

The Local Church and Evangelism

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These are days in which there is great stress on organization, including the organization of great world congresses to talk about evangelism. What are we to think of these huge affairs? Where does the local church figure in evangelism? What is evangelism? Does theology have anything to do with evangelism? And what about the relationship of preaching to evangelism? These are some of the issues which I wish to address in the following article. To begin with an issue might be discussed which is highly relevant and which affects most local churches. I refer to evangelistic organizations outside the churches. Let us look at an example.

An article in *Crusade* magazine, November 1973, is devoted to a description of a new evangelistic project. Conscious of the fact that this new organized effort, nicknamed *Power*, is not the first scheme to descend on the churches from an organization outside the churches, the writer declares: "Whilst it is true that *Power* cannot be described as a truly 'grass roots' movement (can anything?), it is doubtful if any project has been the subject of such widespread and intensive discussion at all levels as this one." Several comments are called for. The project, it is claimed, is the subject of "widespread and intensive discussion". This generation has talked more about evangelism than any other, with massive amounts of money being spent on yet more discussion. World Congresses on evangelism and about evangelization have multiplied words about this subject. Yet talking about evangelism has not arrested spiritual declension going on around us. Furthermore, modern evangelism, particularly as practiced in America, has not arrested the awful moral decline and darkness of the world

whereas the teaching ministry exercised in times of reformation has dispelled darkness and brought light to the nations.

Turning to the Crusade article again the comment about "grass roots" needs analysis. "*Power* cannot be described as a truly 'grass roots' movement (can anything?)", says the writer. In reply I would assert the claim that Christians of previous generations did indeed *practice* "grass roots" evangelism, rather than merely talking about it. They practiced it spontaneously because their roots were in theology. They drew their spiritual life from the Word and hence evangelism was a way of life, rather than a technique to be learned. They could do no other than witness to the Lord Jesus Christ and teach his salvation to others.

The roots of evangelism are embedded in the local church which derives its life from Christ, as he is set forth in the whole of Scripture. The members evangelise as they are nourished by the preaching, strengthened by the corporate prayer and worship of the church and encouraged by fellowship. Christians who abide in Christ by abiding in a true local church will evangelize spontaneously. They can do no other. If the churches are not producing evangelism in this spontaneous way, the way to recovery is not by the imposition of organized efforts upon the churches from without. The only way is by reformation and revival taking place within. The new organization called *Power*, like all its predecessors, is superficial for it ignores the urgent need for reformation and revival *in* the churches. Moreover having attended the Berlin World Congress for Evangelism and spent time analyzing its effects and writing an appraisal of it, I feel very strongly that such Congresses do more harm than good. Not only is ecumenical evangelism promoted, but Arminian teaching and apologetics are encouraged. The overall tendency is for churches to continue to depend on extramural efforts, *i.e.* efforts coming in from the outside. We should rather devote our time and energy to "grass roots" evangelism, evangelism that springs up all the year round—not just an annual effort, but outreach from healthy, scripturally governed churches. I propose to deal with the subject in the following way:

1. *Evangelism defined from the New Testament in which we also see what evangelism is not.*
2. *A dynamic theology is the foundation of evangelism.*
3. *A dynamic Church is the agent of evangelism.*
4. *Dynamic preaching the chief instrument of the Church's evangelism.*
5. *A dynamic communication of the Gospel to every creature springs from local churches.*

1. Evangelism defined from the New Testament in which we also see what evangelism is not.

Evangelism is the preaching of the Gospel to every creature. There is no limit. We are to go into all the world. No kind of person is excepted, old or young, male or female, rich or poor, weak or strong. There is a priority. The Gospel is to be preached to the Jew first (Rom. 1:16). Apart from the application to the Hebrew people there is another lesson to be drawn from this priority. The Gospel must be preached and applied to our own immediate family circle first. The Christian mother teaching the Gospel to her children is a power that has worked to the salvation of multitudes. Some of the best missionaries have emerged from Christian homes, men such as John C. Paton and William Bums.

When we define evangelism we include comprehensiveness as well as contact. To have a five minute chat about the Gospel with every creature in the world is not to evangelize the world. That is contact alone. That is an introduction and such is valuable indeed, but evangelism is much more than that. Evangelism is comprehensive. Our Lord states this comprehensiveness as follows: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19). The teaching is to be such that those disciples or learners that are made are prepared for baptism into the Trinity and such baptism presupposes a thorough and detailed understanding of each of the three persons of the Trinity. Think of the colossal ignorance, the woeful darkness, the terrible deception about Creation, the Bible, God, Christ, and the Church prevalent today. The task of dispelling this ignorance and deception by way of proclamation and teaching is enormous. Until the end of the world we are to tackle this task with intelligence, courage, energy and dependence upon the Lord who is with us to the end of the age.

