

**EVANGELISM:
A BIBLICAL APPROACH**
Revised Edition

G. Michael Cocoris

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FOREWORD: FIRST EDITION

I have a friend for whom fishing is a passion. Not only does he go after trout in Colorado, but he travels across the United States and, in fact, throughout the world to cast his line in any waters where fish are biting. When he talks about fishing, he does so with an enthusiasm and knowledge that makes me want to bait a hook myself. Aspiring anglers can learn much by spending time with such a fisherman.

Mike Cocoris has fished for men and women most of his life. I have known him for over two decades as a student, a successful evangelist, a colleague on the faculty of Dallas Seminary, and now as the pastor of a famous Los Angeles congregation. In every season of his life and in every position he has held, evangelism has been his magnificent obsession. As I have traveled across the world, I have met scores of men and women whom Mike Cocoris has caught for Jesus Christ.

Like a skilled fisherman, Mike has not only thought deeply about evangelism, but he does it whenever he can. Now he has taken time from his busy schedule to share with others what he has learned through study and experience. As disciples following Jesus Christ in the world, we are summoned to go after the greatest catch of all—men and women. After reading this book, you will be motivated to throw in your line; and what is more, you will do it with greater skill.

Haddon Robinson

PREFACE: FIRST EDITION

Almost from the moment of my conversion at age 18, I wanted to be an evangelist and an expositor of the Scriptures. My involvement in both these areas began immediately, but for the next dozen or so years, a problem arose. Most of what I heard or read concerning the subject of evangelism was either a method of evangelism or a motivation to evangelize. I diligently searched for something that would expound what the Scripture has to say about evangelism. I found some helpful material here and there and commenced my own inductive study of the Scripture. I began to formulate some conclusions.

Then I was invited to teach evangelism as an adjunct professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. For five years, I lectured every fall, attempting to make the lectures as expositional and yet as practical as possible.

In 1979, I became the pastor of the Church of the Open Door in downtown Los Angeles. There I preached a series of sermons on the subject of evangelism. This book is a result of the lectures at Dallas Seminary and the sermons at the Church of the Open Door.

I am indebted to Colin McDougall, a professor at Biola University, who read and reread the manuscript and offered many helpful suggestions. My thanks also go to Sharon Beckwith, my secretary, who typed and retyped the manuscript several times.

My prayer is that the Lord will use this material to instruct, to provoke to further study, and above all, to motivate us to be involved in the great task of evangelism.

G. Michael Cocoris
Los Angeles, CA

PREFACE: SECOND EDITION

Evangelism: A Biblical Approach was first published by Moody Press in 1984. That edition enjoyed many reprints, including several that were self-published. In this revised edition, I have made minor changes, including slightly changing sentences here and there and moving the references from the footnotes at the bottom of the page to the text. I have also rearranged the chapters in the section on the principles of evangelism to make them flow in a more logical order.

The major change is the addition of the chapter on Lordship Salvation. When I first developed this material in preparation for teaching evangelism at Dallas Seminary in the 1970s, Lordship Salvation was not as popular as it is today. Since then, it has become a major controversy. Therefore, the discussion of that topic is appropriate and necessary.

I would like to thank Teresa Rogers for proofreading this material and giving helpful suggestions as well.

The first edition of this book was used as a textbook in a college course on evangelism and a seminary course on evangelism, as well as other evangelism training courses. My prayer is that the Lord would use this edition to educate and encourage more believers in our God-ordained responsibility of evangelism.

G. Michael Cocoris
Santa Monica, CA

PART 1: THE DEFINITION OF EVANGELISM

WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

When you hear the word evangelism, what comes to mind? Many imagine a large auditorium, a crusade choir, a well-known evangelist, and a public invitation. Others think of godly Christians quietly letting their light shine where they work. Some might even envision an overzealous believer pistol-whipping a prospective convert with Bible verses.

What is evangelism? Some claim it means changing individuals so that the world will believe. Others say it means changing the world so individuals will believe. Definitions range all the way from the simple saving of souls to more complex ideas about the salvaging of society.

How does the Bible define evangelism? If you were to search your Bible for the word evangelize, you would find that it is not there. In fact, the word did not appear in the English language until the seventeenth century. The problem is not that the Bible does not talk about evangelism; it obviously does. The word evangelize is not in most, if any, English translations of the Bible, but it is in the Greek text. So, to understand what the Bible says about the subject, we must start with the Greek New Testament. There are two Greek words that must be understood before a biblical definition can be determined.

Good News

The first Greek word that must be understood is euangelion. It is a compound word, composed of eu, which means “good” and angelos, meaning “messenger.” Together they form the word euangelion, literally meaning “good message” or “good news.” The word occurs seventy-seven times in the New Testament, sixty-six of which are used by the apostle Paul.

In secular Greek, euangelion could have been any good news. It could have been the good news that your team had won the game, or that your taxes had been reduced, or that your mother-in-law was not coming for a visit. When this word was borrowed by the early Christians and brought into the New Testament, it was used for some specific good news, that is, the good news of Jesus Christ. Mark introduces his gospel with, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk. 1:1). The term he uses is euangelion. So the verse means “the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ.”

Paul is more specific. First Corinthians 15 is the only passage in the New Testament that gives a definition of the gospel.

In verses 1 and 2, Paul says he is about to declare to them the gospel by which they were saved. Then in verses 3 to 5, he defines that gospel. These verses say four things about Christ: He died for our sins, He was buried, He rose, and He was seen. Notice that after only two of these four, “He died for our sins” and “He rose,” Paul adds the phrase “according to the Scriptures,” indicating that the two basic elements of the gospel are: Christ died for our sins and Christ rose from the dead. Why then did Paul add that Christ was buried and was seen? The answer is that His burial is proof of His death and His appearances are proof of His resurrection. Whatever else evangelism is, it has to do with the death and resurrection of Christ.

Announce the Good News

The second Greek word that must be understood is euangelizo, translated “evangelize.” It means “to announce the good news,” any good news. To announce to an anxious student that he has earned an A on an exam; to announce to a nervous expectant father that he has a healthy baby; both these are ways of “evangelizing.” Euangelizo is used fifty-five times in the New Testament. This verb is used in a general way. In 1 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul says, “But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love.” The phrase “brought us good news” is the verb euangelizo. Timothy announced to Paul the good news of their spiritual health. This is the term evangelize in its general sense.

However, in the New Testament euangelizo is usually translated “preach the gospel.” It refers specifically to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:17, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel,” literally translated “not to baptize, but to evangelize.” In 1 Corinthians 9:16, he says, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” In these and many other passages, Paul is using euangelizo, meaning “to announce the good news of Jesus Christ.” So to evangelize in the New Testament sense of the term is to announce the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead.

The phrase “preach the gospel” is usually the translation of the Greek verb euangelizo. However, it is sometimes the translation of the Greek word for “preach” (kerusso) combined with the Greek word for “gospel” (euangelion). C. H. Dodd says, “The verb ‘to preach’ frequently has for its object ‘the gospel.’ Indeed, the connection of ideas is so close that ‘preach’ by itself can be used as a virtual equivalent for ‘to evangelize’ or ‘preach the gospel.’ It would not be too much to say that whenever preaching is spoken of it always carries with it the implication of good tidings proclaimed” (Dodd, p. 8).

When Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:17, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel,” the Greek text for “preach the gospel” is simply euangelizo, “to evangelize,” but in Mark 16:15, when the Lord says, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” the text contains kerusso, the verb “to preach,” and the noun euangelion, “the gospel.” They are simply two different ways of saying the same thing.

Evangelism is...

Having looked at the meaning of these two Greek words, have we arrived at a definition of evangelism? Is evangelism announcing the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead?

Just determining the meaning of a word does not fix the definition. Theological definitions are often determined by the meaning of words and the use of those words in the Bible. For example, the Greek word for “church” (ekklesia) means “called out ones; assembly,” but the way that word is used in the New Testament indicates that an ekklesia is an organized group of baptized believers.

Is evangelism just announcing the good news of Christ, or does the use of that word in the New Testament demand more? Obviously, something needs to be added. Would it be evangelism if a pastor just announced the gospel to a group of believers? A skeptic could

also announce the gospel, attempting to discredit it. So merely announcing the good news of Jesus Christ is certainly not evangelism. What, then, must be included? I propose that Evangelism is communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ with the immediate intent of converting people to faith in Christ and with the ultimate intent of instructing converts in the Word of God so that they can become mature believers.

In the New Testament, Christians did not just present the truth about Christ; they presented the truth about Christ with a purpose. True, they began with a proclamation of facts about Him, but the facts led to an appeal. In Acts 14:15, Paul says, “We ... preach to you that [in the Greek, this is a clause denoting purpose] you should turn from these vain things to the living God.” In Matthew 4:19, Jesus tells the disciples He will make them fishers of men. There is a purpose, or at least an intent, in fishing, namely to catch fish. The immediate purpose or intent in announcing the gospel is that people will trust Christ.

Yet the New Testament does not stop there. The Great Commission means more than making Christians; it means making disciples. In Colossians 1:28, Paul says, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” The ultimate goal of the New Testament is to instruct believers in the Word of God so that they may become mature. This maturity includes personal spiritual growth and service in the context of a local church.

My definition of evangelism consists of two elements: information and intent. Practically, this amounts to informing people about Christ, especially His death for sin and His resurrection and inviting them to trust Him. Information without invitation may be instruction, but it is not evangelism. Likewise, invitation without instruction may be exhortation, but it is not evangelism. This does not mean that every time there is information there must be an invitation. It may be that in a given situation, wisdom dictates that there be information without invitation. That has a place—it is called pre-evangelism, but evangelism proper is the communication of the gospel with a view to conversion.

In his book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer says, “How then should evangelism be defined? The New Testament answer is very simple. According to the New Testament, evangelism is just preaching the gospel, the evangel.” He then adds, “Evangelizing, therefore, is not simply a matter of teaching, and instructing, and imparting information to the mind. There is more to it than that. Evangelism includes the endeavor to elicit a response to the truth taught. It is communication with a view to conversion. It is a matter, not merely of informing, but also of inviting” (Packer, pp. 41, 50).

In defining evangelism, some have missed the New Testament concept altogether. Liberals have defined it as social action. They speak of “presence evangelism,” which means to become involved in what God is doing in the world—to campaign against all that dehumanizes man. Presence could be anonymous and silent; the name of Christ could or could not be mentioned. This notion goes on to define evangelism as “redeeming social structures” and “reconciling hostile men and nations.” Harvey Cox has been quoted as saying, “Any distinction between social action and evangelism is mistaken” (Wager, pp. 96-97).

Against this backdrop, Billy Graham said, “I maintain that evangelism is much more than non-verbal witness. Humanists may heal, feed, and help, but social presence isn’t Gospel presentation. The Gospel is an announcement of the Good News. But what Good News? It is the thrilling proclamation that Jesus Christ, the very God and very man, died for my sins on the cross, was buried, and rose on the third day. The Son has made full

atonement for my sins. If I reach forth by faith to receive Christ as my personal Savior, I am declared forgiven by God, not through any merit of mine but through the merit of Christ's shed blood. Biblically, evangelism can mean nothing else than proclaiming Jesus Christ by presence, by word, and by trusting the Holy Spirit to use the Scriptures to persuade men to become His disciples and responsible members of His church" (Graham, p. 8).

Summary: Evangelism is communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ with the immediate intent of converting the hearer to faith in Christ and with the ultimate intent of instructing the converts in the Word of God so that they can become mature believers.

In defining evangelism, some do not go far enough and others go too far. For example, some would suggest that evangelism is simply proclamation. According to them, Christians are to proclaim the gospel—period. That is not going far enough. We must inform and invite. Others go to the other extreme. They would say that evangelism is persuasion. According to this viewpoint, Christians are to lead people to Christ, but it is not evangelism until people get saved. That is going too far; God gives the increase. First Corinthians 3:6 says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." We must inform and invite. Skill in evangelism depends on us. Success in reaping depends upon God.

Telling someone about your conversion is not evangelism, nor is telling someone about your creed, although those techniques may be helpful in getting attention or creating a sense of need. Convincing someone to walk down an aisle or to sign a card is not necessarily evangelism. Evangelism is communicating the gospel and inviting the person to trust Christ.

What is a marriage proposal? If all a fellow did were give his girl information, such as "I love you," she would wonder when, or even if, he was going to pop the question. On the other hand, if he just grabbed her hand and marched up to the justice of the peace without any previous discussion, most girls would object; that's going too far, too fast. A proposal means communicating your love to your sweetheart and inviting her to be your wife. It is information and invitation. Likewise, evangelism is communicating the gospel with the intent of converting the person to faith in Jesus Christ.

Since the ultimate purpose of the New Testament is to make us mature in Christ, evangelism must be immediately followed by instruction, but that is the result of evangelism and not evangelism itself. The Lausanne Covenant says it well: "But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view of persuading people to come to Him personally and be reconciled to God. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into His church and responsible service in the world" (The Lausanne Covenant, pp. 22-23).

PART 2: THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF EVANGELISM

WHY EVANGELIZE?

Why evangelize? Why even ask the question? For a Christian to question evangelism is like an American questioning apple pie, the stars and stripes, and motherhood. Yet the question needs to be asked and answered. For those Christians who are already involved in evangelism, the question needs to be answered so that the right thing will be done for the right reason. For believers not involved in evangelism, the question needs to be answered so that the right thing will be done.

What, then, is the basis of evangelism? To answer that, five passages of Scripture need to be considered, which will be covered in the next five chapters. The first is Matthew 28:16-20, which says, “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.’”

This incident took place on the mountain in Galilee, where several groups were present. First, the disciples were there. Verse 16 says, “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee.”

Second, it is likely that over five hundred were there. Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that Christ “was seen by over five hundred brethren at once.” None of the gospel accounts say when that took place, but one clue may help solve the problem. Notice that verse 16 says, “To the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.” Of the ten post-resurrection appearances of Christ, only one, the one recorded in this paragraph, was pre-announced and thus prearranged. Since this is the only time Christ announced ahead of time when and where He would appear, students and scholars have concluded that this is the time when five hundred plus saw Him.

Third, you were there. Verse 20 says, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” What Christ had to say on this occasion, He meant to apply to all believers until the end of the age. So at least in His mind, you were there.

On this occasion, the Lord gave the complete Great Commission to those present. A careful study of it is required.

The Authority

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus asserts, “All authority has been given to Me.” There are two different Greek words translated “power.” *Dunamis* means “the ability to perform” and is properly translated “power.” *Exousia* means “the right to use power” and is properly translated “authority.” In this verse, Jesus uses the second word. He is claiming He has all authority, that is, the ability to do all things and the right to use that ability.

To illustrate the difference between power and authority, suppose I walked out of a bank and, for no reason at all, a 250-pound, six-foot-four-inch madman came charging down the street, flew into me, and sprawled me all over the sidewalk. He, being bigger than

I, has power, but he has no right to do that. On the other hand, suppose I had just robbed that bank and it was a 250-pound, six-foot-four-inch policeman who tackled me. He would have authority—the ability and the right to use that ability. That is what Christ is claiming. He has all authority in all the universe.

He claims all authority in heaven. Why does He say that? Paul gives us the answer in Ephesians 6:12. The real spiritual battle is in the heavenlies. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Those evil powers (exousia, literally “authorities,” the same Greek word as in Mt. 28:18) wage war against believers, especially those who are involved in carrying out the Great Commission. Christians wrestle against authorities, but Christ has all authority, even in the heavenlies.

If believers are to be successful in carrying out the Great Commission, they must be aware of, and appeal to, the authority of Christ.

I have often sensed satanic opposition to evangelism. During one united crusade, everything started going wrong. The sponsoring committee and the participating pastors were at odds. There was bickering and backbiting. The people came, but the blessing of God was absent. After several days of defeat, I called the evangelistic team together and suggested that the problem was satanic. We prayed earnestly, pleading Christ’s authority over evil powers. It was then that we were drenched with the blessing of God. Attitudes changed, relationships mended, and sinners were converted.

Jesus not only claims all authority in heaven, He also claims to have all authority on earth. When Jesus walked on the earth, He exercised authority over nature, for example, the stormy sea. If believers are to be successful in fulfilling the Great Commission, they must be aware of, and appeal to, the authority of Christ.

His earthly authority is not only over nature but over nations. Daniel 4:25 tells us, “The Most High rules in the kingdom of men.” More than one missionary, being hindered in God’s work, has appealed to that higher court and has demonstrated that God is greater than government. Some have lost the appeal and their lives. They are called martyrs. The point is that God has all authority and He sovereignly chooses when to use it.

The Task

Based on His claim (“therefore”), Jesus issues a command. The King James Version says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Mt. 28:19), causing a misunderstanding: it sounds as though there are two commands, “to go” and “to teach.” The Greek text, however, has only one command: “to make disciples.” Making disciples (matheteuo) is the only imperative in this paragraph. Clustered around the imperative are three participles: “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching.” The main verb (“make disciples”) tells what is to be done and the participles (“going,” “baptizing,” “teaching”) tell how it is to be done. So the command is to make disciples.

Some contend that “disciple” is a synonym for “Christian.” In that view, to make a disciple is to make a Christian, but this and other biblical passages indicate that being a Christian is one thing and being a disciple is another. Being a Christian costs nothing; salvation is a gift (Rom. 6:23). Discipleship costs everything (Lk. 14:25-35). Thus, a disciple is defined as a baptized believer who obeys the Word and is, therefore, growing in

the Lord.

The three participles indicate the three-step process in disciple-making. Step one is “going.” This Greek participle (poreuthentes) could be translated “as you go” or “having gone.” The Lord does not amplify on “going” here, but in Mark 16:15-16, He adds, “Go [the same Greek word and construction as in Mt. 28:19] into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Evidently, in Matthew 28:19, between going and baptizing comes presenting the gospel and inviting the person to trust Christ.

Step two is “baptizing” (baptizontes). The New Testament teaches that when people hear the message about Jesus Christ and trust Him as Savior, they have eternal life (Jn. 3:36). Then, they are to be baptized. Luke indicates that order throughout Acts. That is always the order: hear, believe, and be baptized (for example, Acts 18:8). Peter says that baptism is a symbol (1 Pet. 3:18). Just as a wedding ring is a symbol of the union between a man and woman, so baptism is a symbol of a believer’s union with Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3-5). Baptism also identifies a believer with a body of believers. The Lord indicates that baptism is to be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Step three is “teaching” (didaskontes). When people have trusted Christ as their Savior and have been baptized, they are to be taught. Verse 20 says they are to be taught “all things that I have commanded you.” Secular teaching today, especially in university classrooms, is nothing more than content for the mind. Teaching in the church must be more. It must include commands for the will.

Thus, the threefold process of disciple-making is to 1) introduce people to the person of Christ, 2) identify them with the Body of Christ, and 3) instruct them in the commands of Christ.

The Extent

Matthew 28:19 says to disciple all nations. Earlier in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus sent the disciples to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 10:5-6). Now He sends them to all nations. That is one of the reasons this is called the Great Commission. The extent of the Great Commission is global.

The Power

In verse 20, Jesus says, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” In the Greek text, the “I” is emphatic. The “I,” of course, is Jesus Christ. He may be identified as the Son of God or as the Savior of men, but in this paragraph, He has identified Himself as the One who has all authority in heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). So when He says “I” emphatically in verse 20, He is reminding them that the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth will be with them.

Furthermore, Christ will be spiritually present with the disciple-makers always, in season and out of season, in sunshine and in shadows. He will be with them in peacetime and in persecution, in success and in failure, now and until He returns.

The goal of the church is to make disciples. That includes both evangelism and

edification. Some preach as if the goal is only evangelism. Others teach that the goal of the church is edification. In their view, the church is a school, not a soul-saving station. It is not either/or; it is both/and. The goal is to make disciples.

Summary: Jesus says to His disciples in the first century and to all disciples in every century until He returns, “As the One who has all authority, I command you to make disciples of all nations and I will personally be with you as you do.”

In other words, with the goal of Christ before them, the presence of Christ beside them, and the authority of Christ behind them, disciples are to march into all the world and make disciples.

THE CONFIRMATION

Matthew 28:18-20 is commonly called the Great Commission. Actually, there are five passages in the New Testament that record the Great Commission. To fully understand that great charge to the church, all five must be studied in detail.

The second passage is Mark 16:14-18: “Afterward He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, ‘Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name, they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues, they will take up serpents, and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.’”

This passage has been rejected as genuine because it does not appear in some Greek manuscripts. Actually, it is in every Greek manuscript of Mark except two and in one of the two, there is a blank space left for it. Furthermore, these verses are included in many of the ancient versions, including the Vulgate and Syriac, which date from the second century, and the Coptic, which goes all the way back to 150 A.D. It is alluded to in the writings of Justin in 151 A.D. and quoted by Titian, Justin’s disciple. Critics of the passage quote Jerome to defend their view, but Jerome included it in the Vulgate! For a detailed defense of the authenticity of these verses, see John Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*.

