2:12).

3. Successism

“Successism” is the philosophy of Christian service which constantly calls attention to the outward, visible success of a man, a church, or an organization. It is a very difficult attitude with which to deal because modern-day Christians (particularly Americans) are much impressed by certain elements which they associate with success in Christian work. This particular malady most often appears in connection with evangelistic activities it would seem.

No one would wish to condemn true spiritual success, the “good success” promised to faithful servants of the Lord (Josh. 1:8). Unfortunately, human estimates of spiritual success may not always jive with divine estimates. God’s ways and thoughts are infinitely higher than ours (Is. 55:8, 9).

“Successism” is generally accompanied by an enthrallment with numbers, crowds. This Sunday School is the “largest in Podunk Hollow” or this church is the “fastest-growing in Lower Slobbovia.” But what do such designations really mean? They do not truly reflect the spirituality or stability of the church. There are some men who possess magnetic personalities, who have tremendous gifts of organization and administration, and who could probably build a giant church in the midst of the Antarctic. However, their success does not necessarily mean that they are more spiritual than others, nor that they are more effective pastors than others. The vast majority of pastors are not whirlwinds of activity nor masterminds of organization. They are men of God, humble, godly, preaching the Word and performing their pastoral duties. They are concerned about the lost, but do not see their churches growing by hundreds each year. Are such men failing? There is considerable evidence that many pastors such as these are plagued with feelings of inferiority and failure because their churches are not “super-

aggressive” churches, baptizing hundreds each year and building ever larger edifices. They have received the impression that if one is filled with the Spirit one will witness remarkable growth in his church. This is not necessarily true. Certainly when a pastor is ministering the Word in the power of the Spirit he will be blessed of God and his church will be vital and growing. However, it may not experience prodigious growth, but more of a slow and steady gain. Care needs to be taken to evaluate Christian work with balanced judgment and Scriptural discernment.

As in other areas there tend to be two extremes. Some glorify the large churches and tend to equate bigness with evangelistic success and spiritual power. On the other hand, some identify spirituality and success with “smallness” emphasizing the fact that they major in “quality” and not “quantity.” Their churches may be small and stagnant because they are lazy, not willing to expend the energy that is necessary to reach their communities for Christ. Either attitude represents an extreme of thought. Big churches are not necessarily bad nor are small churches necessarily good nor vice versa. There are many large churches that are doing an outstanding work for God and are engaged in a balanced ministry such as a true New Testament church should have. There is a tendency for some pastors of smaller churches to be forever critical of those who pastor large ones. However, thanks to God should be raised for every sizeable church that is evidencing a fruitful ministry for God. Conversely, the smaller church should be appreciated, if it too is functioning according to New Testament principles. It is significant that in evaluating the work of church builders at the judgment seat of Christ “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (I Cor. 3:13). The word translated “of what sort” is a word of quality. God does not judge churches or organizations upon the basis of their size, but upon the basis of their spiritual quality. Spiritual quality may be present in a church of any size, and it is this for which the Master looks.

It is feared that in twentieth-century Christianity more “fuss” is made over great leaders than perhaps is warranted in the New Testament. The mother of James and John, disciples of the Lord, came to Christ on one occasion requesting prominent places for her sons in the Messianic kingdom (Matt. 20:20–28). The request angered the other disciples who no doubt were afraid that the two brothers would “get ahead” of them (v. 24). In light of this controversy the Lord Jesus emphasized the great truths of servitude, self-effacement and self-sacrifice (vs. 26–28). The Son of God did not come to be “ministered unto,” but rather “to minister.” Christians, while possessing genuine appreciation for those who have been used of God, should avoid adulation and undue “man worship” of human beings. In so doing they will escape one of the entanglements of “successism.”

4. Jesuitism

“Jesuitism” is a term that was originally coined to describe the modus operandi of the Jesuits, a powerful order with the Roman Catholic Church. It is the philosophy which contends that the end justifies the means. If you seek a good and noble purpose, then you are justified in employing questionable tactics in so doing.

This particular approach to evangelism is rampant today. When any question is raised concerning methods that are being employed, the answer will inevitably be given, “But look at all the souls that are being saved!” For many people this seems a sufficient answer. The principle, however, is not a Scriptural one. God never endorses our use of faulty methods on the grounds that we are seeking to accomplish His purposes. God is consistent and wants us to be consistent as well.

Saul led the hosts of ancient Israel to battle against the Amalekites. The command was clear—destroy the entire nation and their property (I Sam. 15:3). Saul disobeyed that command and spared certain things that he thought were of value (15:8, 9). When questioned about his disobedience by Samuel he declared that he disobeyed God’s command so that he could obey God’s command! That is, he disobeyed God’s command to destroy the Amalekites in order that he could obey God’s command to offer sacrifices of praise (15:13–15). Samuel strongly condemned his action and by so much repudiated the principle that the end justifies the means. “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (I Sam. 15:22).