Evangelism, then, is the preaching of the Gospel in detail and in a thorough manner to every creature. If people will have nothing to do with it we do not give up but persevere in the knowledge that this is what our Lord has commanded and therefore in wholehearted obedience we will continue.

Having given this brief definition we can now observe what evangelism is not.

(i) Evangelism is not John 3:16 in isolation

We must not think that if we shout out a few texts on a street corner we have fulfilled our evangelistic responsibilities. Favorable sites for open air preaching in this modern world of heavy traffic noise are rare and should be utilized wherever there is reasonable prospect of a listening audience. But if such is secured and used regularly it forms only one means of evangelism. Likewise when literature is distributed we must remember that our dropping a few printed tracts or leaflets through letter boxes, while better than nothing, falls far short of the great

commission to evangelize. Much that is done today can be likened to a farmer who, instead of engaging in the systematic labor of ploughing and planting ten acres of corn, goes out for five minutes and throws a few handfuls of seed on the ground, the most of which is immediately devoured by the birds of the air.

(ii) *Evangelism is not revival*

Recently I procured a cassette tape on the subject of evangelism by a well known preacher. I played it several times and was edified by it but in actual fact he did not say a word about evangelism! It was all about revival and the theology of revival. I believe in revival with all my heart, but revival is not evangelism. Revival will lead to better and more effective evangelism. If, however, we slip into thinking that we can do nothing until revival comes—and it has not come now for well over a century—then we slip into irresponsibility of the most diabolical kind. Our Lord commanded evangelism. We are to obey as best we can. We may be weak and the churches may be weak. Nevertheless we may never excuse ourselves. Evangelism is an abiding obligation to the end of the age. Our Lord did not say that we ought only to evangelize when he sends revival. The principle of Psalm 126 is apposite here. If we sow in tears we shall reap in joy. We are not to excuse our sloth by saying to ourselves, "An well, in revival hundreds will be saved, but all our efforts bear little fruit—but one here and two there—so I am going to ease up and wait for revival!" Revival may never be seen in this generation yet multitudes will continue to be saved one by one throughout all nations, through the ordinary outreach and witness of local churches.

(iii) *Evangelism is not the establishment of a preaching centre*

Some dear brothers in the ministry that I know think that all they need do for evangelism is preach in a pulpit three times a week. They pray for people to come in but such prayer shows a lack of common sense for the people round about do not even know of the existence of that pulpit. God uses means. He will not send angels to tell the people. *We* must tell the people and if they are utterly opposed to going to a church then we must resort to other means of teaching them. Our Lord did not lay it down as a condition that the teaching must begin in ecclesiastical buildings. It becomes clear to disciples that Christ and his people are one and that there are decided obligations to make use of the means of grace and to gather where God's people gather. Initially, however, we must be ready to teach people in homes, either theirs or ours.

The pulpit, as we shall see, is the Church's most powerful instrument in the conversion of souls but we must never imagine that the mandate to evangelize is fulfilled merely by the establishment and maintenance of a preaching centre.

(iv) *Evangelism is not a special crusade or campaign*

The idea has long prevailed in evangelical churches that for the most part evangelism consists of a special evangelistic effort once or twice a year, in which an evangelist is employed for a week or two. At the end of every meeting a call is made for decisions for Christ. At the end of the campaign the results are made known. Some souls may have been drawn in and truly saved by this method and in some cases churches have been quickened to recognize their responsibilities. Having come from this kind of tradition and having observed this practice in various places I have noticed that very little, if any, regular, consistent evangelism is carried on in these churches. The tendency is to make a big effort for the special campaign and then to go back to doing nothing until the next effort comes along. In addition to this, the system is fraudulent and dishonest in the extreme—it is a big lie! Only a small fraction of those advertised as though they were converts continue. When the truth is exposed the excuse is made: "it was worth it for one or two!" It is disgraceful that dishonesty of this kind should be practised by some platform evangelists who have to advertise their success in order to continue in business. If all the decisions that have been reported in such a way as to give the idea that they were converts were in fact true converts, we would be living in the millennium by now! Lying at the root of it all is defective theology which brings us to consider the question of doctrine upon which the apostles, particularly Paul, laid such stress.