In this passage, Jesus focuses on the evangelistic command and the confirmation of the commission to the first-century disciples. The disciples here were not on a mountain in Galilee waiting for the Lord to appear; rather, they were sitting in a room (probably in Jerusalem) eating. Mark 16:14 informs us that at this point, the disciples refused to believe in the resurrection. That is remarkable! Mark 8 records that the Lord had told them He was going to die and be raised. After the crucifixion, He sent them three announcements that He was alive (Mk. 16:7, 11, 13). Yet, after all of that, they still did not believe. Their unbelief can be traced throughout this chapter (Mk. 16:13-14). The turn of events had plunged them into disbelief, disobedience, and probably despondency.

Their unbelief affected them radically. Mark 16:14 says the Lord “rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart.” The unbelief produced the hardness. The Greek word translated “heart” (*kardia*) probably refers to the whole inside of the person, the intellect, emotions, and will. Inside they were hard. One commentator says this refers to the “inaction of the whole heart, in its widest sense, including intellect as well as feeling” (Alexander, p. 441). They were shocked, stunned, almost stupefied—their unbelief had paralyzed them. In the midst of their spiritual malady, the Lord manifested Himself. Jesus “rebuked” them. The Greek word translated “rebuked” (*oneidizo*) means “to reproach, to blame, to censor.” He chided them. They should have believed and did not. So the Lord sternly rebuked them to arouse them out of their disbelief and discouragement.

Fascinating, isn’t it? We would think that a command of this scope and consequence would be given to those who were able to accomplish the task: to political, military, or religious leaders; or perhaps to a company of intellectual giants who by sheer force or

genius might accomplish it. Instead, the Lord gave the Great Commission to a small group of obscure Galileans whose names had never been uttered in the Roman senate. Caesar had never heard of them, and they were frozen in unbelief.

The Task

After the Lord chided them, He commanded them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The Greek text says, “Going, preach the gospel.” The command is not to go but to preach—the going is assumed.

Mark titles his book “The Gospel [good news] of Jesus Christ” (Mk. 1:1). In Mark 1:14, he talks about the good news of the coming of the Kingdom. In Mark 8:31, he tells us that Jesus informed His disciples that He would die and rise again. Toward the end of Mark’s gospel, the Greek word “gospel” (euangelion) is used to refer to Christ’s death (Mk. 14:9). After the resurrection, and probably after the incident in this passage, Jesus gave His disciples a discourse on His death and resurrection. It is not until later, however, that Paul defines the gospel as the death and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-8).

A long line of martyrs has died rather than deny what they believed. Unlike Stephen, Jesus did not die as a mere martyr. Nor did Jesus die just to exhibit the love He had for the world. Nor did He die to convince men that He loved them. He died as a substitute. A. B. Simpson is reported to have said that the gospel “tells rebellious men that God is reconciled, that justice is satisfied, that sin has been atoned for, that the judgment of the guilty may be revoked, the condemnation of the sinner canceled, the curse of the Law blotted out, the gates of hell closed, the portals of heaven opened wide, the power of sin subdued, the guilty conscience healed, the broken heart comforted, the sorrow and misery of the Fall undone.”

The command is to preach the gospel, but that is not the complete task. Mark 16:16 says, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” Thus, when people believe, they are to be baptized. This is not saying, however, that one must be baptized to be saved. The verse does not say, “Be baptized in order to be saved;” it says, “He who believes and is baptized.” It is like saying that if you get on the bus and sit down, you will go to New York. Technically, if you just get on the bus, you will make it to New York whether you sit down or not. Being baptized does not save. Omitting baptism does not condemn. Matthew’s account goes beyond baptism to include teaching them after they are baptized. The result of all this is the establishment of a local church (see Acts 2:40-47).

The Extent

This great and glorious good news is to be preached in all the world. Did the disciples obey? Did they go into all the world, or did they stay in Jerusalem? In Colossians 1:16, Paul says the gospel did go into all the world. Whether or not Paul means that they preached in every nation of the world, no one knows, but tradition records that the disciples did not stay in Palestine.

Various traditions have reported the following movements of the disciples. Peter went to Babylon and Rome, where he was crucified upside down. Supposedly his bones have been discovered there. Andrew reportedly went to southern Russia and ended up in

Ephesus in Asia Minor, that is, modern Turkey. James, the son of Zebedee, probably went to Spain between Acts 2 and Acts 12. Acts 12 records that he was killed in Jerusalem by Herod Agrippa. John went to Ephesus and probably elsewhere. One tradition is that Philip went to France. Bartholomew, also identified as Nathaniel, is said to have gone to Asia Minor and eastward to Armenia (an area today between Iran and the Soviet Union), where he was skinned alive before he was beheaded. Tradition also says that Thomas preached in Persia, where he met the three wise men whom he baptized. He is supposed to have taken them with him to India. Matthew stayed in the Holy Land for fifteen years and supposedly went to Persia and Ethiopia, where he met Philip. James, the son of Alphaeus, went to Syria. Jude went to Armenia, Syria, and northern Persia. Simon the Canaanite traveled to Egypt, then to Carthage, to Spain, and to Britain, where he met Joseph of Arimathea. Then, he journeyed to Syria, Mesopotamia, and was martyred in Persia (see William Steuart McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*).

However, the command is to preach the gospel, not only in all the world but to every creature. The gospel has not been given to every creature. For example, the gospel has been preached for centuries in the United States. There are many churches with thousands of people in them and many more with hundreds. Yet there are hundreds, thousands, and probably millions of individuals who have never heard or understood the gospel. The Lord does not mean for one to be left out.

The Confirmation

Jesus promised His unbelieving disciples that signs would follow those who believed. These were confirming signs. Mark 16:20 says that they were to confirm the Word, and Paul indicates that these types of miracles confirm the apostolic office (2 Cor. 12:12). Both the message and the messenger were to be confirmed by signs.

The book of Acts records that four of the five kinds of signs occurred. Peter, Philip, and Paul cast out demons. Tongues-speaking occurred. Paul did not “take up” a serpent, but one “took up” with him, and he lived to tell about it. Peter and Paul healed the sick. There is nothing in Acts to indicate that anyone drank poison, but church history contains a well-known story concerning the apostle John: a fatal potion was prepared for him, but when he drank it, he was unharmed.

Do these signs confirm the message today? There is evidence that confirming signs have ceased. Hebrews 2:3-4 does not say the message was confirmed directly by signs but was “confirmed to us by those who had heard.” In other words, one group got the signs and the next generation did not. The second group was not confirmed by signs, but by the group who got the signs.

Summary: Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach the Gospel in all the world with confirming signs.

THE MESSAGE

Luke records, “Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high’” (Lk. 24:44-49).

In Luke’s account, it appears that everything after the resurrection happened on the day of the resurrection, but that cannot be. In Luke 24, the disciples are told to tarry in Jerusalem; but in Matthew 28, they are told to meet on a mountain in Galilee. Therefore, during the time span of Luke 24, there must have been a trip to Galilee. These observations have driven commentators to the conclusion that Luke 24 is Luke’s summary of things Jesus said after the resurrection. Others believe that it is a summary of what Christ said on the Mount of Olives.

The Message

Jesus began by reminding them that He had taught them the Scriptures. Luke records such incidents for us in Luke 9:22; 18:31-33; 17:25; and 22:37. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were the ancient Jewish divisions of the Old Testament. (The Old Testament Jesus refers to here is identical to the Old Testament today. The subdivisions are different, but the content is exactly the same.) Thus, Christ is saying that every major part of the Old Testament speaks of Him and must be fulfilled.

Jesus told them that they did not understand. Often people do not learn something the first time they hear it. So Jesus opened “their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (Lk. 24:45). Spiritual things can only be discerned spiritually. What they had heard, but had not understood, was the gospel.

Jesus told them it was written that He should suffer and be raised from the dead the third day. It is possible to hear and not hear, to see and not see. That is especially true of the gospel. Satan blinds the minds of those that do not believe. Only God can make them see.

After Jesus explained the Scriptures, He exhorted them to preach repentance and remission of sins. Mark 16 indicates that when people hear the gospel, what they need to do is believe, in this passage, the Lord says repentance is to be preached. Evidently, biblical faith assumes repentance and biblical repentance includes faith (see chapter 11).

They were also to preach the remission of sins, that is, forgiveness. This was to be done “in His name” (literally translated “on His name”), indicating that the name of Jesus is to be the ground upon which the offer of forgiveness is made. The epistles explain further that forgiveness is based on the cross of Christ (for example, Col. 1:14). And actually, the Luke 24 passage implies that. In Luke 24:44-46, Christ says that the Old Testament prophesied

His death and resurrection. He predicted it; He performed it; now He says, "Go preach it." The implication is that His death and resurrection form the basis for forgiveness.

This is an important issue. The basis for forgiveness is not that God likes us or even that He loves us. It is that Christ laid down His life for us to pay for our sins. Some think forgiveness is like a man saying to the child down the block who threw a ball through his window, "It's OK, kid, I like you. Forget it." No, God is love, but He is also righteous and just. Forgiveness is like a child throwing a ball through a window and the owner's son paying for the broken glass. Then, the man says, "It's all right; my son paid for it." G. Campbell Morgan once said, "If God would forgive me without the cross, then I would never be satisfied with His forgiveness."

The Extent

Preaching is to be done among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Earlier, Christ had sent the disciples out, but only to Israel. Now He sends them to the Gentiles. He sent them to one nation; now He sends them to all nations. Jesus was no mere teacher who founded a Jewish sect. The Gospel of Luke presents Him as the Son of Man, who comes to be the Savior of all who trust in Him.

Concerning this passage, John R. Stott says, "The church, in other words, is fundamentally a missionary society, commissioned and committed to proclaiming the Gospel of salvation to the whole world" (Stott, p. 55). This preaching to the whole world was to begin at Jerusalem. For the disciples, Jerusalem was not home; Galilee was home. Jerusalem was where they were at the moment. The principle: evangelism begins where you are.

The Power

Jesus told them that they were witnesses (the apostles were eyewitnesses of the death and resurrection of Christ); then He told them that He would send "the Promise of the Father." What is that? Acts 1:4 uses that phrase and adds, "Which you have heard from Me." "The Promise," then, refers to the promise Christ gave in the Upper Room discourse concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-26; 16:7-15).

He also told them to stay in Jerusalem because the coming of the Holy Spirit was to be on the day of the Feast of Pentecost. So they had to wait, not to convince God to give them the Holy Spirit, but so the day of the annual Feast of Pentecost could arrive and God's program could be fulfilled.

He called the coming of the Holy Spirit being "endued with power." The Greek word translated "endued" (enduo) means "clothed" and is used in Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10-12, Romans 13:14, and Galatians 3:27. If you have trusted Christ, you have been endued just like the apostles.

Summary: Jesus told the disciples that once they understood the Scripture and had received the Holy Spirit, they were to preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations.

The emphasis in this passage is on the message of the Great Commission. The charge of the church is not to heal the sick. Jesus had earlier charged the twelve, and also the seventy, to heal the sick (Lk. 9:12; 10:9). That charge is absent here. God can, and does, supernaturally heal the sick, but miraculous healing (the instantaneous and complete healing without the use of medical means) is not part of Christ's commission to the church. The church today has no authority to exercise a regular ministry of miraculous healing. The primary task of the church is heralding the gospel.

Christians ought to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They should influence society and illuminate its darkness. They must be responsible citizens and even provoke reform on occasions, but the primary task of church members is to herald the gospel, not reform society.

THE POWER

John writes, “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said unto them, ‘Peace be with you.’ Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (Jn. 20:19-23).

The disciples were plagued by fear. The evening of resurrection day found them shut up in a room for fear of the Jews. On one of the greatest days in the history of the world, when men should have been dancing in the street, they were trembling in their locked room.

Of course, they had a reason to be afraid. The Jews had just managed to see to it that Jesus was put to death. The disciples were His closest companions and His designated disciples. Now that Christ was removed, perhaps the bitter hatred of the Jews would be focused on them.

In the midst of their isolation and dread, Jesus appeared suddenly, supernaturally. John 20:19 says the door was securely shut. Therefore, the appearance of Jesus must have frightened them, but with His presence, He brought peace. The solution for fear is the presence of Christ, which brings peace. In Matthew 28:20, He promises to be with us always, even to the end of the age. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul assures us that as we pray, His peace will guard our hearts and minds. So Christ calmed them with His presence and with His peace. He does the same for believers today.

Fear was not their only problem. John 20:20 implies that they were also perplexed by doubt. What is here implied is clearly stated in Mark 16:14. We wonder how they could possibly doubt the Lord. After all, the Old Testament had prophesied the resurrection, and Jesus Himself had proclaimed it to them. On top of that, Mary had seen Him, and so had Peter. How could they doubt?

One possible answer is that they were looking for Jesus to establish a literal kingdom on earth. Although He had told them He was about to die, they were so convinced that He was about to bring in the Kingdom that they did not hear Him. Then, when He died, they were dumbfounded. The crucifixion left them confused because of their own preconceived ideas. Now they did not know what to believe. Doubt dominated the disciples. Consequently, they were not shouting the gospel from the housetops; they were sitting silently in their room. When believers doubt, they are dumb. John R. Stott has said that the greatest single reason for the church’s evangelistic disobedience is centered in the church’s doubts.

John 20:20 says that Christ showed them His hands and His side. Luke informs us that He told them to handle Him (Lk. 24:39). The point is, they doubted the resurrection. So before sending them out, He convinced them with a personal appearance and a personal display of His wounds.

The Authority

After calming and convincing them, Christ commissioned them. He began by stating that the Father had sent Him. John 20:21 says, “As my Father has sent Me, I also send you.” *Apostello*, the Greek word for “sent” in the phrase “As the Father has sent Me,” refers to official, or authoritative, sending. It is in the perfect tense, indicating that the mission of Christ is not being regarded in its historical fulfillment, but in its permanent effect. B. F. Westcott says, “The form of the fulfillment of Christ’s mission was now to be changed, but the mission itself was still to be continued” (Westcott, p. 294). *Pempo*, the Greek word translated “send” in the phrase “I also send you,” is a general word for sending. It is in the present tense. The disciples were not to start a new work; they were to carry on the work of Jesus.

The picture painted by this statement is that of a relay runner passing on a baton to another runner. He has received it, has run with it, and now places it in the hand of another, who is to continue the race.

The Power

The disciples had been given peace and proof. They had been calmed, convinced, and commissioned, but they were still paralyzed. They were still sitting in the locked room. So Christ gave them the Holy Spirit. John 20:22 says He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Breathing on them was to show that He was imparting to them His very own Spirit.

Whatever occurred here, it was not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as some have said. By the time of Acts 1:5, forty days after John 20:22, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was still future. In Acts 11:15-16, Peter explains that the Gentiles in Acts 10 had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit “as upon us at the beginning.” That means that the beginning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2. Therefore, John 20:22 is not referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Rather, what Jesus bestowed on the disciples at this time was a temporary filling of the Holy Spirit. A. T. Robertson calls this “a foretaste of the great Pentecost” (Robertson, p. 314). John F. Walvoord says, “In John 20:22, apparently a temporary filling of the Spirit was given to provide for their spiritual needs before Pentecost. These Gospel passages were not intended to be a norm for the present age, but in general, continue the ministry of the Spirit as it had been in the Old Testament” (Walvoord, p. 83).

Although this passage does not say that the Holy Spirit provides the power for evangelism, Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8 make that abundantly clear. The power is not in the believer’s personal peace. It is not in the believer’s being personally persuaded. It is certainly not in believer’s personality or effective presentation. The power is in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The Task

After breathing on them, Jesus said, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven

them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn. 20:23). Does that mean Jesus gave the apostles the power to forgive and retain sins? No. As Mark 2:7 points out, only God can forgive sins. Peter did not think this gave him the power to forgive sins, as Acts 8:19-24 clearly demonstrates.

What then does this passage mean? The Expositor’s Greek New Testament says that it is talking about the ability to “pronounce forgiveness, and to threaten doom” (The Expositor’s Greek New Testament, p. 865). A. T. Robertson expressed it like this: “What he commits to the disciples and to us is the power and privilege of giving assurance of the forgiveness of sins by God by correctly announcing the terms of forgiveness” (Robertson, p. 315).

There are times when people need to hear a human being tell them, “You are forgiven,” or “You are still in your sin.” Care must be taken to make sure they understand that only God forgives. Nevertheless, the messenger needs to state it. When I have done this kind of thing, I have guarded myself by saying, “If you have trusted Christ, I can say on the authority of the New Testament you are forgiven,” or, “You are entitled to your opinion, but I must warn you that according to the New Testament unless you trust in Christ, you are still in your sin.”

By the way, notice that they received the Holy Spirit, which means they had power; and yet verse 23 indicates that they would not always be successful in winning their audience to Christ. Possessing power, even the power of the Holy Spirit does not guarantee success. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and received 3,000 souls. Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and received 3,000 stones.

Summary: Jesus told the disciples, that with the peace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, you are sent to proclaim forgiveness of sins.

As Luke emphasizes the message that we know from the Scriptures, so John’s account stresses the power that we obtain from the Holy Spirit.

THE PLAN

Luke says, “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:6-11).

Jesus had been crucified, had risen from the dead, and had appeared to the disciples on several occasions. They were over the shock of His death and the surprise of His resurrection. The fear, the doubt, the unbelief had evaporated. They had been instructed and enlightened. Time had passed, emotions were settled down, and their minds were back on track. Now they had questions.

Of all the questions they could have asked, the one uppermost on their minds was, “Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). What they had in mind was an earthly, national kingdom. That was the prediction in the Old Testament (Isa. 1:26; 9:27; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-17; Dan. 7:13-14; Hos. 3:4-5; Amos 9:11; Zech. 9:9). That was the expectation of the nation. Richard B. Rackham says, “They retain the old Jewish idea of the Messianic ‘kingdom of God’ as a glorious empire of Israel” (Rackham, p. 7). Richard C. H. Lenski states, “They thought of a glorious earthly rule for Israel” (Lenski, p. 29). F. F. Bruce calls this their “hope of an earthly and national kingdom” (Bruce, p. 70).

Jesus answered their question and corrected their thinking. In verse 7, He told them, “It is not for you to know”—literally, “It is not given you to know.” Bruce paraphrases this, “It is not your concern” (Bruce, p. 70). We would say, “It is none of your business.” In essence, Jesus said, “That’s later. It’s not your concern now.”

Evidently, they did not have the wrong concept of the kingdom. It was just that the kingdom was not to be their concern now. The kingdom was future. Other matters must concern them at this time. Believers today still tend to get sidetracked. They get stuck on side issues and minor matters. Two of the most popular are the extreme past and the extreme future: the creation story of Genesis 1 and the Millennium of Revelation 20. The point is not that those things are not true or not important. They are, but they are not the major concern now.

The Task

Their main concern was not to be prophecy but preaching the gospel. Acts 1:8 says, “You shall be witnesses to Me.”

Is witnessing something one is or something one does? Years ago, I heard a preacher suggest that witnessing was something a person is. He used Acts 1:8 and the words “You shall be” to prove it. His point was that what we are is more important than what we say.

Although what we are is important in evangelism, technically, evangelism is something one does. The Greek word for witnessing, *martureo*, is a forensic term from the courtroom that implies—yea, demands—speaking. Imagine a witness in the courtroom who says nothing. The judge would hold him in contempt of the court.

If the redeemed of the Lord do not say so, the world will credit them with having commendable moral behavior instead of glorifying God. Silent believers are like beautiful road signs with no words printed on them. Your lips, as well as your life, must speak of Christ; verse 8 says they were to be witnesses “to Me,” that is, Jesus Christ.

What is included in witnessing about Christ? Is it telling sinners about His life, His lectures, His miracles, His marvels? Or, does it primarily mean His death and resurrection? Luke 24:48 says, “And you are witnesses of these things.” The context clearly indicates that “these things” were Christ’s death and resurrection. So when Christ told the disciples that they were to be “witnesses to Me,” He meant that they were to talk to people about His death and resurrection. The task is not to tell people about your church, or your conversion, or your creed, but Christ. Further, in telling about Him, the primary focus must be His death for sin and His resurrection from the dead.

The Power

Christ wanted the disciples to witness, but not without the Holy Spirit. The reason is obvious: the Holy Spirit provides the power for evangelism. Acts 1:8 says, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” The reception of power is simultaneous with the coming of the Holy Spirit, not subsequent to it. This is a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit mentioned earlier (Acts 1:5), which all Christians after Pentecost receive at conversion (1 Cor. 12:13). Thus, if you have trusted Christ, you have the Holy Spirit and you have the power of the Holy Spirit.

Believers may not feel that power, but they have it. The Greek word “power” (*dunamis*) simply means the ability to perform. When a Christian witnesses concerning the cross of Christ, the Holy Spirit has the ability to effect conviction and conversion. With gas in the tank, a driver has power, that is, the ability to perform. If he waits until he feels the power, he will never move, but if he starts the engine and pushes the accelerator, he will experience the power. Likewise, believers should not wait until they feel the power. They should start to witness and then they will experience the power at work.