5. Pragmatism

This attitude is closely akin to Jesuitism. Pragmatism is the approach which says, “It works, therefore it must be good.” This defense is being given by some today who seek to justify bizarre and fleshly methods being employed in reaching people for Christ. They point to their large attendance or their mammoth offerings as proof that what they are doing is right. However, we must always remember that the criterion for the judgment of spiritual efforts is Scripture, not **results**. It is possible for one to gather large crowds and produce impressive statistics while employing means that are not countenanced in the Bible nor pleasing to God.

6. Hucksterism

A kind of a carnival atmosphere pervades some churches today. It is the age of the “give away.” “Ride our Sunday School bus. If you do, you may be the lucky one to discover a \$5.00 bill underneath your seat.” One is almost reminded of the days of his youth when, on the dusty paths of the “sideshow row” the barkers would be enticing people into their tents

to see the “Nameless Wonder”—“Yes-s-sir, folks, it walks, it talks. It crawls on its belly like a reptile. Only one quarter, one fourth of a dollar bill, lets you see this astounding creature!”

One is sickened by the excesses to which some have gone today in their quest for additions to their rolls. It smacks of the flesh and degrades the gospel. The high and holy message of the cross has been dragged in the dust before the public eye. It is time that Christians everywhere cried, “Enough!”

We do not need cheap and sensational promotional gimmicks to help us attract the attention of sinners. This is not to repudiate all promotion. Certainly there is a place for promotion that is in good taste and is honoring to Christ, dignified and effective. The church of Jesus Christ, however, ought not to be made into a three-ring circus. The church that is preaching the Word of God in the power of the Spirit will be able to attract sinners and will see many of them saved without resorting to cheap and tawdry methods.

III. The Apostolic Practice in Evangelistic Methodology

It is interesting to note that the New Testament really does not emphasize evangelistic methodology. While a study of the New Testament will give some idea of how they did it this is not a major consideration. The emphasis is more upon the message and the messenger. Most of the gatherings for prayer and worship were to call on the God of heaven to endue His Word with power and to make His servants successful in their ministries (Acts 4:29–33 et al). There was a cognizance of the fact that evangelistic work was completely dependent upon the mighty God for its success, and this awareness drove the early Christians to their knees to seek the face of the Lord.

There were at least five principal methods used by the apostles in their evangelistic ministry.

1. Preaching

The apostles and the early Christians were preachers, proclaimers of eternal life in Jesus Christ. The word *kerygma*, “the thing preached,” is used of their proclamations. God employs the “foolishness of preaching” to save those who will believe (I Cor. 1:21). Paul associates the gospel with the “preaching of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 16:25). A “herald” (*kerux*) was one who made official proclamations to the public. This title is given to preachers in the New Testament. Paul states that he was “ordained a preacher” (I Tim. 2:7).

It is important to notice that the apostles did not go out to “rap” with those in ignorance and darkness nor to exchange religious opinions with them. The concept of “preaching” is one of authoritative declaration. It is no tentative announcement, or stumbling quest for

truth. It is a proclamation of a finished work in Christ.

Sometimes the word for “evangelizing” is translated “preaching” in the King James Version such as in Acts 17:18 where Paul is said to have “preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.” He was telling the good news concerning Christ and His victory over sin and death. Such preaching took place in many different settings and was a principle method of reaching people with the gospel.

2. Teaching

Teaching can also be used as a means of evangelism. In reviewing his ministry at Ephesus Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had taught publicly and that his teaching included the doctrines of repentance and faith (Acts 20:21). Probably thousands of boys and girls have first been confronted with the gospel by their Sunday School teacher or perhaps by the teacher of a released-time class or a school-day children’s club. In home Bible classes many have been reached for Christ. There are numerous kinds of teaching situations which can be used of the Holy Spirit to bring people to faith in Christ.

3. Witnessing

Believers are often referred to as “witnesses” in the epistles. Also the word “witness” is sometimes applied to God (such as in Phil. 1:8 and Rom. 1:9) where we find the phrase: “God is my witness.” The word includes both the ability to testify to ascertainable facts, things known to be true by the witness, and also the ability to confess personal convictions. Interestingly enough, the Greek word, *martus*, is the word from which we derive our “martyr.” It came to be used in this fashion apparently because those who testify for their convictions very often suffer for it.