2. A dynamic theology is the foundation of evangelism

Our age is an age of power, an age in which people look for and admire the dynamic. Men talk constantly about power: military power, political power, industrial power, economic power. Our Lord in sending his disciples out to evangelize the world, declared that all power belonged to him. He alone has the power to regenerate and quicken sinners. He alone has the dynamic to create new life. A theology that does not come to grips with the sovereign power of God is less than dynamic. "All power is given to me—go ye therefore." Our knowledge of God (theology) and the fact that Christ is now making application of the redemption he has secured for his people forms the foundation of evangelism, the basis upon which we proceed to the work. The knowledge that our Lord has power to quicken whom he wills invests our persevering efforts with hope and expectancy. The doctrine of election, far from shutting out sinners, is the reason for their being gathered in. As we evangelize we soon discover that "there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11). But we are encouraged by the sovereignty of God and such statements as, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).

Theology is a knowledge of God. We are to teach all truth, particularly those truths which pertain to the knowledge of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost into whom the converts are baptized. What makes theology dynamic? The Holy

Spirit, for he comes like the wind to regenerate and quicken. To us the proclamation belongs. To the Spirit regeneration belongs. We are to command men to repent and to believe. We are to exhort, urge, plead, expound and teach. We can do all this. But we cannot regenerate. "Of his own will begot he us with the word of truth" (James 1:18).

Regeneration precedes faith and repentance. Repentance is God's gift (Acts 5:31 and 11:18). Likewise faith is God's gift to all his elect people. It is not man's faith which causes election but election which causes man's faith. (If the reader is in doubt about this a study of the following Scriptures will be helpful: Deut. 7:7, 8; Hos. 14:4; John 6:37, 39, 44; 12:32; 1 Cor. 1:27, 28; Eph. 2:8, 9; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 4:10, 19). This is the hinge upon which the whole issue turns. Modern evangelism is based on the notion that the preacher must preach to obtain man's response in order that God might then regenerate. Human response can be obtained by the exertion of pressure. By means of a call for decisions a visible result can be obtained. Our interest is in regeneration. When souls are quickened they soon make their presence felt as they did under Peter's preaching: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Those who follow in the apostolic tradition preach for regeneration. They are not interested in a harvest of hay, wood and stubble. They look for gold, silver and precious stones.¹

Preaching which is vindicated by the living, dynamic, almighty regeneration of God in which souls are brought to life is magnificent. In contrast to this, evangelism in which teaching and doctrine are minimized, and man-centred religion predominates, with the emphasis on entertainment, is weak and disappointing, because those who profess to have made decisions soon fall away.

The question of the centrality of theology was avoided at the World Congress on Evangelism at Berlin in 1966. The outcome was summarized as follows:

"In contrast with the results of other historic assemblies the Congress papers will reflect the theological weakness and uncertainty which characterizes twentieth century evangelicalism. Blessings and curses are mingled together. The atmosphere is grey. The pure air of the Gospel is there, but so is the smog. The

¹ It is questionable whether Paul is speaking of sound teaching when he refers to "gold, silver and precious stones". I Cor. 3:11-15. The foundation has already been laid, as we see in Matt. 16:18, Eph. 2:21, 22, and particularly 1 Pet. 2:5. We are built on that foundation. Wood, hay and stubble represent those who are false converts—the unregenerate; gold, silver and precious stones, those who are true. This passage is a vindication of the gathered church principle and the necessity of discipline with regard to a realistic church membership. R. L. Dabney in an exposition of this passage warns against the use of artificial means to gain professions of faith. c.f. *Discussions*, Vol. 1, 551 ff.

sun does shine, but dimly through the smoke and fumes of compromise and doctrinal confusion.

"The Christian Church today faces one of the greatest crises of all time. In past centuries some truths have been assailed. Now the very foundations of the faith are being rejected. The World Congress on Evangelism revealed how ill-equipped evangelicals are to face this crisis. Inarticulate in doctrine and man-centred in outlook, many evangelical leaders are unable even to define what the historic faith is, let alone teach it. The result is that a diluted theology within the churches has produced a shallow and ignorant generation of Christians."²

The World Congress on Evangelization at Lausanne in 1974 proceeded on the basis that theological issues had been clarified at Berlin. Lausanne was even more confused theologically than Berlin.