The Extent

The Lord also told the disciples where to witness. They were to begin at Jerusalem, that is, where they were, and go beyond, extending to the ends of the earth. Jerusalem was the capital city of Judea. Judea was the province. Samaria was the next neighboring province. “The end of the earth” signifies that they were to go as far as the most remote country.

The order is important since it assures that there will be evangelism at home and evangelism abroad, commonly called missions. If the order is reversed, a church will have strong mission support but weak home evangelism.

His discourse was finished; it was not interrupted by His departure. Upon the

completion of His charge, He was “taken up”—literally, lifted or raised up. The latter part of verse 9 informs us that a cloud received Him out of their sight. Many commentaries take the cloud to be a symbol of the Shekinah glory, that is, the very presence of God. The one thing that is for sure is that the body of Christ was removed from the eyes of the apostles. They were to cease looking up.

The commission given in Acts 1:8 is the last utterance of Jesus Christ before His ascension. Thus, He is telling us that evangelism, not prophecy, is to be our major concern. The last thing a coach tells his players before they run out on the field; the last instruction of the general before the battle; the last lesson of the teacher before graduation is surely significant. The alert leader makes sure that his last words underscore what is to be the major concern.

As they were staring intently, even straining their eyes, they were startled by the appearance of two men. The fact that they were dressed in white apparel has led many to conclude that these were angels in human form. In Luke 24:4, Luke does call angels “men,” and white apparel does appear to be the color of angels’ garb (Mt. 18:3; Jn. 20:12).

The creatures, whether heavenly or earthly, were messengers. Their communication was short, like a telegram: “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” He went away visibly; ascending into clouds. He shall return in clouds. He was received into heaven; He shall return from heaven.

This reminder must have reinforced the importance of the task. They were told to witness to the whole world, and then Christ immediately disappeared. That underscores in their minds that witnessing was to be of major importance. Then they were reminded that He is coming back. Surely one of the first things to occur to them was the thought and when He gets back, He is going to want to know if we did what He told us to do. Dramatically, the Lord impressed upon them the significance of this demand.

Summary: Jesus told the disciples that their concern should not be the fulfillment of the kingdom promise now, but being witnesses to Him and after promising them the power of the Holy Spirit, He ascended to heaven.

AGAIN, WHY EVANGELIZE?

If a study were done of Christians who are evangelistic, the result would probably reveal that most are involved for one of three reasons.

New converts are usually evangelistic because of their conversion experience. Out of the excitement and emotion of their new-found faith, they tell others about Christ. Andrew is a biblical illustration. John 1:41 tells us that after his experience with Christ, he first found his own brother and said to him, “We have found the Messiah.” That is good, but the excitement soon wears off.

Older Christians are sometimes involved in evangelism because of a training program. They are enlisted and enrolled in an evangelistic seminar. In conjunction with the classes they are assigned to communicate the gospel, and they do. That is good, but the program or class ends and, in the majority of cases, so does the soul-winning.

Some saints are forced into evangelistic activity by guilt. A preacher tells them that the lost are hell-bound. Christians, he says, must warn the lost. If they don’t, the blood of non-Christians will be on their heads. Thus, driven by guilt, the believer tells others about heaven. That is not so good. It is true that the lost are headed for hell. Granted, Christians are responsible to give them the good news about Christ, but if the motivation is guilt or fear, that is less than what God wants.

Those are a few of the reasons why some are evangelistic. Why should Christians evangelize? What is the biblical basis for evangelism? A summary of all five passages on the Great Commission will give us the biblical answer to that question.

No one passage of the five gives all the elements of the Great Commission. Matthew and John record the authority for the Commission. Matthew, Mark, and Luke include the extent. Matthew, Luke, and John inform us that the Holy Spirit is the power. Mark mentions the message and Luke adds details. Only Mark and Luke discuss the message. Mark alone relates the confirmation.

All five passages mention a task, but it is not the same task. Matthew says make disciples. Mark’s passage demands that we preach the gospel. Luke’s version is that repentance and remission of sins are to be preached. According to John, the task is to forgive and retain sins. Acts says the disciples are to be witnesses concerning Christ.

George W. Peters says, “No one of them gives it [the Great Commission] in all of its completeness. But they beautifully supplement each other. While each of the evangelists presents it from his own point of view and with his own unique emphasis, together they make a complete whole. Only as we see the whole outline, as presented in the four gospels, do we see the total Great Commission” (Peters, p. 174).

The Total Task

Only Matthew gives us the all-inclusive Great Commission. According to the Lord’s words, as recorded by Matthew, the Great Commission is by the authority of Christ, the disciples were to go into all the world and make disciples in the power of the Holy Spirit. The all-inclusive, total task of the Great Commission is to make disciples. As a study of that passage reveals, making disciples includes evangelizing, baptizing, and teaching.

The Evangelistic Emphasis

Although the total program includes baptizing and teaching, an analysis of all five passages indicates that the emphasis of the Great Commission is on evangelism. The command in Mark is to preach the gospel. The commission in Luke is to preach repentance and remission of sins. The charge in John is to forgive and retain sins. And, as Luke reminds us in Acts 1, just before He left, the Lord communicated again to them that they were to witness concerning Him to the very ends of the earth. The ultimate goal may be spiritual maturity and the total task may include teaching, but, the emphasis of the Great Commission is on evangelism.

The Biblical Basis of Evangelism

Believers are to evangelize because they are commanded to do so as part of the all-inclusive task of the total Great Commission. Evangelism is not optional, it is imperative. There is no way to fulfill the Great Commission without evangelizing. Believers evangelize because God commanded them to do so.

Some would say that we are to evangelize because of the need of people. They are lost and going to hell. We have the message that will save them, so we must give the message to them. Granted, the Bible teaches that people are headed for eternal separation from God, but the New Testament does not use that as the reason for evangelism.

The reason for evangelism is the command of God, not the condition of human beings. No doubt, contemplating the miserable mess people are in could move us to minister to them. That is emotional motivation, but when our stirred emotions settle down, wear off, or grow old, the emotional motivation dies.

God commands us to make disciples. That involves evangelism. The issue is not emotional. God demands our rational, volitional action. We are to evangelize not because we want to or because we like to, nor because we choose to, but because we are told to do so.

I could get my son to mow the lawn by pointing out the need. I can just see it now. I could plead, "Oh, son, see the grass? It's in terrible shape. It needs cutting." I could then wait for him to see the need and cut the grass. Frankly, that has worked. It has also not worked, depending on the mood of my son. Now, my son does mow the lawn. The reason is that his father says, "Go mow the lawn." That is not to deny that the need is there. It is just to say that the reason is the command of his father. God's children need to be reminded that the Father has given them a command!

Summary: The biblical basis for evangelism is the command given by the Lord as part of the overall Great Commission to make disciples.

PART 3: THE MESSAGE IN EVANGELISM

THE BAD NEWS THAT IS GOOD NEWS

The subject of this chapter is sin. For many, that is bad news. This, however, is a case of the bad news being good news.

Sin is part and parcel of the message in evangelism. After the Lord rose and before He ascended, He gave the disciples the Great Commission. A careful consideration of the passages that record the Great Commission will reveal that sin is to be preached. Note: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn. 20:23) and “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk. 24:47).

Think of it! The Lord wants us to talk to others about sin. That is the bad news. Sin is bad news and talking to others about their sin is worse. The subject sounds bad, but this is a case in which the bad news is really good news. A thorough understanding of the subject of sin will demonstrate that such is the case.

The Definition of Sin

Theologians define sin as anything contrary to the nature of God. Crime is that which is against the government; sin is that which is against God. There are several different aspects of sin.

Imputed Sin Some scholars say Adam’s sin was imputed to the whole human race. They point to Paul’s statement, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12), and conclude that in Adam’s fall, all fell. They claim that, just as our representatives in Congress pass laws that are imputed to us, so Adam, as our representative, did something thousands of years ago in another place that is imputed to us today. Not all agree with that interpretation of Romans 5:12, but it at least implies inherent sin, that is, that all people inherited a sin nature from Adam.

Inherent Sin Theologians talk about inherent sin as well. When Adam sinned, his very nature became corrupt and, thus, every descendant of Adam inherited his corrupt, depraved, sinful nature. Ephesians 2:3 states that we are all sinners by nature. Humans are totally depraved. They have a darkened mind, depraved emotions, and a disobedient will.

Individual Sin Theology professors also talk about individual sins. Individual sins are simply those personal sins all people commit, either intentionally or unintentionally. All individuals commit such sins. See Romans 3:12-18 for Paul’s description of personal sins. This category includes murder, adultery, stealing, and lying.

The point is that sin is anything contrary to the nature of God. Does that mean that the message in evangelism must include a discussion of theological definitions of sin? Not necessarily. Paul did not use the theological concept of sin to prove to a lost people that they are sinners. He used the theological idea as an introduction to the doctrine of sanctification. Consider the outline of Romans:

Romans 1:1-17	Introduction
Romans 1:18-3:20	Condemnation
Romans 3:21-5:11	Justification
Romans 5:12-21	Transition
Romans 6-8	Sanctification

Where does Paul talk about inherent sin? In Romans 5:12-21, after he has discussed justification. Thus, Paul did not use the theological concept of sin to get sinners saved but in preparation for getting saints sanctified.

Well, then, how should we communicate the message of sin to people without Christ?

USE THE LAW

Paul One way to communicate the concept of sin to an unsaved person is by the use of the Mosaic Law. Paul said of himself (Rom 7:7) that except for the Law, he would not have known sin. When he wrote his great theological treatise on salvation, he said that the knowledge of sin is by the Law (Rom. 3:20). He even declared that those without the Law—that is, the Gentiles—have the work of the Law written in their hearts (Rom. 2:15). Paul’s experience shows us that to communicate the concept of sin to a sinner, we could use the Law. After all, the Law is not for a righteous man, but for sinners (1 Tim. 1:9).

Jesus On at least one occasion, Jesus used the Law to prove to a lost man that he was a sinner. The rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked how he might inherit eternal life (Mk. 10:17-23). Jesus began by talking about Himself. He asked, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mk. 16:18). In other words, He was asking, “Are you calling me God?” The young fellow did not respond, so Christ brought up the Law. He said, “You know the commandments” (Mk. 16:19). Jesus did not get theological. He simply used the Law to prove to the rich young ruler that he had broken the Law and, thus, was a sinner.

Does that mean that in evangelism, one must start with the Law or always use the Ten Commandments? Not necessarily.

Use Lostness

Jesus did not always use the Law; He also pointed out people’s lostness. Jesus did not mention the Law at all when He talked to Nicodemus (see Jn. 3:1- 15). He did not appeal to the Law directly when He talked to the woman at the well (Jn. 4:7-26). In both of these cases, however, He communicated that they were “lost.” In telling Nicodemus he had to be born again, Jesus is sending the message that his first birth was not sufficient. Nicodemus needed something he did not have. In the case of the woman at the well, Jesus brought up the issue of sin by asking her about her husband, which is an indirect use of the Law. In neither of these cases did the Lord specifically mention the Ten Commandments.

In his book *How to Give Away Your Faith*, Paul Little suggests that the “I am” designations in the gospel of John are designed to reveal people’s needs.

Emptiness In John 6:35, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” People are empty and

hungry. Jesus satisfies. Most people know they are empty, or at least that they are not satisfied, so they try to fill their lives with possessions, pleasure, and power. Or they shovel in self-made or man-made righteousness. It does not work. It doesn't satisfy. It is like eating junk food instead of nutritious food. Jesus satisfies the emptiness inside like a salad, a baked potato, and a filet mignon satisfy a hungry man.

Purposelessness In John 8:12, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." People are in darkness and do not know where they are going. They are aimless and purposeless. It is like being caught in a dark room. Without light, people grope around, trying to find the light switch. They bump into things. They brush against things. They break things. If something were to bump against them, their heart would sink to their toes. Finally, they find the switch; the light comes on; they can see. They know where they are and can see where they are going. Likewise, Jesus is the Light of the world. Once in the light, people understand life. They have purpose and direction.

Loneliness In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." People are separated from God and are, thus, alone, alienated from others. When Jesus is the shepherd, people are never alone, for Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Furthermore, a shepherd has a flock. When people are members of a flock, they are not only related to the shepherd, they are also related to the rest of the flock; they are not alone.

Summary: Sin is anything contrary to the nature of God; the way to show sinners their need is by using the Law and/or pointing out their need.

Don't get theological. Use God's Law, or people's lack to show sinners their need.

Sin is bad news. Yet, this bad news is good news because the problem of sin is solvable. People have been brainwashed into thinking their problem is not in themselves: their problem is their parents, peers, boss, neighbor, or the government. If that were the case, people would be without hope, for there would be no solution, but when people see their problem is sin, there is hope, for that problem can be solved, and that is good news.

Sin is also good news because it is the truth and people appreciate being told the truth. If people are told they are sinners in a self-righteous, condemning manner, they will not like it, but if someone identifies with them by saying, "I too am a sinner," and then graciously instructing them they are sinners, they are much more likely to hear that Christ is the solution without being offended. People want to know the truth. They want a doctor who tells them the truth, a lawyer who levels with them, a mechanic who is honest; and in spiritual matters, they want the truth.

I once counseled a heavy-set housewife who was having some difficulties with her husband. I patiently listened to her tale of woe. After several hours she asked, "Well, what do you think?" I calmly looked at her and said, "Well, for starters, you're fat. You need to lose weight." Her immediate response was, "Thank you. You're the first person who has ever been honest with me. When I buy a new dress, my friends say, 'Oh, it looks great.' I know they're lying. I'm fat. I can't look great in anything. Thanks for your honesty." We need to tell people the truth about sin. They will appreciate it, and God will be pleased since that is what He told is to do.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Jesus Christ issued a jumbo-sized job for believers: to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15). Obviously, if this job is to be done, the job must be understood. It is not difficult to understand going into all the world or preaching to every creature, but what about the gospel? What is the gospel?

That may sound like asking the obvious. Everyone understands the gospel—right? No. Wrong. Many have misunderstood the gospel of the grace of God. D. L. Moody, the nineteenth-century Billy Graham, is reported to have said, “I think I had been a partaker of the gospel ten years before I knew what the word meant.”

Diverse opinions exist on what the gospel is. A gospel singer being interviewed on the radio is asked to give his testimony. He says, “I was unloved, rejected, alone, and lonely. I suffered from an inferiority complex. I struggled with insecurity. Then I heard the gospel, I heard God loves me. God’s love changed my life.” Is that the gospel?

The proclamation at the fifth assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi said, “The Gospel always includes the responsibility to participate in the struggle for justice and human dignity, the obligation to denounce all that hinders human wholeness.” Is that the gospel?

Just what is the Gospel?

The Gospel in The New Testament

The Greek word translated “gospel” (euangelion) means “good news.” In secular Greek, it was a general term for any good news. In Scripture, it is more specific. It is a technical term for the good news of Jesus Christ. Yet even in the New Testament, euangelion is used in different senses.

For example, John the Baptist announces the gospel of the coming kingdom (Mk. 1:14-15). The “gospel of the kingdom” is the good news that the Messiah will come to set up His kingdom, as prophesied in the Old Testament. The four gospels primarily, and the book of Acts to some degree, deal with this gospel.

The “gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24) is described in more detail in the epistles. There is only one passage in the New Testament that defines the gospel, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. The subject of 1 Corinthians 15 is the resurrection. There were people in the church at Corinth who were denying the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12). Evidently, they did not reject the resurrection of Christ, just the resurrection of the dead. So, Paul begins with the resurrection of Christ and argues from that to the resurrection of believers.

Even though the subject of 1 Corinthians 15 is really the resurrection of believers, Paul begins with the gospel. The first eight verses can be divided into two parts: first, Paul tells them that he is going to declare unto them the gospel he preached and they received. This is the gospel by which they were saved (15:1-2). Then, he defines that gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Since the ultimate purpose of the chapter is to deal with the resurrection, Paul spends the bulk of this part of the passage on proving the resurrection. His definition of the gospel is clear: Christ died for our sins and Christ rose from the dead.

What then is the relationship between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the

grace of God? There are three possibilities. 1) The gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God are two different things. 2) The gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God are identical (Bruce, pp. 185-86). 3) The gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God are not two different things (that is, separate and unrelated), nor one thing (that is, identical), but are two parts of the same thing.

My understanding is that the two can be distinguished but not divorced. The gospel of the kingdom is the good news that Christ, the King, has come to set up His kingdom. The gospel of the grace of God is that God saves sinners by His grace. Thus, the gospel of the kingdom includes the gospel of the grace of God.

The Gospel in Evangelism

Now the question is, “Which of these gospels is to be preached in evangelism?” Mark 16:15 says, “Preach the gospel,” but what exactly did Jesus have in mind? Mark 1:14-15 says that John the Baptist preached the gospel of the kingdom. Mark 13:10 teaches that the gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all the world before Christ returns. Is the gospel of the kingdom the message in evangelism today?

No. The gospel of the kingdom is to be taught today, and it will be preached during the Tribulation period, which precedes the Second Coming of Christ; but the message in evangelism today is the gospel of the grace of God. Granted, John the Baptist and Jesus began preaching the gospel of the kingdom, but later, Jesus prepared the disciples for the message of the gospel of the grace of God (see Mk. 8:27-31). Furthermore, when Jesus said, “Preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15), He meant the good news of His death and resurrection, that is, the gospel of the grace of God. It is obvious that He had that in mind. For one thing, the word gospel was used in Mark of the death of Christ (Mk. 14:9). More important, in the context of the several utterances of the Great Commission, Jesus made it clear that they were to preach His death and resurrection (Lk. 24:46).

Peter preached the death and resurrection of Christ on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:24, 32) and again when the lame man was healed (Acts 3:12-15). He proclaimed the same message to the Gentiles (Acts 10:37-41). Paul also habitually preached that identical message (Acts 17:2-3). Paul’s habitual practice was to preach the gospel of the grace of God (see also 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Gal. 3:1; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 1:5).

After a Bible study, a lawyer once said to me, “Isn’t all the Bible good news? Therefore, all the Bible is the gospel.” Obviously, there is some truth to that, but the good news in evangelism is that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. That God created the world and people may be good news, but that good news will not get anyone saved.

The Gospel to Be Preached Today

The conclusion is obvious. The “gospel of the grace of God” was the message in evangelism in the first century and should be our message today. Unfortunately, in many circles, that is not the case. Some mix the gospel of the grace of God with social activism and call it all “gospel.” For example, the World Council of Churches’ declaration that “the gospel always includes the responsibility to participate in the struggle for justice and human

dignity, the obligation to denounce all that hinders human wholeness” (Lindsell, “Nairobi,” pp. 11-12) is simply not true. In the practice of the apostles in Acts and the precepts of the apostles in the epistles, the gospel never included social activism. That is not to say that Christians should not help the poor nor be involved in social concerns; it is to insist that such activity is not part of the gospel or the Great Commission.

Harold Lindsell’s reaction to the Nairobi conference expresses it well: “Section I devoted itself to this matter and brought back a report that was considerably better than anything coming out of Mexico City, Uppsala, or Bangkok. It called for the proclamation of the whole Gospel to the whole world by the whole church. ‘We are called to preach Christ crucified and risen again,’ it said. The proclamation includes ‘the announcement of God’s Kingdom and the love through Jesus Christ, the offer of grace and forgiveness of sins, the invitation to repentance and faith in Him, the summons to fellowship in God’s church.’ Regrettably, the thrust of this statement was blunted somewhat by the inclusion of the insertion that the Gospel ‘always includes the responsibility to participate in the struggle for human dignity, the obligation to denounce all that hinders human wholeness.’ These things are not an intrinsic part of the Gospel. They are a part of the total mission of the Christian witness and should neither be obscured nor overlooked. The essence of the Gospel lies in its vertical dimension, in which man is made righteous in the eyes of God, which is followed by a new horizontal perspective, in which man is made right with his fellow man. The struggle for justice and human wholeness is a logical and irresistible outgrowth of the new birth” (Lindsell, “Nairobi,” pp. 11-12).

The gospel we must preach today is not the social gospel to reform society, but the gospel of God’s grace to redeem sinners.

Others miss it altogether. They preach around the gospel. They believe the gospel, but they do not proclaim it clearly. Many evangelicals today are not preaching the gospel of the grace of God. They are preaching the gospel of God’s love. The whole “pitch” of their message is “God loves you and you need to accept God’s love.” There is no mention of sin, the cross, or the resurrection of Christ.

In a day when parents are too busy to spend time with their children, the children feel unloved and respond to the emotional presentation of love. Obviously it is true that God loves us and, for that matter, the whole world, but preaching God’s love minus God’s grace is not gospel preaching.

Summary: The Great Commission demanded and the apostles preached the gospel of the grace of God, that is, that Christ died for sins and rose from the dead.

When we evangelize, we must tell people exactly that. Like the two wings of a bird or the two rails of a track, both the death and resurrection of Christ are necessary and important.