Christ appointed believers as witnesses of the Savior. Paul, while preaching in Antioch in Pisidia, spoke of the death and resurrection of Christ, declared that many had personally observed these events, and that these were “witnesses” to the people, declaring the “good news” of salvation (Acts 13:26–32).

Every believer is to be a witness for Christ. He is to tell others of the work of Christ for sinners, and also to give his own personal testimony as to what Christ has done for him. “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). We should witness in the shop, in the office, on the street, at school, in our homes, and wherever God may place us. Evangelism is not the exclusive occupation of a few, but the blessed privilege of each believer.

4. Praying

What great things are wrought by prayer! Not the least of these is the salvation of a lost person. How we ought to intercede before God for our lost loved ones, friends, and associates! The apostle's heart was greatly burdened as he wrote: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1). Paul was praying for the salvation of his kinsmen in the flesh. We can hardly improve upon this method. As we pour out our hearts to God on behalf of lost souls He will lift the blindness and give them an appreciation of the glories of Christ, causing them to trust Him for their salvation.

5. Writing

What powerful appeals to the unsaved have come from the pens of God's servants! Perhaps the greatest of these is the Gospel of John, God's inspired message to the lost sinner. "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name" (Jn. 20:31).

The gospel is found of course in other places in the New Testament beside John's Gospel. However, this Gospel, in a unique way, was intended as an evangelistic appeal. Since the time John authored it many hundreds and thousands of tracts, booklets, and books have been written through the centuries to explain the gospel and urge upon the unsaved the necessity of trusting God's Son. Written ministry is still an important means of evangelism.

IV. The Scriptural Principles Governing Evangelistic Methodology

In evaluating methods employed in evangelism one needs to consider great Scriptural principles. Our methods as well as our message must be in line with these.

1. Do They Honor God and His Word?

As we have already observed theology must govern evangelism. Evangelism must be conducted within a context of proper Scriptural interpretation and of correct doctrinal emphasis. In speaking of his call from God Paul states that he was commissioned "to preach (evangelize) among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:5). To properly understand his statement it should be carefully studied in the light of the entire surrounding context. He speaks of being a minister "by the effectual working of his power" (v. 7). In his evangelistic ministry he proclaims the "riches of Christ," evidently expounding the entire New Testament doctrine of salvation and not merely a few select and disconnected thoughts. As an evangelist among the Gentiles he also kept

in mind the “manifold wisdom of God” and His “eternal purpose” (vs. 10, 11), remembering that evangelism is simply the carrying out of God’s eternal plan.

There is a tendency accompanying much evangelistic work for men to call attention to themselves. Some men gifted in evangelism are strong personalities and may build empires around themselves, sometimes exercising dictatorial powers over churches and organizations (though this is not always or necessarily true of men gifted in evangelism). Methods are sometimes employed which may cause people to be impressed with the preacher or perhaps the church, but not necessarily with the Lord. All believers should fear the sin of Herod who was smitten of God and died “because he gave not God the glory” (Acts 12:23).

The question is simply this: After people have visited a church or gospel meeting do they come away impressed with the holiness of God, with the awfulness of sin, and with the graciousness of Christ, or do they come away impressed with the personality of the preacher, or the quality of prizes, or the efficiency of the organization? No methods employed in the Lord’s work should obscure the glory of Him Who is the supreme delight of our hearts.

2. Do They Appeal to the Baser Instincts of the Flesh?

God’s Word has considerable to say about the manner in which we conduct God’s work. The apostle Paul declared that his ministry was not with “deceit,” that is, did not involve elements which misled people. It was not with “uncleanness,” that is, conducted with impure motives. His ministry was not one of “guile,” that is, an approach involving stealth and cunning (1 Thess. 2:3–5).

What about our ministry today? Do we promise children or adults some material benefit so we can “smuggle” the gospel to them? Do we make wild and extravagant claims for some event which is advertised which people find is not as they thought it would be when they attend? Paul’s method of evangelism was straightforward. He did not seek to ingratiate himself with men nor did he employ flattering words (1 Thess. 2:4, 5). He was honest and upright, presenting the gospel in clarity and truth, trusting the Holy Spirit to use it.

In their zeal to gather ever more Sunday School pupils and church attenders some churches vie with one another in giving bigger and better lollipops, sandwiches, drinks, and prizes. The result is that multitudes come for the “loaves and fishes,” but one wonders what lasting spiritual work is really done in the hearts of the great majority.

3. Do They Promote Dignity of Worship and Reverence for God?

There is a certain dignity and reverence which ought to be associated with the worship of a holy God. Neither dignity nor reverence

necessarily imply spiritual coldness or undue formality. A church can worship in a dignified manner while still exhibiting spiritual warmth and vitality. Some, thinking that the more informal a church is in its services the more evangelistic it will be, have gone beyond the bounds of good taste in allowing extremes of informality to develop.