It is commonly understood that a heresy is something which destroys the Gospel whereas an error is that which is wrong and misleading but which is not serious enough to destroy the Gospel. Two heresies in particular destroy the Gospel as far as its evangelistic thrust is concerned. One is hyper-Calvinism in which the free offers of the Gospel are denied and in which an excuse is made of the fact that men are dead in sin and therefore there is no point in evangelizing. Total human responsibility (men know that they ought to repent and believe the Gospel) must be maintained together with faith in the sovereignty of God. These matters cannot be reconciled to human logic. The hyper-Calvinist in his desire to be logical comes to the wrong conclusion that it is inconsistent to command sinners to repent and believe when they are unable to do so, which is entirely an unbiblical and false conclusion!

The other heresy which destroys true evangelism is decisionism. This system also follows human logic. If God commands sinners to repent and believe, then obviously, reason the decisionists, they must be able to do so. Therefore, without any further ado, we employ every device at our disposal to get men to make a decision. Clive Tyler of Cape Town, in his enlightening article, demonstrates the harmful practices which Finney's logic has led to in the churches.³ That which stops short of God's regeneration deceives souls into a false assurance and creates havoc in the churches because of the addition of false converts. Paul preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). To us belongs the proclamation to every creature. To God belongs the increase.

² *Banner of Truth* No. 48, p. 8.

³ *Reformation Today* No. 18. *Finney and the Disappearance of Revival* by Clive Tyler.

3. A dynamic Church is the agent of evangelism

The Nature of the Church

That the Church is the agent of evangelism can be seen, firstly, by observing the nature of the Church and, secondly, by examining the example of the Church in the New Testament. Our Lord commissioned his disciples to go and, "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). Those so baptized are joined to the body of Christ which is the Church. The Church is described by different analogies. The predominant analogy is that of the human body. Each member of the Church has a function. (Rom. 12:4, the word "office" is better translated function from the Greek word *prazin*; I Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:16.) Union with Christ by faith is essential in order to be a member of Christ's Church. To be joined to Christ is to live or to have spiritual life. The living union is illustrated by the analogy of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-11). Christ's body, or Church, is like the vine. To abide in it is to have life but to be severed from it is to be severed from the means of grace given by Christ to his Church which leads to drying up and ultimately to spiritual death. A further analogy is that used by Paul in Ephesians where he likens the Church to a living building. It is organic, for it is growing. The Holy Spirit dwells in this building in which all the members are like living stones, fitly framed together in harmony, union and common purpose. (See also 1 Pet. 2:5.)

Essential to the Church is the purity of her membership. The stones must be living for they are to offer up spiritual sacrifices. That they must be living is further seen in that they are to grow and increase in love (Eph. 4:16). It is self-evident that nothing will contribute more quickly to the destruction of the Church than the entrance into her visible membership of those who are hostile to her doctrines and to her Head. Christ has, however, made provision for the purity of the Church to be maintained by means of discipline. This discipline was vested first in the apostles for the establishment of the New Testament Church and following that extraordinary period of establishment this discipline is vested in elders. Stress has been laid on the fact that the Church is a living body, this life being well illustrated by the human body, the vine and the living building. This life is exclusive. It belongs to the Church alone. Therefore evangelism emanates from the life of the Church for the enlargement of none other than the Church. Furthermore, the body of truth upon which evangelism is based is entrusted to the Church which is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The truth, together with the authority to propagate, defend and maintain it, is vested in the Church alone and the Church alone is commissioned to evangelize by taking the teaching to all nations, and by preaching the Gospel to every creature. The converts or disciples that are made are added to the parent body by baptism and each one is subject to the discipline of the elders of that body.

The Example of the New Testament Church

This principle is illustrated throughout the book of Acts. All the evangelism issued or came from the Church. All the converts made were baptized into the Church. "Repent and be baptized every one of you," declares Peter (Acts 2:38). When Paul writes to the Corinthians he writes to the Church at Corinth, the composition of which he specifies exactly as "them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints". To them he writes and no other. Paul insists that discipline be maintained to preserve the purity of the body or the membership at Corinth (1 Cor. 5), just as Peter was used to maintain the purity of the Church at Jerusalem by the removal of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