Let me illustrate how the gospel should be preached. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1833-1892) gave his own testimony of conversion as follows:

While under the concern of soul, I resolved that I would attend all the places of worship in the town where I lived in order that I might find out the way of salvation. I was willing to do anything and be anything if God would only forgive my sin. I set off, determined to go round to all the chapels, and did go to every place of worship, but for a long time, I went in vain. I do not, however, blame the ministers. One man preached Divine Sovereignty; I could hear him with pleasure, but what was that sublime truth to a poor sinner who wished

to know what he must do to be saved? There was another admirable man who always preached about the law, but what was the use of ploughing up ground that needed to be sown? Another was a practical preacher. I heard him, but it was very much like a commanding officer teaching the maneuvers of war to a set of men without feet. What could I do? All his exhortations were lost on me. I knew it was said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” but I did not know what it was to believe on Christ.

I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning while I was going to a certain place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a side street and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel, there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed, but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was: “LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.” He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: “My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pain. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just, ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But the text says, ‘Look unto Me. Ay!’” said he, in broad Essex, “many of ye are lookin’ to yourselves, but it’s no use lookin’ there. You’ll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by and by. Jesus Christ says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Some say, ‘We must wait for the Spirit’s workin’.’ You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, ‘Look unto Me.’”

Then the good man followed up his text in this way: “Lookunto Me; I am sweating’ great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin’ on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin’ at the Father’s right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!”

When he had gone to about that length and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked to me under the gallery, and I dare say, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, “Young man, you look very miserable.”

Well, I did, but I had not been accustomed to having remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, “and you will always be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death—if you don’t obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.” Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, “Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look!”

Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun, and I could have risen that instant and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the precious blood of Christ and the simple faith which looks alone to Him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before. “Trust Christ, and you shall be saved.”

That, my friend, is gospel preaching!

WHAT IS FAITH?

If anything is clear in the New Testament, it is that a person is saved by grace through faith. If there is anything that is unclear today, it is the nature of faith.

A college student once told me, “Faith is what you have to have when there is no evidence.” Is faith a leap in the dark? Is it believing unsupported claims? Is faith a sophisticated synonym for superstition? Does faith begin where provable facts end?

I have had many people listen to me present the gospel only to tell me, “Oh, I believe it. I have faith.” Then, as I listen to them, all I hear is the chitter-chatter of people on a sinking ship who are trying to reassure one another that things will surely turn out all right. These people believe that someone, somewhere, sometime, somehow, will do something about the mess they are in. They have faith in faith.

It is vitally important that we understand faith. It is the issue in the New Testament. In John, the one book in the New Testament written to get people saved, the word “believe” (pisteuo) occurs one hundred times. The word “repent” (metanoia) does not occur once. Romans is the most detailed discussion of salvation in the New Testament and, obviously, the issue is faith. The unmistakable point of Romans is that the believer, not the worker, is justified before God (Rom. 4:5). Furthermore, in the Great Commission, we are commanded to preach faith (Mk. 16:16). The word “gospel,” both noun and verb, occurs 132 times in the New Testament. The word “repent,” including the noun and verb, occurs only 58 times in the New Testament, but the word “faith,” both its noun, verb, and adjective forms, occurs 492 times. Obviously, the New Testament emphasizes faith.

What is faith? The Greek word has two basic elements: mental assent and reliance. These two elements assume a third, knowledge. Thus, faith consists of knowledge, mental assent, and reliance.

Recognition of Truth

Faith assumes knowledge, that is, recognition of some information. That is self-evident. Before we can believe anything, we must know about it. The Bible says, “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14). As though to emphasize this, the Bible sometimes puts hearing before believing. For example, Acts 18:8 says, “Many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed.” Again, Ephesians 1:13 tells us, “In Him you also trusted after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (italics added).

If faith presupposes knowledge, what does a person need to know? The object of faith in the New Testament is Jesus Christ. If you were to look up all the occurrences of “believe” and “faith” in the New Testament to see what a person must know about Christ, you would discover four things: (1) that Christ is God (Jn. 20:31) and yet (2) a real man (1 Jn. 4:2), (3) that He is the one who died for sins (Rom. 3:25), and (4) rose from the dead (Rom. 10:9).

In the New Testament, those last two facts are called the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-5). Mark says to preach the gospel and the one who believes it will be saved. Peter says that the Gentiles heard the gospel and believed (Acts 15:7). Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

The object of faith is Jesus Christ, the God-Man, who died and rose. It is not just any “Christ.” The Scripture warns that some may preach another Jesus (Mt. 24:4-5; 2 Cor. 11:4). The object of faith must be the Christ who is offered in the gospel, the one revealed in Scripture.

Reception of Truth

The second element of faith is mental assent. The knowledge received about Christ must now be accepted as true. The most basic meaning of *pisteuo* and *pistis*, the Greek words translated “believe” and “faith,” is to “accept something as true” or be persuaded or convinced that something is true.

People could have knowledge but not accept the information as true. In other words, they could not believe. Several years ago, the police in Phoenix, Arizona, found a three-year-old boy walking down the street. When they asked him what his name was, he replied, “Baloney!” The police did not believe him. However, two hours later, a worried woman telephoned the police to ask if they had her son. “What’s his name?” the police sergeant asked. “He answers to ‘Baloney,’” the mother replied. She then explained that the little boy’s name was really Fred, but his nickname was “Baloney.” The police had knowledge, but they did not have mental assent. They did not accept the knowledge they had as true.

On the other hand, if there is both knowledge and acceptance, there is belief. For salvation, a person must know that Jesus Christ, the God-Man, died for sin and rose from the dead and accept that as factual and true.

Faith does not mean believing when there is no evidence; faith is believing the evidence. Faith is not built on ignorance but on knowledge. Suppose a lawyer told two brothers that a distant relative from the old country had left them a large sum of money. The oldest accepted that information as factual, but the younger was skeptical. They both had knowledge. One received that knowledge, and the other did not. The one who had reception had faith. Notice carefully that believing you have inherited a million dollars when you haven’t is not faith; it is sheer foolishness. Notice also that faith permits investigation. Faith is not having your feet planted in the mid-air of “I hope so.” It is having your feet planted firmly on the ground of facts.

Reliance on Truth

The third element of faith is trust. The Greek words *pisteuo* and *pistis* (“believe” and “faith”) refer to resting in, relying on, or depending upon something or someone. Often the New Testament emphasizes this and makes it even stronger by adding a preposition after “believe.” For example, John 3:36 says, “He who believes *in* the Son has everlasting life” and Acts 16:31 says, “Believe *on* the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (italics added).

A truck driver may believe a bridge is safe, but he does not believe in the biblical sense until he drives onto the bridge. People may believe the elevator will carry them to the top of the building, but they do not believe in the New Testament sense until they step into it. A man with his clothes on fire may believe that the swimming pool will save him, but he

is not saved until he dives into the pool. Faith is acceptance plus reliance.

Simply to know about Christ will not save. To accept as true the facts about Him will not save. Even to acknowledge that Christ actually died for sin and literally rose from the dead will not save. One must believe on Christ, that is, depending on Him, trust Him for the gift of eternal life. Saving faith is not believing a proposition; it is trusting a person. Only when people trust Christ, depend on Him who died and rose, are they saved.

Summary: Faith is accepting something as true and depending on that something. This assumes knowledge.

Thus, faith is the recognition of truth, the reception of truth, and the reliance upon truth. Charles Hodge, the famous nineteenth-century Princeton theologian, said: “That faith, therefore, which is connected with salvation, includes knowledge, that is, a perception of the truth and its qualities; assent, or the persuasion of the truth of the object of faith; and trust or reliance. The exercise, or state of mind expressed by the word faith, as used in the Scriptures, is not mere mental assent, or mere trust, it is the intelligent perception, reception, and reliance on the truth as revealed in the gospel” (Hodge, p. 29)

Faith does not save. Faith is not magic; there is no saving virtue in it. Christ saves.

Faith is merely the means by which the benefits of Christ’s death are applied to the individual. The New Testament does not teach that people are saved on account of their faith, but rather that they are saved through faith. The saving power resides not in the act of faith, nor in the nature of faith, but exclusively in the object of faith—Christ. In his book *What Is Faith?*, J. Gresham Machen puts it like this: “The New Testament never says that a man is saved on account of his faith, but always that he is saved through his faith, or by means of his faith; faith is merely the means which the Holy Spirit uses to apply to the individual soul the benefits of Christ’s death” (Machen, p. 180).

All that is needed is a little faith. Jesus said an amount the size of a mustard seed would do. (Lk. 17:6). A mustard seed is tiny. The issue, then, is not the amount but the object of faith. The question is whether the object of faith is able to do the job. A great amount of faith in a bridge too weak to support you will do you no good, but a small amount of faith in a bridge that would support you—just enough to get you on it—is enough to get you across it.

Imagine a ship filled with people crossing the Atlantic. In the middle of the ocean, there is an explosion. The ship is severely damaged and slowly sinking. Most of the passengers are dead and the rest are rushing for the lifeboats. Now suppose one man doesn’t know about the lifeboat, so he does not get aboard. He didn’t have knowledge, so he is not saved. Suppose another man knows about the lifeboat and believes it will save his life, but he is grief-stricken over seeing his wife killed, so he chooses not to go aboard and dies with his wife. He has knowledge and mental assent, but he is not saved. Others believe the lifeboat will save them and they get into the boat. They are saved by faith, that is, they have knowledge, mental assent, and trust. It is not, however, their faith that saves them, no matter how much they have. It is the boat. Saving faith trusts Christ and Christ saves.

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

Ask two Christian leaders to define repentance and you will probably get two different answers. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer says, “The word means a change of mind,” and again, “The true meaning of the word shows that it is a change of mind” (Chafer, 3:372; 7:265). Dr. R. P. Shuller insists that it contains tears: “I believe in a repentance baptized by weeping. For myself, I pray that I may see the day again when men and women will fall, as of yore at the altars of prayer, crying to God for mercy and interpreting their grief in penitential tears” (Shuller, p. 1). Many evangelists preaching on repentance define it as a change of life. They say something like, “Unless you have turned from your evil ways, unless there has been a marked change in your manner of living, you have never truly repented, for to repent means to change.” Now, which leader is correct? What is repentance?

This is an important question. The Lord Himself commanded that repentance be preached in all the world (Lk. 24:47). God commands all men, Jews, and Gentiles, everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Obviously, then, repentance is necessary for salvation. As Chafer has stated, “Therefore, it is as dogmatically stated as language can declare, that repentance is essential to salvation and that none could be saved, apart from repentance” (Chafer, p. 3:373). If we must repent to be saved, then we must preach repentance, but first, we must know what repentance is.

The Meaning of Repentance

Repentance is basically a change of mind. *Metanoia*, the Greek word translated “repentance,” is a compound word made up of two Greek words. The first is *meta*, “after,” and the second is *noema*, “mind.” Thus, the two together mean “afterthought” or “change of mind.” The word describes an inward change of thinking or attitude. Julius R. Mantey says, “It means to think differently or have a different attitude toward sin and God, etc.” (Mantey, p. 193). Bishop Westcott in his commentary on Hebrews 6:1 says, “It follows, therefore, that ‘Repentance *from* dead works’ expresses the *complete change of mind*—of spiritual attitude—which leads the believer to abandon these works and seek some other support for life” (Westcott, p. 144, italics added). Alfred Plummer in his comments on Luke 3:3 calls repentance “an inward change of mind” (Plummer, p. 86).

When people change their minds, there may be emotions and there may not be. When people change their minds, a change in their course of action is expected, but both of these things are results of repentance and not the nature of repentance.

Repentance is not being sorry for sin. This is a popular idea of repentance. Some even insist on tears. Robert Smith said, “True repentance has a double aspect. It looks upon things past with a weeping eye, and upon the future with a watchful eye” (Tan, p. 1133). There is even a tradition that the lily sprang from the repentant tears of Eve as she went forth from paradise. Most do not carry the idea of remorse that far, but many do feel that repentance is being sorry for sin and that is simply not the case.

Paul plainly demonstrates that sorrow and repentance are two different things: “your sorrow led to repentance” (2 Cor. 7:9). Sorrow may lead to repentance, sorrow may

accompany repentance, but sorrow is not repentance. There is another Greek word, *metamelomai*, which means “to regret” and that Greek word is never used in a salvation passage. There is an obvious difference between regretting and repenting. In Acts 2, the Jews regretted what they did to Christ and asked, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). It was after their regret that Peter said, “Repent” (Acts 2:38).

There is a sorrow that does not lead to repentance. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul goes on to say, “Godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.” People can be sorry and have that sorrow prompt them to change their mind, or they can be sorry and have that sorrow produce a hard heart.

During my college and seminary days, I preached in jails and prisons. I met many men who said they were sorry, but as I talked with them, I realized that they were not sorry for what they had done. Rather, they were sorry that they had been caught. Sorrow may lead to repentance and it may not.

One other observation: sorrow does not have to precede repentance. Paul says the goodness of God can also lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). D. L. Moody used to say the inquirer is not to seek sorrow but the Savior.

Repentance is not turning from sin. That is another common misunderstanding. One fiery preacher may thunder, “Repentance, which was the burden of the Baptist’s message, involves the sense of sorrow, sorrow for sin, and the severance from sin by the grace and power of God. He who repents realizes that he is a sinner, regrets his sin and resolves to forsake it. Remember: he that lacks time to mourn lacks time to mend.” “Turn or burn” is their message. Eloquently, and even poetically, they proclaim:

‘Tis not enough to say, “I’m sorry and repent,”
And then go on from day to day, Just as I always went.
Repentance is to leave, The sins we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve, By doing them no more (Knight, p. 542).

Publicly, and in personal evangelism, this is the message often preached. In an evangelism booklet entitled “Step Up to Life,” Elmer H. Murdoch says, “Repentance is a deep change of mind and heart which leads you to reject and forsake all known sin and the right to run your life independently of God.... Repentance is a spiritual U-turn necessary before you believe” (Murdoch, pp. 10-11).

Acts 26:20 clearly demonstrates that repenting and turning are two different things. Paul says in that verse that the Gentiles should “repent and turn to God” (literal translation). Luke 17:1-4 is an illustration that proves the point. Jesus teaches that if a man repented seven times in one day, he is to be forgiven seven times. There is no question that there is genuine repentance here. The whole point assumes that the repentance is genuine. Yet this genuine repentance did not affect his conduct. Roger Post says of this passage that it “implies that in the word ‘repent’ itself a change of conduct or an alteration of one’s lifestyle is not required” (Post, pp. 66-67).

The fact that repentance is not turning from sin explains why the New Testament talks about repenting and bringing forth fruit fit for repentance (Lk. 3:8; Acts 26:20). Lenski in his commentary on Luke 3:8 points out that “repentance cannot be meant by ‘fruits.’ ... ‘Fruits’ indicate an organic connection between themselves and repentance just as the tree brings the fruit that is particular to its nature.... [Repentance] is invisible; hence, we judge

its presence by the [fruits], which are visible” (Lenski, p. 188).

Berkhoff says, “According to Scripture, repentance is wholly an inward act, and should not be confounded with the change of life that proceeds from it. Confession of sin and reparation of wrongs are fruits of repentance” (Berkhoff, p. 487). In other words, the result of repentance should be a change in action; but the change in action is the fruit, not the essence, of repentance.

The conclusive evidence that repentance does not mean to be sorry for sin or to turn from sin is this: in the Old Testament, God repents. In the King James Version, the word repent occurs forty-six times in the Old Testament. Thirty-seven of these times, God is the one repenting (or not repenting)! If repentance meant sorrow for sin, God would be a sinner.

The conclusion is clear. Repentance means a change of mind or attitude. It does not include tears or turning. It doesn’t even necessarily deal with sin. In fact, “Plutarch tells of two murderers, who having spared a child, afterward ‘repented’ and sought to slay it!” (Trench, p. 258). If someone changes his or her mind, a change in behavior should result, but the word repent looks at the change of belief, not the change in behavior.

The Objects of Repentance

To clarify the meaning even more, the objects, or concerns, of repentance must be understood. It is commonly assumed that repentance always deals with sin. That is not the case. The word means a change of mind or attitude—period. The issue people change their mind about is not in or implied by the word. The different view held by the repentant person may concern God or man, fishing or eating, sin, or sunbathing.

Let me illustrate. What does “dozen” mean? A farmer would say twelve eggs. A baker would insist that it is twelve donuts. Now, does “dozen” mean twelve eggs or twelve donuts? The answer is neither. It simply means twelve—period. The context (the farm or the bakery) determines its object.

What is the object of repentance in the New Testament? There are several. God is sometimes the object (Acts 20:21). If people have a wrong concept of God, they must repent, that is, change their mind about God. If they believe that God is an idol, they need to repent and see that the true and living God is the invisible Creator of the universe. If they believe that God is a mean, arbitrary judge, they need to repent and see that God is just, yet merciful. He is gracious and loving, as well as righteous.

Another object of repentance is Christ. This one is not so much stated as implied. In Acts 2, Peter preached that the Jews had the wrong view of Christ. They thought of Him as a common criminal, a boastful blasphemer. Jesus is the sinless Sovereign of the universe. He is no mere man; He is the magnificent Messiah. When they heard the message they cried out, “What must we do?” Peter responded, “Repent” (Acts 2:37-38). In this context, repentance means to change one’s mind about Jesus Christ. William Evans says, “Thus, when Peter, on the day of Pentecost, called upon the Jews to repent (Acts 2:14-40), he virtually called upon them to change their minds and their views regarding Christ. They had considered Christ to be a mere man, a blasphemer, an impostor. The events of the few preceding days had proven to them that He was none other than the righteous Son of God, their Savior and the Savior of the world. The result of their repentance or change of mind

would be that they would receive Jesus Christ as their long-promised Messiah” (Evans, p. 140).

Still another object of repentance is works (see Heb. 6:1; Rev. 9:20; 16:11; etc.). As a general rule, mankind is of the opinion that works save. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “To reach the port, we must sail, sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it, but we must sail and not drift, or lie at anchor” (Knight, p. 147). Furthermore, moderns play a game with sin. Each individual is convinced that he or she is allowed a few miscues. The common concept is, “If God grades on the curve, I’ll make it.” God declares that the works are unable to save. Our effort is dead works; it has no life or ability to rescue us. So people must repent of their dead works, that is, change their minds about their works.

Finally, the Scripture talks about repenting of sin (Rev. 9:21). Some sinners take a light view of sin. In their minds, sin is not serious. God’s view is that sin is hideous. It separates humans from Himself. It causes destruction and death. To be saved, then, people must change their minds about their sin to see that it is their problem.

From this brief, simple study, it is obvious that repentance has several objects. In his book *What the Bible Teaches*, R.A. Torrey said, “What the repentance, or change of mind, is about must always be determined by the context” (Torrey, p. 355).

The Marriage of Repentance

To thoroughly understand repentance, we must understand its relationship to faith. Frankly, this is a puzzle and a problem.

Sometimes repentance is the only stated requirement for salvation (Acts 17:30; 2 Pet 3:9). In light of the New Testament doctrine of faith, repentance in these passages must include faith. After all, faith involves a change of mind from unbelief to belief (Acts 11:17-18). Many times, faith is the only requirement for salvation. That is the case in the gospel of John and in Romans 4. A few times, repentance and faith are listed together (Mk. 1:15; Acts 20:21; Heb. 6:1). What is one to make of these statements? The conclusion seems to be that repentance and faith are not synonymous. When repentance occurs alone, it includes faith. When faith occurs alone, it implies repentance. Thus, they cannot be separated, but they ought to be distinguished. In salvation passages, repentance is an inseparable part of, but is not synonymous with faith.

Others have come to similar conclusions. Calvin said, “Can true repentance exist without faith? By no means. But although they cannot be separated, they ought to be distinguished” (Calvin, p. 311). Berkhoff put it this way: “Moreover, true repentance never exists except in conjunction with faith, while, on the other hand, wherever there is true faith, there is also real repentance. The two are but different aspects of the same turning—a turning away from sin in the direction of God.... The two cannot be separated; they are simply complementary parts of the same process” (Berkhoff, p. 487). Lewis Sperry Chafer concludes, “It [repentance] is included in believing and could not be separated from it [believing]” (Chafer, 3:373).

Repentance and faith are married. Like a husband and wife, they are one. They are Siamese twins who are born co-joined and cannot be separated. Spurgeon put it like this: “It is a great mystery; faith is before repentance in some of its aspects, and repentance before faith in another view of it, the fact being that they come into the soul together. They

are twins, and to say which is the elder born passes my knowledge” (Spurgeon, p. 402).

Summary: The Greek word translated “repent” means “to change one’s mind” and in relationship to salvation, it is used in the New Testament of changing one’s mind about God, Jesus, dead works, and sin and while it should be distinguished from faith, it is inseparable from it, but not synonymous with it.