Methods of promotion and evangelism that detract from God's glory are to be shunned. The attitude of the seraphims in the presence of a majestic God should give us instruction as to our manner of worship. They covered their faces and their feet and extolled the holy character of God (Is. 6:2, 3). In later centuries when a light and frivolous manner had developed in the Jewish house of worship Christ rebuked those who fostered it (Jn. 2:13–17). Someone has summarized the duty of a preacher as follows: To bring men face to face with God and leave them there. Certainly what little we know of the public worship of the early churches would indicate that there was a sense of the majesty and power of God. We are told that they “ministered to the Lord and fasted (Acts 13:2). They were walking in “the fear of the Lord” (holy reverence, awe, Acts 9:31). All of these facts plus others that could be cited, combine to instruct us that service to God should be conducted in a dignified manner worthy of the great God Whom we worship.

4. Do They Tend to Fill the Church with Tares?

Churches and their pastors and workers may be fundamental in their doctrine, and very sincere in their hearts, but, by faulty methods, may be filling church pews with people who are not truly born-again. Pressure to produce statistics may lead some to employ methods that are subversive of the very thing they are trying to do—build strong, New Testament churches. In an astounding admission one well-known brother, in addressing a large company of preachers, stated that a considerable percentage of the people whom he had baptized and were members of his church were probably not saved. Yet, in the same meeting, he was encouraging the use of various “high-powered” methods to fill up the pews. The words of another wise and greatly used minister are recalled: “It is possible to build a large crowd without necessarily building a strong church.”

The Devil is busy sowing “tares” among the wheat (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). “Tares” were mock wheat, looking almost identical to the real thing until the time of harvest when the difference appeared. Anxious to corrupt and weaken Christ's churches on earth the Devil seeks opportunity to sow among its members those who are not born again, but who may profess and appear to be so. Sometimes he may be unwittingly aided by God's people who, in their enthusiasm to see visible growth, employ methods of evangelism that are not solid.

There of course is a danger on the other side as well. Some

churches expect new converts to be walking encyclopedias of Bible knowledge and paragons of perfection before they can ever be considered for church membership. As a result many are kept waiting for baptism and membership for months and, in some cases, years. This extreme approach can hardly be justified from Scripture. People who are genuinely saved and who understand the basics essential to an intelligent participation in baptism should obey the Lord in this regard and be heartily welcomed into the fellowship of God's people.

5. What Results Will Their Employment Have in the Lives of Believers?

Years ago a preacher friend, in discussing the wisdom of certain methods employed in a local church, said, "If you create an appetite, you will have to feed it." Those who embark on the course of gathering crowds through the use of gimmicks will have to produce greater and more exciting gimmicks each year in order to maintain themselves. Congregations become accustomed to this. It tends to make them dependent upon a continual dose of religious excitement rather than upon the Word of God, prayer, and solid doctrinal preaching. There may develop a tendency to walk in dependence upon the flesh rather than in dependence upon the Spirit (Gal. 5:16).

One of the important ministries of the pastor is to see that his congregation is "edified" (built up) in the faith so that they become strong, mature, and stable Christians (Eph. 4:12, 16). The question must always be asked when considering the use of any method, "Will the use of this method tend to produce strong believers, to honor God, and to build up the church, or, will it tend to weaken believers and thus the church as a whole?"

Conclusion

All methods must be brought to the Lord for inspection and approval. As our Lord He has the right to instruct us as to how we should conduct His work. We are to seek to be "approved unto God" (II Tim. 2:15). The Lord examines our work and will deal with us at the judgment seat of Christ about it (Rom. 14:10; II Tim. 4:14; Rev. 2:2, 8).

6 EVANGELISM: THE OUTREACH OF NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES

THE EVANGELISTIC ACTIVITY DESCRIBED in the New Testament flowed out of New Testament churches, and the results of that activity—new believers in Christ—flowed back into those churches. The churches were the center of New Testament evangelism. To them was committed the responsibility of reaching the world with the gospel of Christ.

Clear thinking regarding the nature and functions of the New Testament church are required in order to engage in God-honoring evangelism. False notions regarding a local church abound and thus often hinder the type of evangelism commanded in the New Testament. Some see little value in an organized local church, preferring to emphasize the so-called “invisible” church, the mystic unity of all believers. Others, while acknowledging that local churches have some importance, believe that they are not organized bodies but merely gatherings of true believers wherever they might assemble, without any necessary organization. Still others believe that the New Testament presents the importance of the local congregation, but they do not believe any specific or binding instructions are given as to its form or its ordinances. Some have gone so far as to say that there are elements of congregationalism, presbyterianism, and episcopalianism in the New Testament and that no single type of organization is prescribed. Their attitude toward baptism is often similar—one may sprinkle, pour, or immerse and be within the bounds of revelation.