Every true local church is an expression in an area of the body of Christ. The life of Christ is seen in that body as it can be seen in no other group of people on earth. The members of that local church are joined to Christ. They have his life and to have his life is to have dynamic life. The Holy Spirit dwells in and fills the members of the local church. Such love of people for each other the world has never seen. This is no small factor in convincing them that the Gospel is true (John 17:21). Such unity and such affection for God and devotedness in worship as expressed in the local church the world has never witnessed. The members of Christ's body found in the local church should have no peers when it comes to hospitality and good works. The inhabitants round about observe in them a people who suffer with meekness, who rejoice in God's goodness, whose lives are blameless and who abound in the truth which has brought transformation and eternal life to them. Thus the dynamic local church is God's agent for evangelism. The whole local church is involved. All members evangelize by life and lip and support some of their number who have been recognized and set apart, not only for the oversight and the maintenance of discipline, but for the public preaching of the Word. Care is taken to fulfil the high standards of correct doctrine insisted upon by the Scriptures (Acts 20:27-32; 1 Tim. 4:16; Titus 1:9 and 2:1). Those recognized in this way lead the flock in evangelism. The work is a corporate work and the elders or leaders do not act independently but see every member as having some part to play.

In the New Testament we see all the preaching coming from the Church as expressed in the local churches whether at Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus or elsewhere. All converts were added to the churches. All preachers were subject to the discipline of the churches and, if traveling abroad, were sent out by one church or another. Even the great apostle Paul did not go unsent or independently. He and Barnabas, after prayer and fasting, were sent out by the church at Antioch and to that church they returned and reported after their journeys.

Wrong Practice in Evangelism Today

Independent evangelists, some of whom set up their own evangelistic organizations, are popular today. Some churches which are far from dynamic and which have poor preaching; little, if any, discipline; badly attended prayer meetings and a poor reputation in the towns where they are found, often resort to evangelistic campaigns to give them a boost. There is a flurry of activity and for a time a special effort is made to reach out to the neighborhood. Contacts are made and there may be some additions to the church. After the excitement of the special effort all the unsolved problems emerge once more—the lack of doctrine, the lack of oversight and discipline and the lack of consistent week by week outreach. The real problems are not solved by an evangelistic campaign. Evangelism does not produce life in the church. Rather, life in the church produces evangelism. Consistent, all-the-year-round evangelism will emerge when the churches are reformed and when due heed is given to the order which God has ordained by way of Scriptural church government, teaching and pastoral oversight. When such reformation takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit and He surges through or empowers the Scriptural order God has specified in his Word, evangelism will be irresistible and spontaneous. The people will not need to be bullied into it. Nobody will be able to stop them doing it!

Evangelistic societies which operate independently of the churches reason that they are needed because the churches are lifeless and dead. The churches, they argue, do not evangelize. Therefore, they contend, it is necessary to have evangelistic organizations to do the work. Yet these organizations appeal for money and depend on the churches for their existence. The evangelists are not subject to the authority of the churches. Their abilities, energies and resources are not channelled into churches but into separate organizations. Their lives, their thoughts and their practice are not moulded by the realities of local church life. They are responsible for their doctrine, their practice, and their methods to no one but themselves. That the forms of entertainment and the gimmicks they use to gain an audience are harmful to the true worship of God does not concern them. They do not have to face basic issues at local church level. They are independent of the churches and can act as they please.

When evangelistic organizations become huge in power and influence their own interests are predominant and they become a curse to the churches. There may be great talk about evangelizing the world by the end of the twentieth century, but in fact an enormous sum of money and time is spent merely on promoting a colossal organization and the system of evangelistic societies as a whole. In order to bolster up and support the needs of the evangelistic societies two matters are essential. One is the maintenance of Arminian or decisionist doctrine and the other is the promotion of Ecumenical evangelism. Should anyone preach free grace doctrine at a world Congress for Evangelism it will not make any impact for the simple reason that such convictions represent but one viewpoint among many. Synergism is the order of the day at these Congresses. Synergism is the combination of Arminian and Calvinistic concepts—the blending of truth with error. You take the five points of Calvinism, say on your right hand, and the

five points of Arminianism on your left, you fold your two hands and ten fingers together and, hey presto!—perfect truth is the result! Even the apostle Paul would be baffled by one of these Congresses of Evangelism! His voice would simply be drowned by a hundred others—huge mountains of words and papers—and the end result? —Arminianism and Ecumenism! I can well imagine Paul's astonishment to observe the truth he made clear buried under such an enormous pile of words and papers!