The wrong version of repentance goes like this: “You are a sinner. Be sorry for your sin. Stop sinning! Turn from your sin.” People who hear this will be convicted and will think they must change their lifestyle.

On the other hand, the correct view of repentance is more like this: “You are a sinner. You have the wrong view of God and Christ. You have sinned, and you cannot save yourself. Only Christ can help you. Throw yourself upon Him.” People who hear this will be convicted of their sin, but they will also be convinced that their works cannot save them, and they will come to Christ for salvation. God then changes the inside of people, with sometimes sudden and sometimes gradual change on the outside.

Donald Grey Barnhouse summed it up like this: “The basic meaning of the original word, repentance, is ‘to change one’s mind,’ and since the idea of mental direction is involved, it is the equivalent to the military command ‘about face!’ Change of direction is involved in the process of becoming a Christian, but this must not be allowed to degenerate into the false idea of weeping for sin before salvation can be secured. (Soon after that, one would think that there must be further suffering for sins after death, and thus we would deny the finished work of Christ.) Biblical repentance may be described thus: the sinner has been trusting in himself for salvation, his back turned upon Christ, who is despised and rejected. Repent! About face! The sinner now despises and rejects himself and places all confidence and trust in Christ. A sorrow for sin comes later, as the Christian grows in appreciation of the holiness of God, and the sinfulness of sin” (Barnhouse, pp. 4:201-202).

For a more detailed discussion of repentance in the New Testament, including an examination of every occurrence of the noun (“repentance”) and the verb (“repent”), see G. Michael Cocoris, *Repentance: The Most Misunderstood Word in the Bible* (available at Amazon, etc.).

DON'T ASK JESUS TO COME INTO YOUR HEART

Shortly after I was saved, an experienced soul-winner taught me how to lead people to Christ. He gave me a booklet that told me everything I needed to know to lead people to the Lord. It told me what verses to use and what to say. As my tutor handed me the booklet, he said, "This will tell you everything you need to know, but there is just one thing missing. The author's presentation includes everything but the gospel."

Imagine a booklet on how to lead someone to Christ containing everything but the gospel. Sure enough, the recommended verses to use were Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, John 1:12, and Revelation 3:20. The problem was easily corrected. My mentor suggested I insert Romans 5:8 after Romans 6:23.

So, armed with a practical presentation of God's dynamite, I marched into life to capture people for Christ, and I did. For the next several years, I led several hundred people to the Lord. In the process, I came to believe that there was another problem with the presentation given in that booklet. It all began when I started to teach others how to lead people to Christ. I was still in college at the time, but I trained other students and took them out to witness.

One day I watched one of the trainees talk to a teenage fellow. As I listened, it was evident that the teenager did not understand what he was doing and did not get saved. Yet when the counselor was done, the young man believed that he was saved. That high school student had no conviction of sin, no conception of Christ's dying in his place to pay for his sin, no comprehension of trusting in Christ alone for salvation. Rather, just about all he got was that he was to bow his head and ask Jesus into his heart.

When the counselor was asked, "Do you know for sure that you are saved?" he answered, "No." Then the counselor (mind you, the one I trained) instead of going back to the basics of sin, the cross, and faith, tried to convince the fellow he was saved because he had prayed a prayer. "After all," he argued, "you asked Jesus to come into your heart, and He said He would come in, didn't He?"

That day, I doubted. I doubted that asking Jesus to come into your heart was valid. That provoked me to study. Since then, I have concluded that the Bible does not teach that people get saved by asking Jesus Christ to come into their heart or into their life.

The Bible says Sinners must "Believe"

In the first place, the biblical expression for what a sinner must do is "believe." God could have used any word He wished. He could have said it in any language. He could have created a word or a whole language, but He chose *pisteuo*, "believe," and *pistis*, "faith" and He uses them emphatically. In John, the one New Testament book written to get people saved, *pisteuo* occurs one hundred times (*metauoou*, "repent," does not occur once). Furthermore, in Paul's most extended theological discourse on salvation, the book of Romans, he used one word, "faith." In Romans, one whole chapter (chapter 4) is given to that subject. There are other words used for what a sinner must do to be saved. "Look," "come," and others are employed, but these are used as synonyms for faith.

Sometimes it is objected that people do not understand what it is to "believe." If that is

the case, they are simply not ready to be saved. In Matthew 13:13-16, Jesus taught that if people did not understand, they could not be saved. He even spoke in parables so they would not understand.

No Passage Teaches “Ask Jesus into Your Heart “

In the second place, no passage states or even implies that sinners are saved by asking Jesus to come into their heart. The one most commonly used to suggest that it does is Revelation 3:20, but that passage does not teach that people are to ask Jesus to come into their heart to be saved.

The context of Revelation 3:20 is the Lord’s letter to the church at Laodicea. In Revelation 3:15-17, the Lord talks about their condition. In Revelation 3:18-20, He offers His counsel. In describing their condition, the Lord says He knows their works (Rev, 3:15-16), their word (Rev. 3:17a), and who they are (Rev. 3:17b). He calls them “lukewarm.” Note carefully that the subject there is not salvation but works or service. The Laodiceans were half-hearted in their service. The Lord says, “I could wish you were cold (and know your need) or hot (and have no need).” Instead, they were lukewarm. They had just enough to satisfy themselves but not enough to be completely committed and satisfy God. Hot tea is usable, and iced tea is also usable, but lukewarm tea you spit out. So when He tasted of their works, it made Him want to vomit. Being half-hearted in service results in being a castaway (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

The Lord goes on to describe their pride. Laodicea was one of the wealthiest cities in the world. This material wealth produced an independent, self-sufficient attitude in the people of the city. They thought they had need of nothing. In 61 AD, an earthquake devastated the city. The Roman government offered to help them rebuild, but the people were so proud they refused and rebuilt the city using their own resources. The attitude in the city was absorbed by the church. The citizens said, “We don’t need government” and the Christians said, “We don’t need God.” Make no mistake: material wealth can cause a Christian to be self-sufficient and not depend on the Lord (1 Tim. 6:17).

After examining their works and their words, the Lord evaluates what they are. His conclusion is that they are in dire spiritual need and do not even know it. His assessment is expressed in terms with which they could immediately identify. Laodiceans were rich; He tells them they are poor. Laodiceans had a world-famous medical center that was particularly known for treating eye disease; He informs them that they are blind. Laodicea was a center for manufacturing clothing; He declares that they are naked. The point is, of course, that they were deceived concerning their spiritual condition. Obviously, unbelievers can be deceived about their spiritual condition and be described as poor and blind, but so can Christians. The New Testament clearly indicates that Christians can be deceived about their spiritual condition (Jas. 1:22), be poor (1 Tim. 6:18), and blind (2 Pet. 1:9).

Having summarized their condition, the Lord offers some counsel. He tells them they need to be faithful (Rev. 3:18). They need to be faithful to the Lord so that they might have faith tested by fire, personal righteousness, and vision. They also need to be fervent (Rev. 3:19). The Greek word translated “chasten” (paideno) refers to child training, the activity of God to believers (Heb. 12:5-8, esp. 12:8). Furthermore, they are to be zealous and, one

other piece of advice, they need fellowship. That is the point of verse 20: if a Christian invites Christ to dinner, He will come, and they will have fellowship together.

Before considering Revelation 3:20, note carefully that the context of this passage is a letter to believers. The passage is addressed to the Laodicean church. Granted, these people are half-hearted, self-sufficient, and deceived about their spiritual need, but they are believers. The crowning indication of that is that the Lord tells them that He will chasten them, that is, child train them (Rev. 3:19). They were His children.

Now, look carefully at Revelation 3:20. It says Christ will come “in to” (two different words), not come “into” (one word). The verse is saying that Christ will come in the church to the person, not that Christ will come into the person. When He gets in the church with the person, He will eat dinner with that individual. That is, He will have fellowship with that person.

This is not hair-splitting a word in the English text but an accurate reflection of the Greek text. In Greek, “come in” (eiserchomai) is one word. It is followed by the preposition “to” (pros). That construction occurs eight times in the New Testament (Mk. 6:25; 15:43; Lk. 1:28; Acts 10:3; 11:3; 17:2; 28:8; Rev. 3:20). In each instance, it means to enter into a building and stand before a person.

If Jesus had meant that He would enter into the person, there is another Greek construction He could have used. That is the word “come in” (eiserchomai) plus the preposition “into” (eis). That combination is used 136 times in the New Testament for entrance into a building, a city, a closet, and even a person. In fact, every time “come into” is used of entrance into a person, it is followed by the preposition eis, not pros as in Revelation 3:20. There are only four such cases in the New Testament (Mk. 9:25; Lk. 8:30; 22:3; Jn. 13:27), and everyone refers to demon possession. Therefore, the “come in to” of Revelation 3:20 means entrance into a building in order to meet a person. If entrance into a person were meant, another Greek construction would have been used.

This conclusion is confirmed by the Arndt and Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon. The authors list one possible meaning of eiserchomai as “enter into someone.” They list another possibility as “to come or go to someone.” Under this later one, they list Revelation 3:20 (Arndt and Gingrich, p. 232). In commenting on the use of the two Greek prepositions in question, C. F. D. Moule says, “It may be added, as a rough and ready distinction between the meaning of eis and pros, that eis tends to include the idea of entry, whereas pros tends to stop short at going up to (without entering)” (Moule, pp. 67-68). The point of Revelation 3:20 is that those lukewarm, self-sufficient, spiritually deceived believers had pushed God aside and they needed fellowship and faithfulness. It is not teaching that people are saved by asking Jesus into their heart. It is not even talking about salvation!

Another verse often used to support “asking Jesus to come into your heart” is John 1:12. That verse is not teaching that people should ask Jesus to come into their heart or their life to do anything. A careful study of this passage will indicate that.

First, look at the context. In John 1:10, John declares that Jesus came to the world, but the world did not recognize Him. They did not even know He was here. Think of it: He who made the world was in the world and the world did not even know it. At the time, the center of the world was Rome. All roads led there. Jesus walked and wandered around the dusty road of obscure Galilee. Whoever heard—whoever cared—about Galilee? Literally, He was in the world He made and it did not know He was here.

John next considers Israel. In John 1:11, he says He came to His own, that is, His own

people Israel and they did not welcome Him. Unlike the world, they at least knew He was there, but like the world, they did not care. John says they did not welcome Him. They crucified Him. With a brief stroke of the pen, John has dismissed the world and Israel. Now, in John 1:12, He drops down to individuals. The first word in verse 12 is “but” (de), a word of contrast. In contrast to the world and Israel, only individuals who “receive” (lambano) Christ will become sons of God.

What is meant by “receive?” Is it a subjective receiving of Christ into your heart or life? No. The “but” demands that this receiving is in contrast to the world and Israel. John is simply saying that in contrast to the world and Israel if any individual does recognize and welcome Christ, he or she will become a child of God. Dean Henry Alford, the famous Greek exegete, says that “receive” here means some “recognized Him as that which He was, the Word of God and Light of men” (Alford, 1:684). Alfred Plummer says it “denotes the spontaneous acceptance of the Messiah” (Plummer, p. 66).

The pertinent question is, How does one receive Him? By asking Him in? Again, the answer is “No.” At the end of verse 12, John explains “even to those who believe in His name.” F. L. Godet, who wrote one of the classic commentaries on John, put it like this: “The figurative, and consequently, somewhat vague, term receive, required to be explained, precisely defined; for the readers must know accurately the means by which they may place themselves among the number of ‘all those who.’ Hence the apprehended phrase ‘to those who believe on His name’” (Godet, 1:265).

In other words, John 1:12 is not teaching that sinners are to ask Jesus to come into their heart. It is telling us to accept Christ for who He is and that acceptance is trusting Him as Savior.

Still another verse that has been used to support the idea of asking Jesus to come into one’s heart is Romans 10:13, which says, “For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” In the first place, nothing in this verse even remotely indicates anything like “asking Jesus to come into your heart or life.” There is no hint in the context of the passage that people are to ask Jesus to come into their heart.

If the gift of eternal life is received by faith, what is the meaning of calling on the Lord to be saved? In the book of Romans, there is a difference between justification and salvation. Romans 5:9 says, “Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” and Romans 5:10 says, “Having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Romans 10:10 makes the same distinction. It says, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness [justification], and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” In other words, in the book of Romans, after justification and reconciliation, there is salvation. Justification is by faith (Rom. 10:10) and salvation is by confession (Rom. 10:10) or calling on the Lord (Rom. 10:13).

The question is, “What is salvation in the book of Romans?” Most people today think of justification and salvation as two different ways of speaking about the same thing, but the New Testament uses the word “salvation” for more than one aspect of the spiritual life. It speaks of believers having been saved (past tense, Eph. 2:8), of believers being saved (present tense, 1 Cor. 1:18), and of believers being saved in the future (Heb. 9:28). Theologians explained that believers have been saved from the penalty of sin (past tense), that they are being saved from the power of sin (present tense), and that they will be saved from the presence of sin (future tense). In the book of Romans, the word “salvation” is used of being saved from the power of sin (present tense salvation) and that is done by calling

on the name of the Lord.

The point is Romans 10:13 is not talking about asking Jesus to come into your heart to be saved. It is not even talking about salvation in the sense of justification! It is talking about calling on the Lord for the power to overcome sin.

Summary: The biblical expression for what sinners must do to be saved is “believe,” not “ask Jesus to come into their heart.”

To crystallize and clarify that even more, several observations need to be made. First of all, people have been saved when a wrong verse or model has been used. I am not saying, nor have I ever said, that people have not been saved when Revelation 3:20 was used. On the contrary, I do think that people have been saved when this verse was used, but in my opinion, it was in spite of the verse and not because of it. Augustine was saved when he read Romans 13:14. Does that mean we should use Romans 13:14 to lead people to Christ? I once met a lady who swore that when she was saved, she did not know anything else to do, so she prayed the Lord’s Prayer. Does that mean the Lord’s Prayer should be used to lead people to Christ? There are people who have heard and understood the gospel but have not trusted Christ. When they are confronted again, and this time decide to come to Christ, they use the “ask Jesus to come in” prayer. In their case, they understood all the right things and the words were almost immaterial.

On the other hand, people have been deceived by this approach. I am personally convinced that many who have prayed asking Jesus to come into their hearts were not regenerated. Because they were told that praying that prayer was the means of salvation, they thought they were saved. How much better it would be to point people to Christ and the cross and exhort them to trust Him and His finished work.

Once another pastor and I were talking to a lady who said she was saved. The pastor asked her what she did to get saved, and she replied, “I asked Jesus to come into my heart.” Not satisfied with that, he asked, “If you were to stand before God and God were to ask, ‘Why should I let you into My heaven,’ what would you say?” Her response was, “I love God and I deserve it.” The more we talked, the more obvious it was that she had no comprehension of salvation and no relationship with Jesus Christ; but she thought she was saved because she had asked Jesus to come into her heart.

Let me state the whole issue another way. Biblically, faith is the means of salvation. The indwelling of Christ is the result. There are other results of salvation. Take, for example, the sealing of the Holy Spirit. It is no more proper to make His indwelling (that is, asking Jesus to come into your heart) the means of salvation than it is to make sealing the means. If you told people to pray to ask God to seal them with the Spirit and they did, would they be saved? My personal opinion is that we cannot really say one way or the other. It depends on whether or not that person understood the gospel and trusted Christ. We must be biblical and the biblical word for what a person must do to be saved is “believe.”

IS LORDSHIP SALVATION BIBLICAL?

In the early 1970s, when I originally prepared this material on evangelism in preparation for teaching evangelism at Dallas Seminary, I included a lecture on asking Jesus to come into your heart because it was the most common misrepresentation of the gospel presentation at the time. In the late 1970s, some students at the seminary asked me to speak on Lordship Salvation. Since I did not have room in my classroom lectures for another topic, I prepared a lecture on Lordship Salvation which I delivered in a meeting outside of class. That presentation was later printed under the title “Lordship Salvation: Is it Biblical?” Since then, Lordship Salvation has become much more popular. Here is an edited version of the material in the Lordship Salvation: Is it Biblical? (available on Amazon, etc.).

Lordship Salvation is the view that to be saved, one must make Jesus the Lord of one’s life. Proponents of that view say, “Make Jesus the Lord of your life,” “Give your life to Christ,” or “Commit your life to Christ.” They insist, “If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all!” What are the biblical arguments that are used to support Lordship Salvation?

Arguments for Lordship Salvation

The advocates of Lordship Salvation often use the word “repent” to prove their position. They say “repent” means “to turn from sin.” For example, John R. Stott says, “True, metanoia [Greek ‘repentance’] means literally ‘a change of mind,’ but it describes such a change of mind as involves a change of attitude, direction and behavior” (Stott, “Must Christ be Lord to be Savior?-Yes,” *Eternity*, September 1959, pp. 15, 17).

A second argument used to prove Lordship Salvation is the use of the word “faith.” According to this argument, “faith” means “commitment.” John R. Stott says, “Faith is directed towards a Person. It is, in fact, a complete commitment to this Person involving not only an acceptance of what is offered but a humble surrender to what is or may be demanded. The bent knee is as much a part of saving faith as the open hand.... Faith is commitment to Him as a whole person, not in a particular role. Faith may not choose to be committed to Him in the role of Savior and not in the role of the Lord.”

A third argument used to support the Lordship position is the use of the word “Lord.” Exponents of the Lordship position claim that the word “Lord” means “Master.” Therefore, in order to be saved, we must submit to Christ as Lord. John R. Stott says, “Why does Paul tell the Philippian the jailer that he must believe in ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ to be saved if he must only believe in Him as Savior (Acts 16:31, cf. 11:17)?”

It is also claimed that the biblical concept of discipleship supports the Lordship position for salvation. The logic is discipleship demands all. Therefore, to be saved, we must give all to Christ. In his book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, after citing passages on discipleship, J. I. Packer says, “In our own presentation of Christ’s gospel, therefore, we need to lay a similar stress on the cost of following Christ, and make sinners face it soberly before we urge them to respond to the message of free forgiveness. In common honesty, we must not conceal the fact that free forgiveness in one sense will cost everything; or else our evangelizing becomes a sort of confidence trick. And where there is no clear

knowledge, and hence no realistic recognition of the real claims that Christ makes, there can be no repentance and therefore no salvation” (Packer, pp. 72-73).

The story of the rich young ruler is also used as an argument for Lordship Salvation. The notion is that Christ demanded all. Therefore, to be saved, we must give Christ control over all of our lives. In his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, H. B. Swete said. “The sale and distribution of his property were the necessary preparations in his case for the complete discipleship which admits to the Divine kingdom” (Sweet, p. 226.).

Answers to the Arguments for Lordship Salvation

There is simply no question about the fact that the Bible teaches that one must repent to be saved (Acts 17:30; 2 Pet. 3:9). The question is, “What is the meaning of repentance?” Does it mean to turn from sin, that is, to change your conduct? The answer is “No.” In the first place, the basic meaning of the word “repent” is “to change one’s mind or attitude.” Furthermore, the word, per se, does not have sin for its object. The context determines the object of repentance. It is like our word “dozen.” The word simply means “twelve.” The context determines the content. Likewise, the context of “repentance” determines the object. In Hebrews 6:1, it is repentance from dead works. In Acts 20:21, it is repentance concerning God. The context of Acts 2:38 seems to indicate that Peter was urging the audience to change their mind about who Christ is. Of course, there are other passages where the object of repentance is sin (Acts 8:22), but that is determined by the context, not the word itself (for a more detailed discussion of “repentance,” see the chapter on repentance in this book and my book entitled *Repentance: The Most Misunderstood Word in the Bible*).

Obviously, the New Testament teaches that faith is the means of salvation (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 2:8). As was pointed out in the chapter on faith, the Greek word translated “faith” means accepting and reliance on something as true. The synonyms for “faith” in the New Testament cannot mean “commit.” For example, in John 4:13, Jesus said, “Whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst.” Later, Jesus said, “Whosoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life” (Jn. 6:54). Obviously, these statements suggest “appropriation,” not commitment. The same thing is true of the idea of “looking” implied by John 3:14-15 (Num. 21:6-9). Hogan says, “In ‘looking,’ there is no idea of committal of life, no thought of healing being deserved, no question concerning the subsequent life of the looker, no possibility of surrender to the object of vision” (Hogan, p. 16).

Faith is required for salvation; but faith, in the New Testament sense of the term, is believing that Jesus Christ the Son of God died and rose from the dead (Jn. 20:31; Rom. 4:25 and 10:9). It is trusting in Him for eternal life. It is not the commitment of one’s entire life to Him.

It is true that the New Testament refers to Jesus Christ as the Lord Jesus Christ, but the question is, “What does the word ‘Lord’ mean?” In the New Testament, the word “Lord” means a number of things: owner, master, sir, God, etc. When used of Christ, it very often means “God.” In the Old Testament, the Jews said “Lord” instead of pronouncing Jehovah. In the Septuagint, “Lord” was used for God’s name. So in the New Testament, “Lord” often means “God.”