Not only is there confusion regarding the nature of a New Testament church but also regarding its relationship to world evangelism. Organizations completely unrelated to any local church or group of churches have proliferated in the twentieth century, many of them for the purpose of evangelizing the world or some segment of it. These have clamored for the attention and support of the Christian public, and many have been very successful in getting it. In many cases such organizations become a real problem for the pastor who is trying to lead his flock in a Scriptural ministry. The members of his church are often influenced by Christian organizations outside the church who do

not hold the same position as the church on matters of doctrine and practice. If the pastor takes a stand against such groups, he is castigated by some as uncooperative, unspiritual, and lacking in concern for the lost. If he does not take a stand against them, but permits his church to become involved with these organizations, the distinctive doctrinal and evangelistic ministry of the church may be lost through such compromise.

What should be done? There is only one thing to do and that is to carefully study what the New Testament says about the local church and its relationship to evangelism, and then follow that divinely inspired pattern.

I. Evangelism: The Outreach of an Organized Church

According to apostolic instruction the local, visible church is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). This would indicate that the local congregation is responsible for maintaining the truth, for upholding and defending it in the community, and for propagating it to the ends of the earth. The so-called “invisible” church has not been delegated this responsibility. It is, rather, the responsibility of an assembly, a local church.

At the conclusion of Peter’s stirring address on the Day of Pentecost a large number received Christ as their Savior (Acts 2:41). These were immersed in water, in obedience to Christ’s command, and were constituted a local congregation. (The words “added unto them” would better be rendered, “added together,” in the sense that they were united into a functioning body; Acts 2:41.) They “belonged” to a group. They were “members” of a church. That it was a church with a recognized constituency is evident from the fact that later on a group of men were elected to serve in the church. “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out from among you seven men of honest report” (Acts 6:3). The selection was made “out from among” the entire group, indicating that there was a stated membership from whom officers could be selected.

In the Greek state-cities the “ecclesia” (called-out ones, church) were those who qualified to vote and participate in the conduct of the civic business. They were a definite body. There was an organization involved. So Christ has not left upon earth merely some chance gathering of believers, but rather some functioning “ecclesias,” some bodies organized after His instructions. It is not an accident that, following the description of the initial organization of the Jerusalem church, and its subsequent division of responsibility to the seven men, we are told “the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly” (Acts 6:7). This does not imply, of course, that successful evangelism is dependent upon mere outward organization. It does indicate, however, that this great church, the first

one established in the Roman world, prospered as a center of evangelism even as it grew and stabilized internally.

II. Evangelism: The Outreach of an Instructed Church

When Christ ascended back to glory He bestowed upon His Church various gifted men who are mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. The gift of the apostle and the prophet were temporary gifts to be exercised during the infancy of the Church and then removed. The gift of the evangelist is still being bestowed. The pastor-teacher is also a vital part of the divine program today. This gift is exercised within the structure of a New Testament church, as other Scriptures indicate.

1. A Gifted Pastor

The term “pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11) does not refer to two separate gifts, but one—the pastor-teacher. The pastoral heart and ability is a gift from the risen Christ. God bestows upon some men a special ability to shepherd (pastor) a flock of believers with all that this entails.

The gift of the pastor-teacher differs from that of the evangelist though there are probably some men pastoring churches who, in reality, possess more the gift of an evangelist than the gift of a pastor-teacher. The evangelist has special and unique ability to successfully present the gospel to lost people. As a result of this God-given ability he will see more people come to Christ under his ministry than will some others who do not possess this gift.

Great harm can be done by leaving the impression that **all** pastors, if they are filled with the Spirit, are going to be leading hundreds of people each year to Christ. This author is acquainted with large numbers of pastors in the United States and elsewhere. Some of these are extremely successful in personal evangelism and, through their own witness, lead many people to Christ within a given period of time because God has given them a special ability. However, there are many others who are true men of God, who faithfully engage in personal evangelism, witness to the lost, but who do not experience the outstanding response that some of their ministerial brethren may experience. Such men may be strong expositors of the Word, leading growing and prosperous congregations. Yet they may not personally lead as many to Christ as someone else. This is not a reflection upon their spirituality nor their love for the lost, but is simply related to the particular spiritual gifts they may possess.