Let us consider Ecumenism and its implications at the local level. Ministers of true local churches are laboring to fulfill the command of Christ to teach, preach, administer baptism and the Lord's supper, maintain discipline and evangelize. In most cases they battle and struggle with the problem of Modernistic churches in which false ministers (wolves in sheep's clothing) deny the faith by rejecting the authority of Scripture and such basic truths as the wrath of God, the Judgment, hell, the atonement, the deity of Christ and the necessity of the New Birth. In some parts evangelical ministers are opposed by Roman Catholic, Anglo Catholic and Modernist ministers all working together in the Ecumenical movement. Along comes the Evangelistic Crusade which, in order to have adequate support, co-operates with all these alien bodies. When evangelical ministers are not prepared to join in and unite with such an effort they are accused of narrow-mindedness and disinterest in the great work of evangelism.

Not only independent evangelistic societies but all societies must be subject to the local churches. In no other place is spiritual authority vested but the local church. To no other place are disciples ingathered, taught and incorporated (Eph. 4:16). The Church, as represented by spiritual local churches throughout the world, is alone the object of Christ's saving love (Acts 20:28). It is high time that we thought in terms of dynamic churches alone as God's agent for evangelism!

4. Dynamic preaching the chief instrument of the Church's evangelism

It is not by the wisdom of men that souls are saved, but by the foolishness of preaching (1 Cor. 1:21). Through the ministry of the pulpit believers are fed and by means of the same ministry converts are made. Since so much depends on powerful and edifying preaching how careful ought we to be to safeguard the pulpit. If the flock is to be fed, then the preaching needs to be expository, systematic and doctrinal. Happily, such a ministry is well suited to evangelism for all parts of Scripture, including the doctrine of election, can be applied to unbelievers. Election implies total depravity. Since all men have rejected God he is free to save whom he wills. If he saves an enemy then that is an act of grace. I maintain that any part of Scripture can be preached evangelistically. We are to teach all things— all truth we find in Scripture. Thus teaching should be powerful, convicting, inspiring and relevant.

With regard to the evangelistic aspect of the pulpit ministry, I would suggest five factors of which the preacher should always be mindful.

(i) *Biblical content.* God should be set forth in his attributes. Who is God? God is Creator, God is holy, God is just, God will judge all men. Content is essential in the preaching, but this content should be arresting, it should be interesting, it should be relevant and delivered in a powerful manner. There should be content always. That we are living in an age of education for all highlights this requirement. This is an age of education, far more so than in previous generations. Content and substance in the preaching does not in itself convert. What I am trying to explain is the fact that most people are repulsed from a natural point of view by mere emotionalism. They can recognize when there is real content and substance to what is said. It is interesting to observe how surprised people are to discover far more than they ever imagined. They just thought we were governed by emotions alone but then they discover we are a thinking people, that we are concerned about the application of the Gospel to every aspect of life. They may argue and disagree yet they are drawn back again and again and find themselves arrested and convicted by the truth of God.

(ii) *The moral law.* The Gospel is for sinners only, so our first task is to convince people that they are sinners. They are totally depraved, vile, evil, wicked sinners. These words sound extreme but when the full meaning of transgression against a holy God is realized by means of the law, they are no longer extreme words but true words. In exposition of the moral law there ought to be variety, directness and personal application. I have found Thomas Watson's book a help in understanding the Ten Commandments. The Larger Catechism is a great help, for it explains in precise terms the different ways in which the law is broken. Are we preaching the moral law? Is the Holy Spirit convincing sinners by the law through our preaching?

(iii) *Justification by free grace.* I believe we should always be conscious of the wonder of God's grace when we preach. God in his mercy comes to save all kinds of sinners. This is the wonder of grace. He freely justifies the sinner who believes. No matter how bad a man has been, no matter how foul he is, God can save him and give him a free justification— instantaneously and once and for all. This is why we give glory to God for the wonder of his grace. Everything is to this end: "the praise of the glory of God's grace" (Eph. 1:6). When sinners are saved that grace is magnified. Therefore we expect that sinners will be saved.

(iv) *The free offers of the Gospel.* The Lord invites all men to himself. He freely invites them to come to him as they are and not because of anything good or righteous they may find in themselves. The sinner does not look to see if he has worthiness, or if there are preliminary signs of grace in him. We should be free, flexible and fervent in our preaching of the free offers of the Gospel. In other words we must not in any way be stiff or starched or hampered. If the doctrines of grace hamper the preacher in any way it indicates that he has not grasped

their implications. The Puritans can help us a very great deal here.⁴ They were marvelously free, They had the doctrines of grace; they held to particular redemption absolutely, but this never hampered them in their preaching of the free offers of the Gospel. There is great joy in offering the Gospel, because the Holy Spirit often favors Scripture passages containing Gospel invitations and applies them with power to sinners.