Westcott confirms this: “To ‘confess Jesus,’ which in this connection can only mean to confess “Jesus as Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3; Romans 10:9), is to recognize divine sovereignty in One Who is truly man, or, in other words, to recognize the union of the divine and human in one Person, a truth which finds its only adequate expression in the fact of the Incarnation” (Westcott, *The Epistles of John*, p. 142). B. B. Warfield concurs that the word “Lord” was a reference to deity (Warfield, pp. 105-106). J. Gresham Machen, in reference to the widespread pagan use of the term “Lord,” observed: “When the early Christian missionaries, therefore, called Jesus “Lord,” it was perfectly plain to their pagan hearers everywhere that they meant to ascribe divinity to Him and desired to worship Him” (Machen, p. 306).

More recently, Hans Bietenhard, in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, writes: “In accordance with the usage of the Hellenistic synagogues God is frequently called *kyrios* [Greek ‘Lord’], especially in the numerous quotations from the Old Testament in which *kyrios* stands for Yahweh, corresponding to the custom of pronouncing the title *kyrios* instead of the tetragrammaton in public reading... *kyrios* frequently denotes God in the Lucan birth narratives” (Bietenhard, 2:513). At the end of the article on “Lord” by Bietenhard, the general editor, Colin Brown, adds, “Wilhelm Bousset ... argued that the application of the title *kyrios* to Christ originated with the Gentile church” and that this “direct transferal of this holy name of the almighty God was actually almost a deification of Jesus.” He notes further that “a similar position was adopted by R. Bultmann” (Brown, 2:515).

The point is that the New Testament is claiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, that is, that He is God and, as the God-man, He is our Savior. The word “Lord” in the phrase, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,” is no different than “put confidence in President Reagan.” The term “President” is his title. It indicates his position and his ability to follow through on promises. In a similar fashion, the term “Lord,” when applied to Jesus Christ, indicates His position as God and thus His ability to save us and grant us eternal life.

It is correct to say that discipleship demands all, but in the New Testament, justification and discipleship are two different things. That is obvious. Salvation is a gift (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9). All one has to do is trust Jesus Christ to receive it. The one book written in the New Testament to bring people to Christ is the Gospel of John. The word “believe” is used over and over to describe the requirement for eternal life. In the Gospel of John, neither John nor Jesus ever say anything like, “You must count the costs first.” Yet, according to Luke’s Gospel, the requirement for discipleship is to count the costs to become a disciple (Lk. 14:25-35).

If, however, discipleship is made to be tantamount to salvation, one must be baptized to be saved. Matthew 28:19-20 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” In the Greek text, the only imperative in the last paragraph of Matthew’s Gospel is “make disciples.” That command is followed by three participles (going, baptizing, teaching), all describing how to make a disciple. The way to make a disciple is to go preach the gospel, baptize those who trust Christ, and teach them to observe all things Christ commanded. Thus, if discipleship is the same as salvation, one must be baptized to be saved.

If discipleship is tantamount to salvation, one must continue in the Word to be saved,

for John 8:31 says, “If you abide in My Word, you are my disciples indeed.” Continuance is absolutely demanded for discipleship. If discipleship and salvation are the same, continuance is demanded for salvation. Yet the New Testament clearly teaches a believer have eternal life at the point of faith (Rom. 5:1). Continuance is not a requirement for salvation.

A young man came to Christ and asked, “Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk. 18:18). Jesus answered his question, but the answer is very often misunderstood. In the first place, Christ inquired of him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but one that is, God” (Lk. 18:19). In other words, Jesus asked him, “Are you recognizing that I am God?” The young man did not answer.

Having tried the God-ward approach, Christ then turned to the man-ward approach. He says, “You know the commandments” (Lk. 18:20). Notice that He did not say, “Go do the commandments.” He simply said, “You know the commandments” and quotes the last six of the Ten Commandments, the ones that refer to man’s relationship to man. Why did the Lord bring up the Ten Commandments? The answer is that He was using the Law lawfully. Paul explains in 1 Timothy 1:8-9, “that the law is good, if used lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly, and for sinners.” Thus, the Lord is using the Law lawfully in that He is using it to teach the young man that he is a sinner and needs a Savior.

The Lord then says, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me” (Lk. 18:22). Is the Lord telling the young man that he must give up everything he has to go to heaven? Let us hope not, for if that is the requirement for heaven, there will be few who make it!

After the young man walked away, the disciples came to Christ inquiring concerning what He had told the rich young ruler. In the process of explaining to them what had transpired, Christ says how hard it is for them who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God (Mk. 10:24). In other words, Christ said that He told the rich young ruler to give away all of his goods because he was trusting in his riches. The young man needed to stop trusting in his riches so he could transfer his trust to Christ. So Christ told him he would be better off giving his riches away. Thus, the issue in this passage is not giving up his material possessions. Rather, the issue in this passage is trust.

On another occasion, the Lord said, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right-hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Mt. 5:29-30). In other words, if anything hinders you from trusting Christ, get rid of it so that you can trust Him. That was the problem the rich young ruler had. Hence, Christ told him to sell all because he was trusting in his riches.

Summary: The issue in the Lordship Salvation debate is a definition of terms, namely, the terms repentance, faith, Lord, and disciple, as well as the story of the rich young ruler.

Beyond that, the issue in the Lordship Salvation debate is: What are the means of a changed life? Both sides want converts to have a changed life. The issue is, what is the means to that? The Lordship Salvation position says, in essence, that we are to demand it, or should at least preach it and ask for it. They preach the gospel like this: “You are a sinner, you have broken God’s law, you have left God out of your life, and you deserve

hell. But God loves you. Christ died for you and paid for your sin. Now you should turn from your sin and commit your entire life to Christ. You must give Him your all.”

The New Testament teaches, however, that a changed life comes about by preaching the grace of God. Titus 2:11-12 says, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, “A changed life comes about when we preach the gospel of the grace of God and invite people to trust Christ and grow in grace. It is grace that changes the life.

The gospel should be preached like this: “You are a sinner, you have broken God’s law; you have left God out of your life. But God loves you. Christ died for you. He paid for all your sins. Now recognize that you are a sinner and trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone. Depend on Him for the forgiveness of sin. Rely on Him, plus nothing else, to get you to heaven.” The Holy Spirit uses such preaching to overwhelm the sinner with the sinfulness of sin and the greatness of grace.

After people trust Christ, plus nothing else, for salvation, they should be told to grow in grace. They should be told, “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1, italics added). “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Throughout the New Testament, the message is grace, grace, grace. Let us preach the gospel of grace.

One other observation needs to be made. In an evangelistic conversation, the issue is not Lordship, but it can become the issue. The New Testament makes the issue faith in Christ. However, other things can keep a sinner from faith. The lost person can focus on something other than faith. When that happens, the sinner makes that the issue and the evangelist must deal with that issue.

Let me illustrate. A friend of mine preached the gospel of the grace of God in the northwestern part of the United States. After the service, a businessman approached him and said, “If I trust Christ, do I have to be baptized?” The preacher answered, “You do not need to be baptized to go to heaven. But if you trust Christ, I must tell you the Bible teaches that you should be baptized.” The man said, “I’m afraid I cannot do that,” and then explained. He had recently been charged with embezzlement. He had been found guilty, and the sentencing part of his trial was due shortly. He felt that if he were publicly baptized the papers would pick it up and it would be played up as a ploy to get the judge to reduce the sentence. He did not want that done, but he did want to trust Christ. So, my friend urged him to trust Christ, saying that baptism was not necessary to get to heaven, but if he trusted Christ, the New Testament did tell him he needed to be baptized in obedience to Christ. After considerable conversation, the man chose not to trust Christ.

New Testament gospel preaching does not demand that we tell sinners that they must be baptized before they trust Christ. That is not part of gospel preaching. But if someone makes that an issue we must be true to what the New Testament says. By the way, sometime later, the man did trust Christ and was baptized.

Several years ago, I preached a gospel message. After the service, a sensual-looking young lady said to me that she wanted to trust Christ, but she had a problem. She explained that she was living with a man who was involved with the underworld. She was afraid that

if she trusted Christ, she would have to break off the affair and she was certain that if she did that he would kill her.

I urged her to admit the fact that she was a sinner and trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone for salvation. She then asked, “Do I have to stop the affair?” I explained that one does not have to stop sinning to be saved, but that candidly, if she trusted Christ, God would tell her that was a sin and she should stop. She concluded that she would have to stop the affair to go to heaven. I insisted that that was not exactly right, but she didn’t get the message.

Finally, I went to the blackboard and drew a circle. In the circle, I wrote the word “salvation.” I drew an arrow to the circle and on top of the arrow wrote “faith.” I then drew another arrow, away from the circle, and entitled it “stop sinning.” I explained that the means of salvation was faith. The result would be that God would tell her to stop sinning and she should. She was trying to turn it around and say that the means of salvation was to stop sinning and that was simply not the case.

She finally got it. She agreed to trust in Christ and let God deal with the fellow. She did just that. Sometime later, she broke up with the fellow. He did not kill her. On the contrary, she married another man, is the mother of several children and is happily serving the Lord in her church.

What must I do to be saved? The biblical answer is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). That is the message we are to preach that people may trust Christ for the gift of eternal life (for a detailed explanation of the major passages in the New Testament related to the Lordship Salvation debate, see G. Michael Cocoris, *The Salvation Controversy*, available on Amazon, etc.)

PART 4: THE PRINCIPLES OF EVANGELISM

WHO DID IT?

Let me introduce the characters and plot and, then, you decide who did it. Mr. and Mrs. Smith had a son named Joe. Immediately, a godly grandmother began to pray. She pleaded with God to save Joe and use him. Mr. and Mrs. Smith were also concerned. They too prayed. They lived godly lives before him. They took him to church. Then, there was Aunt Martha. She was not Joe's aunt; that was her nickname. All the children at church called her that. She was a talented teacher who faithfully taught Bible stories in a captivating way. And, oh yes, there was Pastor Pritchard. He preached and Joe listened—sometimes.

Then, one day an evangelist came to speak at Joe's church. He was energetic and dynamic. Joe was moved. He, and a number of others, went to the front at the end of the message. There a counselor explained the gospel to Joe and he trusted Christ.

Who led Joe to Christ? The counselor ... the evangelist ... the pastor ... Aunt Martha ... father and mother ... Grandma Smith ... God?

As with a complicated crime, a number of cases could be constructed. In one sense, the counselor did it, yet without the evangelist, he could not have. (You can believe the evangelist added Joe to his total, and told the story as if he did it.) The pastor at least had a part. So did Aunt Martha, the parents, and Grandma Smith. A Calvinist would argue that God did it.

Well, who really did it? That question will be answered shortly, but first let me introduce the concept of principles of evangelism. The New Testament contains several topics pertaining to evangelism that are not necessarily present in one passage. These topics could be called principles of evangelism. There are the principles on which God works.

There is a difference between a principle and a method. Principles remain the same; methods change. An abiding principle is something like "invite people to trust Christ." A method is for an evangelist to ask people to come forward at a mass meeting.

Now let's consider who did it. To answer that question, we need to know several pertinent principles of evangelism.

God is Seeking and Saving Sinners

The first principle is the principle of divine activity. God is seeking to save sinners (Lk. 19:10). The story of Zacchaeus illustrates the point. He was a rich tax collector with a bad reputation. Other than his effort to see Jesus out of curiosity, there is no indication he was seeking the Savior or seeking salvation. It was Jesus who was seeking him.

That is the way it has always been. When Adam sinned, there was no indication that he began to search for and seek out God. He and Eve were too busy covering their nakedness. When God did initiate the process, they did not run to Him; they ran away from Him. Genesis 3:8 says they hid themselves! They did not seek God; God sought them. That is the way it is today. According to Ephesians 2, people are spiritually dead. They are not just bad, they are dead. They are blind. They do not need glasses; they need eyes. They do not seek God (Rom 3:11; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:14).

Theologians teach that people are not seeking God; evangelists preach that people are. The theologians read their Bible and conclude that people are not interested in finding God.

Evangelists meet people who seem to be trying to find God and conclude that people are seeking God. Who is right? Both. It is because of God's work that some begin to search.

Some years ago, a five-year-old boy became lost in the Northwest. As night grew near the family grew frantic with anxiety. Sympathetically, many others joined in searching for the missing lad. Snow began to fall, hindering the efforts. Despite their valiant endeavors, the little boy could not be found. The next morning the weary father, having looked all night, decided to return home for a short rest. A half mile from the house he kicked against what seemed to be a log lying across the pathway. Suddenly the snow-covered bundle moved, and a small boy stretched, yawned, sat up, and exclaimed, "Oh, Daddy! I found you at last!" The father was overjoyed that the child, although badly frost-bitten, was still alive; the boy thought he had found the father, but it was the father who found him.

Because God is working in the world, some are ready to be saved. To the theologically untrained or biblically unaware evangelists who meet a number of people God has prepared, it appears that these people are "hungry for the gospel." And they are! In John 4, Jesus tells us that there are more prepared people than we think. The fields are white, ready for harvest. Because God is working in the world, some are ready to be saved.

God is not only seeking. He is saving sinners. The whole Trinity is involved in saving a person. The Father planned it, the Son provided it, and the Holy Spirit produces it. The Trinitarian involvement in salvation is spelled out in Ephesians 1. In Ephesians 1:3-6, Paul tells us of the work of God the Father. He has chosen us, adopted us, and accepted us. In verses 7-12, the work of the Son is revealed. He has redeemed us, forgiven us, revealed God's will to us, and made us an inheritance. In verses 13-14, we are told of the work of the Holy Spirit. He has sealed us and given us a pledge. In Titus 3:4-7, Paul calls God our Savior. Then, he talks about the part that God the Father had, the portion of God the Spirit, and the part of God the Son. Biblical evangelism is Trinitarian.

If God does all the work, why not just let Him do it, and we do nothing? To answer that, as well as the question at the beginning of this chapter, we must note a second principle of evangelism.

God Uses People to Reach People

The second principle of evangelism is the principle of human instrumentality. God uses people to reach sinners. In Romans 10:14, Paul boldly declares that people cannot hear and believe without a preacher. In his comment on this verse, Dean Henry Alford says, "The apostle is showing the necessity and the dignity of the preacher of the word" (Alford, 2:421, italics his). George W. Peters has put it like this: "God has chosen human instruments to accomplish His task in human hearts within a human society surrounded by human environment" (Peters, p. 163).

God's method is people. We are looking for methods, but God is looking for people. God's method is people; not people with a method; but people with a message. We are looking for better methods. God is looking for better people.

To emphasize the fact that God uses people, look at the other possibilities. God could save people directly, that is, apart from any means. In fact, He did just that in the Garden of Eden. After Adam sinned, he sewed fig leaves to cover himself and sat where he thought God could not see him. God personally came to reestablish the broken relationship. The

objection could be made that Adam was the first man. There were no other men to send to him. True, but the point is that God could have, and did, save Adam and Eve directly, apart from any other means. If that instance is not enough, consider Acts 9. The Lord saved Paul directly, apart from any preacher or pastor. He personally spoke and Paul was immediately converted on the spot. Let's face it: God could do the job Himself by personally appearing and speaking. Instead, He chooses to use people.

Or, consider that God could use animals. He did once. In Numbers 22:28, God used a donkey to speak to Balaam. If Walt Disney can put words in the mouth of a duck, God can put a message in the mouth of a donkey. God could use angels. That is not as farfetched as you might think. God has used angels to deliver messages (Dan.10:1-9). More important, He used angels to inform the shepherds of the birth of Christ (Lk. 2:7-14). Furthermore, they announced that the Babe was the Savior, and Luke used the word "evangelize" (euangelizomai) to describe what they did (Lk. 2:10). Paul entertained the possibility of angels preaching the gospel (Gal. 1:8). Angelic evangelists may be theoretical now, but that will be a reality in the Tribulation (Rev. 14:6).

D. L. Moody once said in a sermon, "I believe that if an angel were to wing his way from earth up to heaven and were to say there was one poor, ragged boy without father or mother to care for him, teach him the way of life, and if God were to ask who among them were willing to come down to earth and live there for fifty years and lead that one to Jesus Christ, every angel in heaven would volunteer to go. Even Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty would say, 'Let me leave my high and lofty position, and let me have the luxury of leading one soul to Christ.' There is no greater honor than to be the instrument of God's hand of leading one person out of the kingdom of Satan into the glorious light of heaven."

Summary: The principle of divine activity and the principle of human instrumentality are the first two principles of evangelism. Simply put, God seeks to save, but God uses people to do the job.

In the two thousand years since Christ was physically here, people have developed many means of communication: the printing press, the telephone, the radio, the television, the computer, the internet, the cell phone, etc. All of these have been pressed into evangelistic service. God has been pleased to use them to bring millions to Himself, but even here, God's method is still people. People must write. People must speak. People must run the presses, radio stations, TV stations, the internet, etc. God employs people.

If we in the church are to win people to Christ, we must be personally involved. We can put ads in the paper, letters in the mail, spots on the radio, and notices on the internet, but that is no substitute for personal contact and personal presentation to trust Christ.

God uses people and He wants to use you. At the beginning of this chapter, I asked, "Who did it?" The answer is, "All of them." Or more accurately, God did it and used all of them. A fable illustrates this truth well. According to this myth, when Jesus ascended and arrived back in heaven, He was met by Gabriel, who asked, "Did You die?" Of course, the Lord responded in the affirmative. Gabriel said, "Now the whole world knows, right?" The Lord had to tell him no. Gabriel, shocked, blurted out, "Well, do You have a plan?" The Lord nodded yes. "What is it," inquired Gabriel. "Peter," said the Lord. "Peter!" exclaimed Gabriel, disturbed and upset. "He's the fickle fellow who denied You. What if he fails? What's Plan B?" The Lord responded, "My plan is Peter; there is no Plan B."

THE PEOPLE GOD USES

God's method is people, but what kind of people does God use? What type of person does God desire to use? All agree God wants His servants to be spiritual and to be evangelistic. There is even a consensus that there is a relationship between the two, but that is where the agreement ends. What does it mean to be spiritual? What is being evangelistic? What is the relationship between the two?

Some teach a passive view of spirituality. "Let go and let God" is their slogan. Others preach an active view of spirituality. Their cry is, "Get going and let God."

What does it mean to be evangelistic? Is it witnessing with your walk or winning with your talk? A friend of mine attempts to witness to every person he meets. If he does not talk to them about Christ, which he usually does, he gives them a tract. Another friend argues that we must love people into the kingdom of God.

What is spirituality? What is being evangelistic? What is the relationship between the two?

The Spiritual Life

The spiritual life is first and foremost a life of faith. "The just shall live by faith" (Heb. 10:38); this is true of both salvation and sanctification. In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." The Christian Hall of Fame is a hall of fame of faith. Hebrews 11 repeats over and over the expression "by faith." The life of faith believes God's Word and trusts God's Person. Faith hears from God's Word and accepts as true God's point of view. Faith depends upon God's grace and power for the ability to do what God says.

The spiritual life also includes obedience. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus told the disciples, "Follow Me," meaning "imitate Me, obey Me." Later, as recorded in John 14:15, He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." One of Paul's favorite expressions for the Christian life is "walk" (peripateo). He exhorts believers to walk as children of light. Charles Ryrie says, "To walk in the light [1 John 1:7] is to live in obedience to God's commandments." James sums it up in James 1:22 when he says, "Be doers of the word." The spiritual life, then, is a life of effort. Galatians 5:16 does not say to sit in the Spirit; it says to walk in the Spirit.

The songwriter struck the proper balance when he said, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey." In the debate between passivity and activity in the spiritual life, it is not either/or, it is both/and. There is a sense in which we let go and let God. We rest in Him. But we must also get going and let God. We do not just rest.

Two of the most basic things that can be said about the spiritual life is that it about trusting and obeying the Lord, but, obviously, there is much more involved in the New Testament concept of spirituality. For one thing, the goal of the spiritual life is to grow to Christ-like spiritual maturity. (For a detailed explanation of the spiritual life, see G. Michael Cocoris, *The Spiritual Life: Clarifying the Confusion*, available on Amazon, etc.)

Evangelism Is a Result of the Spiritual Life

There are many results of the spiritual life. The greatest is love. Another is evangelism. Jesus said, "Follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mk. 1:17). In Acts 1:8, He said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me." Peter urges, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you of a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). The spiritual life comes before and produces evangelism. Following precedes fishing, power precedes proclamation.

If the spiritual life is a life of faith and obedience, evangelism is the result of the spiritual life. God commands us to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk., 16:15). Do we believe? Do we obey? If the result of the spiritual life is conformity to Christ, evangelism is the result of the spiritual life. Jesus came "to seek and save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10). If we are to be conformed to the Shepherd, we will seek lost sheep. If we value what God values, we will value people and their salvation. If we desire what God desires, we will long to see people saved. If we walk with Him, we will run after those who are going astray.