Let no one misunderstand the previous remarks. Every pastor (or child of God) should be a consistent witness for Christ to the lost. This is mandatory upon us. Because we do not possess the gift of evangelism does not excuse us from endeavoring to reach as many lost people as

possible with the gospel of Christ. Nor should we think that because we do not possess the gift of evangelism we will have no success in soul-winning. Each believer can have the joy of leading some to a saving knowledge of Christ if he faithfully witnesses, using the Word of God and depending upon the Holy Spirit to bless his witness. However, there may be a difference in degree of success. Because some believers see others apparently being very successful in their soul-winning efforts while they are not, they tend to give up or to excuse themselves from any effort to reach the lost. This is a Satanic and subtle trick. Let us not get our eyes on others' success, but upon our own privilege and responsibility. Let us not be discouraged because others, perhaps specially gifted of God in the area of evangelism, are more successful than we. Let us rejoice in their successes and continue to tell those whom we meet of the glories of the Christ of God.

The gift is referred to as the "pastor-teacher" because his primary ministry is to teach God's Word in a systematic and clear manner so that the saints can grow and the Lord's work flourish. A "pastor-teacher" is not an evangelist. His work is different from that of an evangelist. He is responsible for the nurture of Christians, and for the exposition of God's Word. If he accomplishes that work as he should, the church will be reaching out into the community and its numbers will be multiplying.

2. A Maturing Congregation

The pastor-teacher is responsible to minister the Word of God so that the saints will be perfected (Eph. 4:12). The word rendered "perfecting" was used to describe the setting of bones that were broken or out of joint. It was used to describe the mending of broken nets. It refers here to the ministry of the pastor as he teaches and preaches God's Word and thereby brings the saints to a well-rounded Christian life out of which they are capable of effectively witnessing for Christ. Spiritual growth is vital to effective witnessing. It is feared that we are exhorting many saints to win souls to Christ who are really not prepared to do so. They are spiritual babes and in need of much teaching, or they are carnal believers in need of much cleansing.

The systematic, expository preaching of the Word of God is the best way in which to equip the saints for fruitful life and ministry. Bizarre and crowd-attracting messages may not possess the necessary spiritual nutriment that believers need. The exposition of God's Word is certainly not antithetic to a ministry of evangelism. It should be the very foundation of it.

3. A Diversified Ministry

The saints are to be edified "for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12), that is, so as to equip them for effective service for God. This

phrase is not confined to evangelism but would certainly include it. Too long the ministry of the church has been thought to be primarily that of the “full-time,” paid servants of the church, the pastor and others. This is certainly not in line with New Testament teaching and practice. Each believer is to exercise a ministry for God, depending on the spiritual abilities given to him by the Spirit. “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (I Cor. 12:7).

God has planned for a congregation to include people with diversified gifts. As these people employ their gifts the congregation will prosper spiritually, and will also expand numerically. It will evidence life and vitality.

III. Evangelism: The Outreach of a Worshipping Church

Most unfortunately, a dichotomy has been created in the minds of many between worship and evangelism. It would seem (to listen to some) that a quiet, reverent worship service is an unholy abomination and a deterrent to evangelism.

What fools we mortals be! How could we possibly banish services of worship to a holy God, so clearly called for in the Bible! And why should we? Were not sinners cut to the heart by the Spirit of God while sitting in the proper and quiet atmosphere of the church in Northhampton while Jonathan Edwards was preaching? What about the evangelistic fervency of Charles Spurgeon? Yet there were no special numbers, no musical extravaganzas such as are common today, and the hymns used were the great, solid, doctrinal hymns of the Christian church.

What was the secret of the evangelistic boldness of the early Christians? “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). The text no doubt refers to the fact that the disciples were recognized as having been followers of the Lord during his earthly ministry. However, a deeper spiritual meaning than that is evident. They had fellowshiped with Christ—walked and talked with Him— and were therefore bold ambassadors for Him. To spend much time “with Jesus” is to set one’s heart on fire to tell others about Him. This same principle is seen in the fact that Saul and Barnabas, just spent time with others and “ministered to the Lord” (Acts 13:2). Worship must precede and accompany evangelism. Believers must have their minds filled with the glory of the God of grace if they are to proclaim His gospel successfully. The disciples along the Emmaus road listened raptly to the greatest Expositor of Scriptures ever—the Lord Himself—came away with their hearts burning, and almost immediately were speaking of Christ to others (Luke 24:13–35). Worship and instruction led to a bold confession

of Christ.

IV. Evangelism: The Outreach of a Going Church

Evangelism must be done where lost people are. The old farmer, fishing in a tub full of water in his back yard, was chided by his neighbor—"Man, there ain't no fish in that tub. Why are you wastin' your time like that?" "Yeah," came the reply, "I know there ain't no fish in here, but it's just so powerful convenient." Many churches are engaged in convenience evangelism" which is really very little evangelism at all. They spend most of their time talking to themselves, still priding themselves on the fact that they have a Sunday evening evangelistic service though virtually no unsaved ever attend it. Others brag that theirs is one of the few churches in the area that gives a public invitation, yet failing to notice that practically no sinners are ever present to respond to such an invitation.