(v) *Faith in preaching.* Do we have faith in the Word of God as such? It is possible for the preacher to become over-worked or distracted and without realizing it he loses faith in his own preaching as God's instrument not only of edification but of conversion. He needs to pray always for the power of the Holy Spirit in preaching. Do we really believe that the Word of God is powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12)? Do we have a great faith in the Word of God preached? Do we believe in the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven when we preach? Do we expect for the Holy Ghost, God himself, to come down from heaven? That is what Peter said (1 Pet. 1:12), and Paul declared that "our Gospel unto you came not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5). We should wrestle with the Lord that he will send down the Holy Ghost and that there will be much assurance and power in the preaching. We should do this every time we preach, not just sometimes. W. G. T. Shedd has a fine sermon with the title, "The certain success of Evangelistic Labour," in which he says, "suppose that I myself have never felt the revolutionizing power of Christianity, or have never seen an instance of it in another person: will not the theoretical belief that I may have in this religion be likely to wane away in the lapse of time? If a power is not exerted, we begin to doubt its existence. And if an individual or church witnesses no effusions of the Spirit, and no actual conversions of the human soul, it will inevitably begin to query whether there be any Holy Ghost, and whether the Gospel is anything more than ethics."⁵

It is the effusions of the Holy Spirit that we long for. It is conversions which we look for, pray for, plead for and aim at. The regeneration of souls is the best proof we have of the power of God among us.

Shedd goes on to illustrate this from different parts of history. The beginning of the eighteenth century was a time of skepticism, doubt, coldness and rationalism, and one of the reasons was that there were not these powerful conversions. But when the awakening came what a change there was then! God was in the land. People were being converted from all strata of society. Rationalism crumpled like paper. We need such spiritual awakening today. It will show itself in preaching

⁴ In a paper, *The Puritan Approach to Persuading Souls*, given at the Westminster (Puritan) Conference the question of the free offer is expounded in detail. It is published in a booklet with the title *Adding to the Church* at 50 pence and is available from Carey Publications.

⁵ W. G. T. Shedd, *Sermons to the Spiritual Man*, Banner of Truth, p. 413.

first just as it did with the apostles. And if we look behind powerful preaching we will see the Spirit of grace and supplication.

5. A dynamic communication of the Gospel to every creature

My headings with regard to the above are as follows: (i) The prayer meeting; (ii) effective house to house visiting; (iii) relevance in our presentation of truth; (iv) using our homes as a base; (v) the use of literature; (vi) zeal and perseverance in the work. All these aspects are connected to, spring from, are inspired by or directed by the local church.

(i) *The prayer meeting.* Prayer is fundamental to the activity of evangelism. This is obvious but nevertheless requires assertion. All too often the primary place of prayer is forgotten or added as a postscript after human organization has dominated, and human wisdom dictated the details of a project. The New Testament not only urges the importance of prayer (Eph. 6: 18) but this is evident in the lives of the apostles. Acts 4:13-32 is one instance of many that could be quoted.

By its very nature prayer is a reminder that salvation belongs to God. There will be no salvation but such as he is pleased to give. As we have seen, our major weapon is preaching. God pours out his regenerating power through preaching. Such preaching cannot be taken for granted. It has to be sought by preacher and people. Paul appeals to the Ephesians to pray for him that utterance will be given to him (Eph. 6:19).

Prayer is essential if we are to receive spiritual vitality and drive to persevere in the work of evangelism which means perseverance in our interest in people and contact with them. Wisdom and ability, guidance and insight are born through prayer as the details are laid before the Lord. The church needs to gather for prayer at least twice a week in order that there will be adequate opportunity to include the responsibilities and details of evangelistic endeavor in the prayer life of the church.

Some have tended to think that the amount of prayer is the crucial factor as though God will be conned into action by the force of numbers or by repetition. Such notions are misguided. The intelligent, enlightened prayer of one righteous man can be worth more than ten thousand prayers that are not according to the truth.