That does not mean that the result will be spontaneous, though many have taught that it will be. It has been said that the New Testament has a remarkable absence of the command to witness. I don't think it ever occurred to the early church not to witness. Another pastor expressed it like this. Evangelism never seemed to be an "issue" in the New Testament. That is to say, one does not find the apostles urging, exhorting, scolding, planning, and organizing for evangelistic programs. In the apostolic church, evangelism was somehow "assumed" and it functioned without special techniques or special programs. Evangelism happened! Issuing effortlessly from the community of the believers as light from the sun, it was automatic, spontaneous, continuous, and contagious.

Those sentiments are idealistic. They are not realistic. The New Testament is replete with commands to witness. There are five passages on the Great Commission. Commands are given to be obeyed and obedience demands effort.

To Be Evangelistic

Most Christians agree that the spiritual life will affect evangelism. The question is how. For one thing, walking with the Lord produces godliness, which in turn, affects evangelism.

Lack of godliness can discredit not only your testimony but the reputation of the Word of God. In Titus 2, Paul tells Titus to speak to the older men, the older women, the young men, and the young women. Each group should develop godly character. In the midst of the discussion, Paul suggests that if the young women develop this godliness, they will prevent the Word of God's from being blasphemed. In the New Testament, the phrase "word of God" sometimes refers to the gospel. Most commentators interpret it that way in this verse. The gospel ought to make a woman a better wife. If the wife were unruly, her unbelieving husband might blame the gospel. Godliness will prevent that from happening.

On the positive side, godliness will produce a good reputation for you and the gospel. In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Paul exhorts believers to live a calm, peaceful, industrious life, paying attention to their own work so that they may "walk properly toward those who are

outside.” The Greek word translated “properly” (euschemon) means “good form, honestly, becoming.” As one commentator suggests, the idea is “so as to cause no offence.” One of the requirements of an elder (“bishop”) is that he “has a good testimony among those who are outside” (1 Tim 3:7). Likewise, a witness must have a good reputation in the world.

A godly life may win a person to Christ. In 1 Peter 3:1, Peter tells believing wives to submit to their unbelieving husbands that they may “without a word” win their husbands by their conduct, which is to be pure, coupled with respect. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul tells the believing partner not to leave his unbelieving mate. “For,” he says in verse 16, “How do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”

That does not mean that a godly life guarantees the conversion of an unsaved friend or family member. In 1 Peter 3:1, Peter says, “may.” The word “won” is in the subjunctive mode, which is the mood of probability. Joseph Lightfoot interprets 1 Corinthians 7:16 to mean that is a “responsible chance.” The believer may convert the unbeliever, but he or she may not.

Nor does it mean that people must see the life of the witness before they hear the message of the witness. The Ethiopian eunuch had not observed Philip’s life before he trusted Christ. He had been to Jerusalem and had probably met Christians, but even so, it was a short visit, and it was not someone’s life that led him to Christ.

To know the Lord and walk with Him creates a desire for others to know Him. In Romans 10:1, Paul says, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God is for Israel that they may be saved.” The fruit of the Spirit is love. Love desires the best for someone. Thus, when you love God, as a result, you love people. You want to see them saved. George Whitefield prayed, “Oh Lord, give me souls or take my soul.” John “Praying” Hyde, a missionary in India, pleaded, “Father, give me these souls, or I die.”

Walking with the Lord will also produce an effort to see people saved. As love and the desire to see people saved grows, it will break forth and at least attempt to witness. Jesus said, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mk 1:17). Notice that He said “fishers,” not necessarily “catchers.” The degree of success in fishing depends on the skill of the fisherman, the supply of fish in the fishing hole, the bait, and even the time of day. Fishermen sometimes fish with success and sometimes with disappointment. Likewise, followers of Christ may not always catch, but they want to try to fish.

I once went with a friend of mine to eat in a small, natural-food cafe. The place was popular and always crowded at noon. The procedure was to order your food at the counter and then search for a place to sit. A lady, sitting at a table, saw us standing and said, “You can sit here if you would like. I’m about to leave.” We thanked her and sat down. My friend began to engage her in conversation. In a friendly, warm way, he was curious and conversational. But as I listened, I knew he was trying to steer the conversation toward things spiritual. Before he succeeded, she had to leave and return to work. After her departure, he looked at me and said, “Oh, well, I was at least fishing.” He had not even mentioned the Lord, the Bible, or anything about Christianity, but he was fishing or at least preparing to fish. That is what walking with the Lord will do for you: it will make you fish.

Summary: The spiritual life is a life of faith and obedience that produces godliness, a good reputation that can influence people for Christ, a desire to see people saved, and attempts at fishing for men.

There is a great deal of foggy thinking about the spiritual life and evangelism. For example, some think that if you are spiritual, you will automatically, without effort, be evangelistic. Or that being spiritual means you will be successful. Or, worse yet, that by being evangelistic, you will be spiritual. In 1888, the chairman of the Keswick Convention wrote a letter to the lay secretary of the Church Missionary Society. In it, he said, "A new thought has been given to me. Consecration and the evangelization of the world ought to go together." Amen!

PRAYING PEOPLE INTO HEAVEN

Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, once wrote a book entitled True Evangelism. The subtitle is a tip-off to his point of view: “Winning Souls by Prayer.” In the book, he said, “While the believer-priest may intercede on behalf of the fellow members of the body of Christ, it is the privilege of his co-partnership with Christ to intercede for the lost, and the answer to that prayer will be the going forth of the Spirit to convict them of sin, of righteousness and of judgment.” Christians involved in evangelism have found themselves spontaneously praying for someone’s salvation. Although there is much disagreement about many areas of evangelism, surely this would be the one aspect concerning which there is agreement.

But such is not the case. There are questions. Where in the New Testament is a believer instructed to pray for the salvation of a non-Christian? Is prayer for someone’s salvation proper, in light of the fact each person must choose? Dr. Earl Radmacher once preached a sermon in which he pointed out that prayer in the New Testament is for believers, not for unbelievers. Is it appropriate to pray for the salvation of sinners? What is the place of prayer in evangelism? Can we pray people into heaven? Is prayer for a sinner’s salvation proper? And what can be biblically prayed for in evangelism?

Prayer Should Precede Evangelism

In the New Testament, prayer is connected with evangelism. The Lord’s parting instructions to the seventy are recorded in Luke 10:1-24. In verse 2, He tells them to pray. In verse 3, He tells them to go. Obviously, praying precedes the going.

Perhaps following that example, the early church prayed before preaching the gospel. In Acts 4:29, they pleaded with the Lord for boldness. In Acts 4:31, they spoke about the Lord with boldness. The pattern is plain. They prayed and then evangelized. Paul taught that prayer preceded evangelism. In Colossians 4:2-4, he requested that the Colossians pray for him. The request, in this case, concerned his evangelistic ministry. The concept is clear: prayer precedes the preaching of the gospel.

Thus, in the gospels, in Acts, and in the epistles, prayer is connected to evangelism. It comes before it, not after it. That is not to say that prayer should not take place during or after evangelism. It is to say that if prayer does not take place until after, it is late.

Perhaps if we prayed more, we would win more. In Acts 2, they pray for ten days, Peter preaches for ten minutes, and 3,000 got saved. Today, churches pray for ten minutes, preach for ten days, and three get saved. It is reported that A. C. Dixon once said, “When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely upon education, we get what education can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do, and so on. Nor am I disposed to undervalue any of these things in their proper place, but when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do.”

So there is a connection between prayer and evangelism. But for what do we pray?

Praying Evangelistically

The New Testament indicates that there are a number of things for which we are to pray. For example, it teaches that we are to pray for peace. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul exhorts the men of the congregation to pray for those in authority that “we” may lead a quiet and peaceful life. In verses 3 and 4, he gives the reason for such a habit. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved.” As peace prevails, the gospel spreads. William Hendricksen says, “In more ways than one, conditions of tranquility and calm promote the spread of the gospel of salvation.” Though people have been saved during periods of public turmoil and trouble, the gospel, like warm butter, spreads more easily during periods of public peace. During the campus demonstrations of the sixties and seventies, students were not interested in talking about “religion.” Their attention was riveted on the war in Vietnam.

Paul expressed a similar idea in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2. The Thessalonians are invited to pray that the gospel will have “free course” (trecho, literally “run,” or “swiftly advance”). They were also asked to pray that Paul, Silas, and Timothy would be delivered from “unreasonable and wicked men.” “Unreasonable (atopos) means “out of place,” “perverse,” “outrageous.” Wicked (poneros) means “bad,” not just in the passive sense, but in the active sense; that is, not being content to corrupt itself, it wants to corrupt others as well. Paul is asking for prayer that they be delivered from the unsaved, outrageous Jews who were turning others against them. If this small war ceased and peace prevailed, the gospel would more swiftly advance.

Second, the New Testament indicates that we are to pray for laborers. In Luke 10:2, the Lord says, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few, therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” The Lord looks on a harvest-ready field and sees people who are ready to be saved, like ripe wheat ready for the sickle. But He laments that there is a lack of manpower. So, pray that the sovereign Lord of harvests, heaven, and the whole earth will dispatch a labor force into the great harvest. Believers must pray for God to send laborers into the fields of the world.

In Ephesians 4, Paul teaches that God gives gifts to men and gifted men to the church. One of these gifts is the gift of evangelism. Because of American church history, Christians in America tend to think of an evangelist as an outstanding public figures like Finney, Moody, or Graham. But the evangelist may also be a layman who has a spiritual gift of personal evangelism. Church members should pray that God would grace their church with people who have the gift of evangelism.

Third, we are to pray for an opportunity. In Colossians 4:3, Paul requests prayer that God would open to him and to Timothy “a door for the word” that they might speak the gospel. Joseph B. Lightfoot translates this verse, “A door of admission for the word, i.e., an opportunity of preaching the gospel.” Imagine Paul and Timothy arriving in a new town where the gospel had never been preached, where they had never been, and where they knew no one. The one thing they needed, and needed badly, was an opportunity, an open door, a place to start. This truth also applies to getting an opportunity, not just in the city, but in the life of an individual. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he was in prison. Perhaps He was asking for an opportunity to effectually present the gospel to another prisoner, or to a guard. Maybe he needed to be put with a certain person, or once with him, he needed an opening to present the gospel. At any rate, Paul asked them to pray that he

would get opportunities to present the gospel.

Fourth, we are to pray for boldness. In Acts 4:29, the Jerusalem Christians prayed to the Lord that they might, with all boldness, speak the word. "Boldness" (*perresia*) simply means "plainness of speech." It is not rudeness. It is freedom to speak openly. A believer may have an opportunity and not take it because of fear. So, believers need opportunity and boldness. In Ephesians 6:19, Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for him that he might speak boldly. Imagine that! Paul, the great, mighty, fearless apostle, is asking prayer that he might be bold. If Paul needed prayer for boldness, obviously, so do we.

By the way, note that Acts 4 is a group prayer meeting. Ephesians 6 is a request that a group pray for Paul. Although it may be permissible for individuals to pray for boldness for themselves, the example of Scripture is to have a group pray with you and for you.

All this is good and proper, but there is one question yet unanswered. Is it biblical to pray that a person to get saved? Yes. It is biblical to pray for a person to get saved. In Romans 10:1, Paul says, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved." It is not just his desire but his prayer to God. Acts 7:60 is another incident of praying for sinners to be saved. As he is dying, Stephen prays, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."

Calvinists object to all of this; they fear praying for one who is not one of the elect. Paul had no such fear. In Acts 26:29, his prayer wish for Agrippa is "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains." Apparently, Paul prayed for non-elect people to be saved.

The Scripture does not bother to explain all the details, but these passages are clear about the practice. Lewis Sperry Chafer says, "The reason for human intercession in the divine plan has not been fully revealed. The repeated statements of Scripture that it is a necessary link to the chain that carries the divine energy to the impotent souls of men, in addition to its actual achievement as seen in the world, must be the sufficient evidence of the imperative need for the prayer in connection with the purpose of God. Thus, in the Scriptures and in experience, it is revealed that God has honored man with an exalted place of co-operation and partnership with Himself in His great projects of human transformation."

Summary: The praying connected with evangelism is praying for peace, laborers, opportunity, boldness, and even the sinner's salvation. In short, we should pray for believers around the sinner and for the sinner's salvation.

Notice that the emphasis of the New Testament seems to be praying for believers around the sinner. Pray for someone to give the unbeliever the message. Pray that someone is given an opportunity and boldness to seize it. Then pray that the person gets saved.

Prayer is not a shortcut for the lazy and unprepared. It is a resource for the wise and diligent. Prayer is not a substitute for a word of witness. You may be the answer to your own prayer. So after you pray, look for an opportunity, and when it comes, take it with all boldness. Pray like the little girl who said, "Never ask God to do something we can do ourselves." She said, "I asked the Lord to stop my brother from trapping birds and I believe my prayer was answered. I kicked his trap to pieces." Let us pray and let us proclaim.

ON BEING WISE, LIKE A SNAKE

He disgusts us. There he stands, to our embarrassment. His shoes are dirty, his pants are not pressed, his tie, if he has one, is hanging loosely around his neck, and he is screaming at the top of his lungs with a hoarse voice. He is the zealous street preacher. There he is, standing on the street corner, waving his arms, yelling, “Turn or burn! Repent or perish!” If you could get him to stop long enough to interview him, he would be delighted to talk to you. He would tell you that he is witnessing to the world. The world is not listening, but he is doing his duty and “telling ‘em.”

The consensus of the Christian community is that such efforts are an embarrassment and ineffective. We applaud his zeal, but we are appalled at his lack of finesse. After all, does the New Testament not say, “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside?” (Col. 4:5). Definitely! Yet many Christians evidently do not know, or they do not understand, the meaning of that concept. Consequently, they offend, not by what they say, but by the way that they say it.

Wisdom begins with Pure Motives

Paul does not explain the details of walking in wisdom in Colossians 4, but other passages give us insights. For example, when the Lord sent the disciples to Israel He briefed them by saying, “Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Mt. 10:16). Closely connected with wisdom is being harmless. In fact, biblical wisdom begins with being harmless. The word translated “harmless” (*akeraios*) in Matthew 10:16 means “unmixed” or “pure,” hence “guileless.” In other words, their motive was to help, not to harm. They were to be as harmless as a dove.

Richard Lenski puts it like this: “without admixture, i.e., of base motives such as a falseness, cunning, and the like, the type of this quality being the doves who hurt no one.” J. A. Alexander says, “Harmless is, therefore, an inadequate and inexact translation, and the true sense given in the margin (simple) of the character required is not mere abstinence from injury to others, but that perfect simplicity and purity of motive, without which all the wisdom of the serpent would be unavailing” (Alexander, italics his).

James 3 confirms that wisdom begins with pure motives. James 3:13-18 describes two kinds of wisdom: devilish and divine. James says in verse 14 that devilish wisdom is characterized by bitter envy and strife, that is, self-seeking. He goes on to explain in verse 17 that divine wisdom is first pure. In this context, that can only mean pure in motive, not having bitter envying and self-seeking. Godly wisdom, then, begins with pure motives.

Be a dove. Men have been injured and killed by elephants, lions, tigers, and even on occasion by some types of birds, but never by a dove. Before a dove would hurt anyone, it would fly away. Don’t be a donkey and kick; don’t be a spider and kill; be a dove.

Start Where They Are

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul speaks of using common sense by starting where people are.

In verse 20, he says, “And to the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews.” He acted as they acted. He conformed to their customs. He did not do this to the point of iniquity, but he did it to identify with them. For example, he had Timothy circumcised. Verse 21 says, “To those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law.” He was willing to behave as a Gentile when with the Gentiles. He did not insist on keeping the Jewish observances. He quoted heathen poets and took as his text an inscription on a heathen altar. Yet he was not without the moral law before God. He kept himself under the law of Christ. Paul also applies the principle to believers. To a weak Christian, he became as one who was weak, that he might gain him. He says, “I have become all things to all men, that I might, by all means, save some.” Verse 23 adds, “Now this I do for the gospel’s sake.”

Let me illustrate. Walt asked his church for a Sunday school class. The church agreed but told him he would have to go out and get his own pupils. So Walt began to beat the bushes. He came across Howie busily playing marbles and asked him to go to Sunday school. Howie was not interested in the least in Walt’s Sunday school but quickly agreed when Walt challenged him to a game of marbles. After Howie lost all of his marbles, he agreed to go to Sunday school to learn how to get them back. Walt was a warm, simple-minded man who worked in a tool and die shop. He was well over six feet tall with a heart as big as his size 14 shoes. Walt loved the Lord and his class of young boys. One day he took his class on a hike through Fairmont Park in Philadelphia. During the hike he took aside Howie, who was having trouble in school and at home, and introduced that troubled youth to Jesus Christ. The boy responded by receiving Christ as his Savior. Later that youngster became affectionately known as “Prof” by students at Dallas Theological Seminary. He was Dr. Howard Hendricks. Walt used wisdom. He started where Howie was.

Don’t Quarrel

“A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all” (2 Tim. 2:24). God’s servant is not to quibble or quarrel. He must not be irritable, intolerant, sarcastic, or scornful. Rather, he is to be kind, gentle, and gracious.

Soul-winners are not to attack a sinner like a soldier on a campaign to conquer an opponent. If a haughty and hostile attitude provokes debate, the believer may win the argument and lose the convert. So don’t argue. Many mistakenly view the sinner as a soul that must be overcome and conquered at all costs. If he resists, he is stupid and stubborn and must be persuaded. That attitude can lead to a raised voice, a strained neck, even a clenched fist. Tempers flare.

Don’t be caught in that trap. Be a light and shine; don’t be lightning and burn. Remember that tact is the knack for making a point without making an enemy.

Argue

“Paul used wisdom in evangelism; he argued. Acts 17:2 says he “reasoned with them.” The Greek word (dialegomai) means “to discuss, to argue.” Verse 3 says, “explaining and

demonstrating.” The Greek word translated “demonstrating” (paratithemi) was employed for quoting evidence. So Paul did argue. He explained and quoted evidence. Like a lawyer presenting a case, the apostle used logic and reason. Acts 17 says that this was his custom. Paul disputed with the Jews in the synagogue and daily with people in the marketplace. In Acts 24:25, we are told that he reasoned with Felix.

Robert Smith argues that Christians should argue. He says, “Jesus never hesitated to argue with people if that was the most effective means of getting to the heart of the matter. As a great teacher, however, he was never interested simply in mental gymnastics, as were medieval schoolmen; his goal was to tear down barriers men erect against God. He not only ward off the attacks of his opponents but thrust his point to the heart of his foes, as a fencer jabs with a rapier. He used reproach, fiery indignation, even sarcasm, and so effectively that at times his opponents slinked off with their tails between their legs. They feared to engage him in the mortal combat he handled so well.

“Unlike Socrates or Aristotle, who were more concerned about the intellectual search for truth than for the searcher himself, Jesus sought to bring man into the life more abundant. Expose’ of fallacies did not suffice. Commitment and discipleship were his goals. He sought always to get to the essence of the questions, sometimes passing by the outward form of them—as with Nicodemus (John 3) or the woman at the well (John 4)—to probe the depths. He knew which points to explore and which to avoid. The cutting edge of his argument peeled away the mish-mash and phony fronts men hide behind so that many could say, ‘No man ever spoke like this man.’ (John 7:46)” (Smith, p. 15).

Second Timothy 2:24 exhorts us never to argue. Yet these examples urge us to argue. How are these two seeming opposites to be reconciled?

The answer is to use arguments but never to be argumentative. To argue means to present a thesis and evidence to support that thesis. The thesis, in this case, may be 1) Jesus is God in the flesh, 2) Jesus’ death fully paid for sin and paved the way for eternal life, 3) salvation is by faith and not by works. The evidence for these arguments come from Scripture, logic, testimony, example, quotations, and so on. Yet while presenting the case, the contender for the faith must not be contentious. The New Testament contains two words for “argue.” One, dialaleo, suggests “contention and strife.” The other, athleo, used of Paul’s practice, simply means “debating, arguing, mingling thought with thought.” Charles Finney, a converted lawyer, won thousands to Christ by arguing like a lawyer for sinners to be converted.

Use Current Events

Luke 13:1 tells of a time when Pilate slaughtered Galileans who were sacrificing. The popular view was that those sufferers had merited their deaths. Erdman says, “The common fallacy was supposing that exceptional suffering is a proof of exceptional guilt on the part of men.” Jesus seized the opportunity to teach that temporary exemption is a mark of the grace of God. All are sinners. All deserve judgment. Delayed judgment should be regarded as a merciful opportunity to repent. Jesus emphasized the truth by referring to a recent calamity in which eighteen men had been crushed by the fall of a tower. Their fate was not the sign of their special sinfulness but a warning to others that they would likewise suffer unless they repented of their sins. The lesson for evangelism today is that, like Jesus, we

need to capitalize on current events.