An examination of the book of Acts will reveal the fact that the early Christians permeated the society of their day with the gospel. Their evangelism, for the most part, was not done within the confines of a building nor in the regular gatherings which they held. It was done out in the arena of life, out in the everyday world where thousands of lost people thronged. "And daily in the temple, and from house to house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). They propagated the gospel to the multitudes in public gathering places and were haled into court for it (Acts 4:13-22). They "filled Jerusalem" with their doctrine (Acts 5:28). They "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). They did personal work on conveyances (Acts 8:29 ff.), and in jails (Acts 16:25 ff.). They lifted their voices in the great centers of public discussion (Acts 17:22 ff.). So widespread was the evangelistic effort of the early Christians that the apostle spoke of the gospel as having been preached "to every creature which is under heaven" (Col. 1:23). By this he meant to state that the gospel had been widely proclaimed in the civilized world.

Far too many churches have very little outreach in their communities. This is often because they have not studied their particular situation with a view to finding ways and means of reaching sinners with the gospel. Many people continue to connect evangelism primarily with a church building—getting people into a building in order to get them saved. Now it is well and good to get sinners into a church building, but this is certainly not essential to their salvation. Multitudes of lost people will never set foot inside a gospel-preaching church until they are first saved and given a desire by the Spirit of God to fellowship with other Christians. We must reach them where they are—in the schools, the factories, the business places, and the homes.

V. Evangelism: The Outreach of a Stable Church

Perhaps the most significant statement concerning the first church at Jerusalem was this—"and they continued stedfastly" (Acts 2:42). This is a very important statement. It specifies the type of evangelism conducted by the early church. Such a statement, plus the emphasis of the epistles on a solid Christian growth, should help us to understand that God is not merely interested in the counting of noses. He is interested in the building of Christian character and in the long-range development of persons who will glorify Him in their lives. He desires saints that are continuing steadfastly.

1. The Church Continued in Doctrine

To fulfill completely Christ's Great Commission involves more than leading a person to faith in Christ. It includes their thorough instruction in the revealed doctrines of Scripture (Matt. 28:19, 20). The post-Pentecost Christians continued in the "apostles doctrine" (Acts 2:42). The content of the "apostles doctrine" is not a secret, it is contained in the inspired epistles of the New Testament.

Evangelism should always be linked with thorough instruction in doctrine. Converts need to be taught, not merely the basic truths, but all that God's Word has to offer. Churches should plan as to how they may systematically expose new converts to the great truths that will make them strong in the Lord. In this day when experience is glorified above doctrine, thus producing unstable, undependable Christians, we need to teach . . . teach . . . and teach some more so that those whom we lead to Christ are not "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14).

2. The Church Continued in Fellowship

The "fellowship" referred to in Acts 2:42 no doubt refers to the wonderful Christian fellowship enjoyed by the believers together. In order to properly enjoy fellowship "with one another" we must be in fellowship "with him" (1 Jn. 1:3-7). The reason some church members are unhappy and dissatisfied with the fellowship of other believers is because they themselves are out of fellowship with God. Vertical fellowship is essential to horizontal fellowship.

New converts need the fellowship of other believers. Sometimes this is one of the most difficult things to achieve in a church. The older members rejoice initially when someone receives Christ, shake their hand, and give them momentary encouragement. As the weeks pass, however, the older Christians, long established in the church, tend to drift back to their friends and forget the new convert who has few Christian friends and desperately needs to make more. Often new

converts become disillusioned, and, after a period of struggle, stop coming to the services. In many cases it is because they have been shut out of any meaningful fellowship and they feel isolated and insecure. Pastors and churches should give some careful thought as to how they might better provide for the new converts.

3. The Church Continued in the Breaking of Bread and in Prayers

In addition to instruction in doctrine and fellowship with believers the early Christians also participated in the Lord's table (the breaking of bread) and in public gatherings for prayer. The regular gathering at the table of the Lord was considered an important part of the believer's life. It is still important. To remember the Lord in His death, burial, resurrection, and second coming is one of the most blessed experiences a believer could have.

Prayer—this was the real fountainhead of the early church's success. They were continually on their knees before God. God bared His arm on their behalf and mighty works were done.

What was the result of this steadfast continuance? “. . . the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved” (Acts 2:47). This Jerusalem church—stable and strong—was successful in evangelism. There was a constant stream of converts being received into her membership. She stands as an example to all local churches—a balanced ministry involving evangelism coupled with doctrinal exposition and careful teaching.