(ii) *Effective house to house visiting.* It goes without saying that every country and area is different when it comes to actual opportunities to present the Gospel. Open-air preaching may be feasible in one country but be quite ineffective in another. We find that our community for the most part is shut in with television sets and families tend to live to themselves. Opportunities to use the mass media

for evangelism are few and far between. Open-air preaching tends to be drowned by the roar of traffic and the general attitude of the public is to despise such attempts and ignore them. Under these circumstances house to house visiting, if thoughtfully conducted, is found in most cases to be by far the best means of evangelism. To evangelize is to teach and instruct every creature in the Gospel (Matt. 28: 19). The suitability of visiting every home with that in mind should be apparent.

It is advisable that only those who are well-equipped in knowledge and have a gift to approach people should be encouraged. Visiting can be done two by two but where a man is experienced he can visit with greater effectiveness on his own particularly on a Saturday when the men-folk are at home. It is not suitable for men to visit women on their own. One purpose of visiting is to make contact with the people and to inform them of the work of the church in their area. While people are invited to come it is to be realized that it is exceedingly unlikely that they will respond to such an invitation and therefore a main objective must be to broach the fundamental issues of the Gospel. We are to go and teach or disciple all peoples where they are and not wait for them to come to us, for we will wait in vain!

Commonsense plays a major role in house to house visiting. Records should be kept. Diligent follow up work is vital. Suitable times need to be chosen for the visitation, and so on.

(iii) *Relevance in our presentation of truth.* If a church is well instructed and the believers have assimilated the Gospel, and practice it daily, this is going to be the most telling factor in evangelism. Instead of thinking of the Gospel as a simple formula they will be ready to show the relevance of the Gospel to every area of life; the family, employment, civil law, politics, recreation, ecology, the state of institutional churches, the moral law, education, evolution, the existence of Israel and the Jews, the question of famine and undeveloped countries, etc. A well instructed Christian will be able to converse on all these matters and it is by the power of the Spirit that the essential matters of personal repentance and faith are introduced and discussed.

The question of apologetics is inescapable in evangelism. Here again the pulpit occupies a central role. If a Christian thinks that the natural man is neutral and that he is in a position to make judgments about the Bible and about God then this will cripple evangelism. Also if he thinks that it is helpful to impress unbelievers with the glamour of the Church such as some pop stars professing to be Christians then he is wasting time because the Church can never be glamorous in the sense that the world is glamorous. The natural man is not led to conviction and an inward change by showing that Christianity is nice and easy and not very different from the world. It should always be borne in mind that if there is no conviction of sin there will be no conversion; if there is no repentance there will be no salvation!

(iv) *Using our homes as a base.* In the early Church there was no other possibility but for believers to meet in homes. Outsiders are more ready to join us in a domestic atmosphere than in an ecclesiastical one, especially when church going is completely out of vogue. When a meeting is due to take place in a certain road, it is good to concentrate on visiting all the people in that road and extending invitations where there seems to be any possibility of acceptance.

It is also helpful to visit a Christian home if such exists in a particular locality where we are visiting and have prayer first before actually going to knock on doors. Afterwards the details of the visiting with that Christian family should be shared in order that further contact may be encouraged.

(v) *The use of literature.* John Bunyan in his fascinating book, "The Holy War", shows how Diabolus overcame the city of Mansoul through Fargate and Eyegate. Likewise when Emmanuel, the Captain of our Salvation came to make his conquest over fallen Mansoul, he too came through Eargate and Eyegate. Literature has its place but it is greatly inferior to the personal approach in which words and expressions are adapted in an ideal way to a living situation. In our society the value of mass distribution of literature along impersonal lines is questionable. Literature does, however, have an important place when following up contacts especially if items are carefully and thoughtfully selected in order to be suitable to personal problems that have come to light in conversation.

(vi) *Zeal and perseverance in the work.* To make a start in house to house evangelism is difficult enough but to persevere can be even more exacting. The best motives will be needed to sustain determination and perseverance.

There is surely no higher motive than that of the great commission. Our Lord commanded us to teach all nations and assured us that he was with us even to the end of time. If he has commanded evangelism and promised to be with us, then that ought to be enough to spur us on. However, there are many other motives to encourage us, including the promise that the Holy Spirit will convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. The doctrine of Election is also very heartening as we know that the Father has a people which he will give to his Son and that success must crown the right use of means. Compassion is a powerful motive for evangelism. The more we are conformed to Christ the more we will be like him in goodness, compassion and concern toward his enemies (Luke 23:24).

I conclude by urging that we should go out of our way to encourage one another in the urgent and essential task of evangelism.

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