VI. Evangelism: The Outreach of a Spirit-Empowered Church

If anything is clear in the book of Acts it is the fact that the early churches owed their amazing vitality to the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Someone has suggested that the book of Acts could be called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” A thrilling record it is! The gospel truth was scattered throughout the Roman Empire by believers who were enthusiastic about their new-found faith.

1. The Fruit of the Spirit

A Spirit-filled believer will evidence the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22. These are spiritual characteristics which can only be produced by the Spirit of God. Certainly a Spirit-controlled life is fundamental to an effective and consistent witness before lost men. How often has a believer attempted to bear witness of Christ in his neighborhood or at his work only to undo what his lips have said with what his life evidences. The distribution of gospel tracts will not have a great deal of effect if done by one whose life fails to reveal the graces of the Spirit day by day. It is this spiritual fruit—the results of a life abiding in Christ and controlled by the Spirit—of which Christ speaks in John

15:16.

2. The Boldness of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit can grant boldness of witness to even the most timid believer. Certainly Stephen, the first church martyr, was embued with such boldness when he proclaimed Christ as Savior before the unbelievers of his day. He was full of the Holy Spirit, full of faith and power, and spoke with such forcefulness that his adversaries could not resist the truth which he gave (Acts 6:5, 8, 10). This is not to say that everyone who is filled with the Spirit will be a forceful public speaker, but it is certainly evident that the Spirit empowers and emboldens Christians to speak God's truth. It was no weak and spineless message which Stephen gave. He charged the nation of Israel with the enormous sin of rejecting God's Son and of refusing God's Spirit (Acts 7:51,52). A Spirit-filled witness does not merely mouth pious platitudes and comfortable assurances, but rather he challenges sin and causes men to consider their evil ways. The hearers of Stephen were "cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth" (Acts 7:54). Their crimes were consummated in their stoning of God's messenger.

3. The Power of the Spirit

Evangelism conducted apart from the power of the Holy Spirit will be carnal, fleshly, and, from God's standpoint, a failure. Paul declared that his preaching was "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (I Cor. 2:4). The apostles and New Testament Christians were filled with the Spirit, evangelized with boldness and great power, and saw the results of their witness in those who were saved (Acts 4:31-33).

In personal evangelism the Holy Spirit directs as well. He led Philip to a hungry heart (Acts 8:29). He opened his lips, gave him the ability to explain the Scriptures, and finally, through his ministry, brought the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ (Acts 8:36-39). It was the Holy Spirit who directed in world-wide missionary effort, thrusting out workers and guiding their paths (Acts 13:2-4; 16:6, 7).

The Spirit of God can cut through the hardest heart and can convince the most stubborn sinner. Who would have thought that Saul of Tarsus would ever become a hated Christian! Yet God's Spirit convicted him, brought him low, and transformed him into a believer and fervent ambassador of the cross.

Conclusion

God be praised for every local congregation that is evangelizing according to the New Testament pattern. It may be a large congregation in a vast population center, attracting multitudes to its ministry. Or, it

may be a small church planted in a very difficult area of limited potential. However, if the believers in either church are filled with the Spirit and faithfully spreading the good news, God will honor His Word and people will be added to the church. In the one case there may be large numbers, in the other only a steady, if small, number. In both cases God will be honoring His Word and bestowing blessing upon His people.

CONCLUSION

WHILE SOUND THEOLOGY MUST not be neglected in our approach to evangelism it must be remembered that evangelism is the overflow of a broken heart. Centuries ago a man bowed in the presence of his God, and poured out a floodtide of tears over the grievous sins of the rebellious nation of Israel. His name was Jeremiah. Faithful prophet he was—telling his people in no uncertain terms that they were sinners and deserved the divine judgment which they received. But Jeremiah cried, “Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?” (Lam. 1:12). His eyes ran with tears (Lam. 1:16). While the ministry of an Old Testament prophet is to be distinguished from that of a church-age witness for Christ there is a similarity which ought to transcend the dispensations—a heart burdened and broken over men and women who are rebels against God.

Standing on the brow of the hill overlooking one of the most privileged cities in the world—Jerusalem—our blessed Lord wept (Lk. 19:41). Why did He weep? His heart was broken over the unbelief, hostility, and rebellion that characterized the leaders and citizens of that city. He had preached, but now He wept. God deliver us from our dry-eyed, superficial, and programmed evangelism which does not force us to our knees to wrestle with God over the souls of men! If our Lord wept, then we should weep!

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave.
Weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen;
Tell them of Jesus the Mighty to save.*

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