The young lady whom the airline computer had placed beside me on the plane was excited. She was on her way to her wedding and was at thirty thousand feet before the plane left the ground. I listened as she told me how she and her fiancée had met, dated, and decided to get married. When she finally stopped long enough to rest, I said, “You know, many people are down on marriage, but not me. I’m happily married. I believe wedlock is wonderful. I think marriage is the second most important decision of your life.” Startled, she blurted, “Second? What’s first?” By using the current event in her life, I was able to suggest that the first, and most important decision of life, was who people would spend eternity with and the second was with whom they would spend the rest of their earthly lives.

Summary: Wisdom in evangelism is using common sense with pure motives. It is being simple-hearted without being a simpleton. It is being smart without being a smart aleck.

In commenting on Matthew 10:16, Spurgeon says, “The disciples were sent to fierce men, to convince them, and therefore they must be wise; to convert them, and therefore they must be gentle. The weapons of Christians are that they are weaponless. They are to be prudent, discreet, ‘wise as serpents,’ but they are to be loving, peaceful, ‘harmless as doves.’ The Christian missionary will need to be wary to avoid receiving harm, but he must be of a guileless mind that he does no harm. We are called to be martyrs, not maniacs; we are to be simple-hearted, but we are not simpletons.”

To us who know the Lord, the gospel is a sweet, sweet story; but to a sinner headed for the judgment of God, sin, death, and hell are bitter pills to swallow. Thus, we must be wise as we deliver the message.

A small boy was asked how summer camp could be improved. He answered, “Put more sugar in the lemonade.” More sugar and less lemon is needed in evangelism. In this case, it is all right to sugar-coat the “gos-pill.” I like chocolate chip ice cream, but when I go fishing, I use worms because fish like worms.

WHAT MADE PAUL SO BOLD?

Have you ever feared telling someone about the Lord? You wanted to present the gospel to them, so you pondered it, prayed about it, and planned. When the moment of truth came and you were face to face with the individual—it happened. A hesitation, a reluctance, a fear gripped you. You were like a small boy who had a bit part in a church play. At the appropriate moment, he was to bounce out on the stage and say, “It is I. Be not afraid.” But when the moment of truth arrived, he appeared on the stage and proclaimed, “It’s me, and I’m scared to death!”

To make matters worse, you meet someone who, with no restraint, speaks openly and freely about Jesus Christ. Perhaps it was a new convert who, in the excitement and enthusiasm of his new-found faith, was telling everyone about Christ. Maybe it was an excitable extrovert who talked all the time anyway and, thus, did not seem to have any difficulty talking about Christ. I suspect many Christians look longingly at believers with such boldness and wish they had it, too. Then they decide, “That’s not me. I’m not outgoing.”

How does one become bold? Is it just a matter of personality? Paul was obviously bold. What made him like that? He tells us in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8. He says, “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we [Paul and Silas] had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so, we speak, not as pleasing man, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives because you had become dear to us.”

Paul was Bold

In verses 1 and 2, Paul makes the point that he was bold. He begins by saying that his visit to them was not empty. It was not hollow activity, but rather, he says in verse 2, “we were bold.” Boldness is not bluntness. Our English word gives us the impression of aggressive and crass behavior, but the Greek word (*parresiazomai*) simply means “the freedom to speak.”

In November 1977, Sam Blair, a sports writer for the Dallas Morning News, said to Tom Landry, legendary coach of the Dallas Cowboys, “You have lapped the league a couple of times, in terms of longevity, and you’re not even winded. But in 1960, when you became the Cowboys’ coach, did you ever have any idea the job would last this long?” Landry replied, “It’s amazing. If I had had as much knowledge as I have now, I would have been more concerned when I moved into this job. Still, I think my experience in 1958, when I became a Christian, a person with goals beyond winning and losing football games,

gave me a different insight. I wasn't really even concerned about being fired." That is boldness. He was not rude, or blunt, or crass, but he did have the freedom to speak openly about Christ.

Paul was not only bold, but he was also bold in the face of opposition. He says, "We had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know" (1 Thess. 2:2). The suffering refers to physical beating and the spiteful treatment refers to being insulted and humiliated. Remember Philippi? Acts 16 tells us he and Silas were arrested and beaten with many stripes. Jewish law was forty stripes save one, but this was a Roman scourging. The Roman custom depended upon the caprice of the judge and it was a brutal ordeal. He was humiliated, arrested on false charges, stripped, publicly beaten without trial, and thrown into prison like a common criminal.

Imagine it. Lift up Paul's shirt and look at that bareback. See those long, large, red welts. Look at the cuts. You can be sure they hurt for months afterward. I can just imagine that as Paul and Silas left Philippi, Silas pleaded with Paul, "Let's keep a low profile in the next town, at least until my back heals." But not Paul. When he got to Thessalonica, he spoke out openly and boldly. Sure enough, trouble started all over again. Verse 2 says that he spoke with much contention, that is, struggle. He met opposition again, but even with a bruised back and a shamed spirit, he spoke again. Paul was bold in the face of opposition.

When we get a snicker, we shut up. When we are ridiculed, we rivet our mouths shut like a locked trunk. Paul got opposition and spoke openly. What made him do that? He explains in this passage. Verse 3 begins with the little word "for." So does verse 5. That is an indication that Paul is giving us the two reasons he spoke so openly about the gospel.

Paul was Convinced His Message was from God

In verses 3 and 4, Paul talks about the origin of his message. In verse 3, he says it did not come from man: "Our exhortation did not come from deceit." The Greek word "deceit" (plane) means "error." The ancient Greeks believed Zeus was the god who controlled all weather and decided the outcome of all battles. That was erroneous. So an exhortation to worship Zeus was an exhortation of error. Paul is saying that his preaching did not originate from error.

Paul continues, "or uncleanness." "Uncleanness" (akatharsia) here probably refers to sexual impurity. It regularly appears with adultery and fornication. So Paul is saying, "My preaching did not originate from sexual impurity." That may strike us as odd, but the ancient world would have immediately got the point. The Greek temple housed priestesses who served as prostitutes. An exhortation to worship there was an invitation to wallow in uncleanness.

Paul adds, "Nor was it guile." He is not talking here about origin so much as a sphere. "Guile" (dolos) means "bait, snare, deceit." In other words, his preaching was not composed of deceit or trickery. A fisherman uses a worm as bait to deceive and trick a fish. The fish thinks he is getting something to eat and ends up getting eaten. The religions of the ancient world were deceitful. Paul is declaring that his is not.

Paul's point, thus far, is that his exhortation is not of men; it is not of error, uncleanness, nor in deceit. Well, from where did it come? He tells us in verse 4.

Paul claimed the gospel was of God. He says in verse 4 that God put him in trust and

holds him accountable. Therefore, he speaks not to please men, but God. In other words, he is saying, “I speak the gospel because it is not from the corruption of men, but it is from the commission of God.”

Paul was God’s trustee. Let us suppose a wealthy man died and made you the trustee of his estate. His instructions were that you were to give the wealth away to a certain kind of people. So you start looking for those kind of people. When you find such a person, you have no hesitation or reluctance in saying, “I want to give you this large sum of silver.” The person might say, “That’s got to be wrong. You must have stolen it. It’s hot. What’s the trick?” You would respond, “Take this. It’s yours. I am not mistaken. It is not out of uncleanness. It is not stolen. There is no trick. I know a wealthy man who died, and he wanted you to have this.”

That is something of what Paul is saying. He claims, “That’s why I speak so openly. My exhortation is not a mistake or illegal. There is no deceit. It is simply that God has made me a trustee of the gospel.” Paul was convinced that his message was of God and that made him bold.

There was a second reason for his boldness.

Paul Was Concerned About People

In verses 5-8, Paul talks about his motives. At first, it may appear that he is talking about his technique, but careful analysis will reveal that he is talking more about motives than methods.

In verses 5 and 6, he tells us what his motive is not. He says that his motive is not to serve himself: “For neither at any time did we use flattering words.” The Greek word *kolakeia* was used of flattery that had selfish motives. There is a difference between appreciation and flattery. One is sincere, and the other is insincere; one is selfless, the other is selfish. He adds, “Not a cloak for covetousness.” He had not used preaching the gospel as a coat to cover his covetousness like a robber uses an overcoat to cover his gun. There was no hidden selfishness in what he had done. He also contends, “Nor did we seek glory from men.” He had not selfishly sought recognition and reputation, yet he does add, “We might have made demands as apostles of Christ.” As an apostle, he did have a right to recognition, but he did not seek it. His point is that his motive is not to serve himself.

In verses 7 and 8, Paul tells us that his motive is to serve others. Verse 7 says, “We were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” Because we loved you, we were gentle with you. A mother loves her small infant, so she tenderly, carefully, gently cares for it. In verse 8, he adds, “So, affectionately longing for you. You had become dear to us.” Paul and Silas were willing to give them their lives as well as the gospel. The point is that Paul loved them, so he served them and not himself.

Wendell Willkie once asked Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Mr. President, why do you keep that frail, sickly man, Harry Hopkins at your elbow?” FDR replied, “Mr. Willkie, through that door flows an incessant stream of men and women who almost invariably want something from me. Harry Hopkins wants only to serve me. That’s why he’s near me.” People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Summary: Paul says he was bold to speak the gospel, even in the face of opposition,

because he knew his message was from God and his motive was to serve others.

Could it be that if we were convinced the message was of God and were committed to serving people, we would speak? If that is the case, the issue is not personality; it is spirituality. Outspoken people do not speak just because they are outgoing. In fact, it may be harder for outgoing people to speak, since they want more than anything to be liked. The issue is not personality; it is spirituality. If you are convinced and committed, you will communicate. If you are not, you will not communicate. If you focus on yourself, you will be silent. If you focus on the Lord's command and you are concerned about others, you will speak.

Hugh Lattimer once preached before King Henry VIII. Henry was greatly displeased by the boldness in the sermon and ordered Lattimer to preach again on the following Sunday and apologize for the offense he had given. The next Sunday, after reading his text, he thus began his sermon: "Hugh Lattimer, dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak? To the high and mighty monarch, the king's most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life, if thou offendest. Therefore, take heed that thou speakest not a word that may displease. But then consider well, Hugh, does thou not know from whence thou comest—upon Whose message thou art sent? Even by the great and mighty God, Who is all-present and Who beholdeth all thy ways and Who is able to cast thy soul into hell! Therefore, take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully."

He then preached the same sermon he had preached the preceding Sunday—and with considerably more energy.

THE GIFT OF EVANGELISM

The Bible clearly teaches that there is a gift of evangelism, but that is where the clarity stops. What is involved in the gift of evangelism? Lewis Sperry Chafer defined an evangelist as “a pioneer missionary to the hitherto unevangelized” (Chafer, *True Evangelism*, p. 6). John F. Walvoord has stated that the gift of evangelism is the “unusual capacity to preach the gospel of salvation and to win the lost to Christ” (Walvoord, p. 40). A Bible teacher once suggested that it is the ability to make the gospel clear (Dr. Dwight Pentecost). Yet another teacher contends that it is the ability to get results and teach witnessing (Dr. Stanley Toussaint). One professor even suggested that it is the ability to think like a lost man (Dr. Haddon Robinson).

The principle is simply that God gives some the gift of evangelism.

Definition of the Gift

The gift of evangelism is the special ability to communicate the gospel to sinners. That is evident from the Greek word for “evangelist” (euangelistes), which means “one who announces the gospel.” It is used three times in the New Testament. In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul says that God gives people who are gifted as evangelists to the church. Philip is called an evangelist in Acts 21:8. Timothy is urged to do the work of an evangelist in 2 Timothy 4:5.

In his book *Evangelism*, G. Campbell Morgan explains, “A man who receives the gift of evangelism is one to whom there is given a clear understanding of the evangel, a great passion in his heart results from the clear vision, a great optimism fills his soul, born of his confidence in the power of Christ to save every man, and growing out of that passion and that confidence a great constraint seizes him to tell somebody, to tell everybody the glad news of salvation by Jesus Christ” (Morgan, p. 55). In other words, an evangelist tells people the good news.

The gift of evangelism also includes the special ability to equip saints. Ephesians 4:12 indicates that. Jack Arnold clarifies, “The term evangelist, in its primary sense, is a person sovereignly endowed with the gift of evangelism, who has, as his primary purpose, the evangelizing of the lost, and also has as his secondary responsibility the equipping of the saints for evangelism” (Arnold, p. 4).

The gift of evangelism, then, is the special ability to communicate the gospel to sinners and equip saints to evangelize. That definition implies several things.

For one thing, evangelists are able to communicate to non-Christians, which means they can think like a non-believer. After a lapse of time, a degree of spiritual growth, and extended exposure to the Christian community, many saints forget what it is like to live in the world totally apart from God. It is like being married for years and forgetting what it is like to be single. Evangelists seem to have a native ability to understand where the non-Christian is “coming from.” Thus, they can identify with non-Christians and communicate to them.

Evangelists may also have a special ability to reap. Dr. Lee Roberson, the founder of Tennessee Temple University, would on occasion, take Dr. John McCormick, a Bible

teacher at the University, with him to speak in churches. After several years, McCormick said, "I could speak on salvation and nothing would happen. He could speak on anything and people would get saved."

If evangelists have to a gift to equip saints, they probably have some ability to teach. At least they will be communicators. When they minister, saints will learn not only information but skill in approaching a sinner.

Evangelists will probably be able to motivate. If they do not turn people off at first with their enthusiasm, they will turn them on.

All of this does not mean that evangelists have a special kind of personality. They are not necessarily extroverts. I have known introverts with a gift of evangelism, but at the same time, I would also have to say that although an evangelist may not be an extrovert, every evangelist I have known has been an incurable optimist.

Evangelists do not necessarily dress a certain way. There is no such thing as an evangelist costume. Years ago, in the South, evangelists often wore white shoes, red ties, and flashy clothes. That was part of the culture, not part of the gift. Evangelists know, by their gift, that clothes either help or hinder them in evangelism since they understand non-Christians and communication. They know that clothes communicate. Consequently, they will probably dress either to get attention or to identify with their audience.

Years ago, when hippies were exercising their right to free speech in Haight- Ashbury (named for the intersection of Haight and Ashbury streets in San Francisco, California), I ask a youth pastor who had been there, if I went there, would the hippies listen to me. Pausing to reflect for a moment, he finally said, "Yes, I think they would, but you would have to change your clothes." When I ask him to explain, he said that they would listen to somebody who was sincere and had something to say. He felt that I met that qualification, but my suit and tie would be a hindrance. So I asked what he would recommend that I wear, and he said, "bib overalls." The reality is that clothes communicate a message and people respond, often unconsciously, to what a person is wearing. Granted, God looks on the heart, but people look on the outward appearance and are either attracted to or "turned off " by what others are wearing.

Description of the Gift

From experience, I have concluded that the gift of evangelism exists in different shapes and sizes. For example, there is a gift that specializes in personal evangelism. The person with this gift is successful in personal evangelism, but not in public meetings. A pastor I know has led many to Christ personally. Consequently, he has been invited on many occasions to conduct evangelistic crusades. By his own admission, he was a failure in the mass meetings and finally concluded he should refuse to conduct evangelistic crusades, although he remained highly successful in personal evangelism.

On the other hand, a person may have the gift that manifests itself in public evangelism. One would think that an evangelist who had an ability to evangelize publicly would be successful in personal soul-winning. However, that is not always the case. I know of one evangelist who has been highly successful in pulpit evangelism for many years, and yet he has confessed poor success in leading people to Christ privately, though he has tried.

Some with the gift seem to specialize in training believers to be evangelists. Bill Bright

and James Kennedy are outstanding examples of this. Each has manifested his gift of evangelism in equipping saints.

Women can have the gift of evangelism. Philippians 4:3 seems to indicate that. A Christian housewife once said to me, “What’s wrong with me? I’d rather be with sinners than with saints.” A few questions revealed that she was not “worldly;” she was just interested in reaching the world with the gospel. Her gift naturally pushed her in that direction.

There is also the possibility of combining the spiritual gift with a natural talent. Some gifted evangelists have combined their talent for writing with their gift of evangelism and have won hundreds and thousands to Christ through literature. Do not some evangelists combine their gift for winning the lost with their talent for singing? The point is that the gift of evangelism includes various types.

Deployment of the Gift

Some people get the idea that the possession of the gift automatically guarantees success in reaping. They think that if they can get an evangelist to talk to their friend, or get their friend to hear an evangelist, he or she will be saved, but there is more to successful reaping than being a gifted farmer.

Paul exhorted Timothy to “stir up” his gift (2 Tim. 1:6). The Greek word rendered “stir up” means “rekindle,” or keep in full flame. Imagine the fire in a fireplace burning low. The coals need to be stirred up. New logs must be tossed on the fire. Likewise, gift-possessors may need to stir up their fire. This includes using their gift and, perhaps, developing their gift by watching and listening to others with the same gift. By practice and use, people perfect their ability. A teenager may be a gifted pianist, but she still needs to stir up her talent. Older performers, even those not as gifted as the youngster, may still be able to teach the younger musician many things. Remember, being a talented farmer does not guarantee a bumper crop.

Successful reaping also depends on circumstances. Jesus, God in the flesh, could not do mighty works in His hometown because of the residents’ unbelief (Mk. 6:1-6). When the nation rejected Him, He told the parable of the sower. The problem was not the sower, nor the seed, nor the sowing, but the soil. Billy Graham would not have been as successful in a Muslim country as he has been in America. For great success, there must be good soil.

Summary: The gift of evangelism consists fundamentally of a special spiritual ability to communicate the gospel to sinners and to equip saints for evangelism.

There are different manifestations of the gift, but all forms must be exercised and developed to have the greatest possible success.

There are two practical applications of this biblical principle. In the first place, we need to use not only gifted evangelists; the church needs to be exposed to all the gifts, especially the ministering gifts. When a church is exposed to one gift only, believers become lopsided and unbalanced. If all they hear is a teacher, they end up spiritually fat. If all they get is exhortation, they end up lean and mean. So, every church needs to be exposed to a variety of gifts so that it can be balanced and blessed.

Second, we must all learn from the gifted saints among us. Some Christians have used

the existence of gifts as an excuse not to be involved. That is to misunderstand the nature and purpose of gifts. God has given to some special ability and all responsibility. God has given each believer many responsibilities, including evangelism, exhortation, teaching, giving and showing mercy. God has also given some special abilities, or gifts, in these areas. I believe God gave spiritual gifts to individuals so that they could teach other believers their area of responsibility. This is the point of Ephesians 4.

For example, God has given all believers the responsibility of giving. He has also given some believers the special ability, that is, the gift of giving. I have given money to the Lord all my Christian life, but I must say frankly that I did not know how to give until I met a man who had the gift. My exposure to him and my experience with him taught me more about giving than everything else put together. Suppose I had said, “I don’t have to give because I don’t have the gift.” You see, you may not have special ability, but you do have responsibility to give money—and to give the message of salvation.

PART 5: THE PRACTICE OF PERSONAL EVANGELISM

WHERE DO I START?

Knowing about evangelism, the details of the message, and how to present it is one thing, but knowing practically where to start and how to proceed is another. When confronted with individuals who need Christ, the issue is how to approach them. There are two basic philosophies of personal evangelism.

Friendship evangelism starts by making friends. By taking time to establish a relationship and winning the friendship, you win the right to be heard. Then, and only then, according to this view, do you share the gospel.

On the other end of the spectrum is the view that says, “That’s not necessary. Get a method of presenting the gospel and get started. Witness to everyone you can, everyone you meet. Winning friends is great, but you need to win strangers.” This view is sometimes called “cold turkey evangelism.”

Each side marshals biblical support for its view and wages war on the other view. The friendship folks could well cite Luke 16:1-9. In the parable of the unjust steward, Jesus taught the disciples to use their money and influence to “make friends for yourselves.” The ultimate purpose was so that “they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” (By the way, this view also goes to John 4 for support, but that passage supports the other side. In John 4, Jesus witnesses to a stranger, not a friend.) The cold turkey persuasion could point to Acts 8. Philip did not take time to establish a relationship or a friendship; he immediately plunged into the issue of salvation.

Problems occur with both views. Some end up witnessing only to friends and use friendship evangelism as an excuse. The Great Commission becomes, “Go into all the world and win friends.” On the other hand, the cold turkey extremists insist that every person they meet, even those they meet just for a moment, must be spoken to. Such legalism can kick the heart out of evangelism. Where, oh where, is the balanced, biblical view? After wrestling with this subject and the related Scripture passages for many years, I have developed a philosophy of personal evangelism. It could be summarized as follows.

Assume Divine Design

A practical, biblical approach to evangelism begins with an attitude. Believers ought to assume that the people in their life are not there by accident but by divine design. In Genesis, we are told the story of Joseph. Motivated by jealousy, his brothers sold him into slavery. Ishmaelites bought him, transported him to Egypt, and there sold him into Egyptian slavery. Potiphar’s wife falsely accused him and he ended up in prison. Eventually, the dreamer rose from prison all the way to the palace. Now, a humanist might conclude that the caravan had happened to come along and just happened to be headed for Egypt. The humanist would conclude that this poor boy had a lot of bad luck. That was not Joseph’s view. He concluded, “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:20). What happened to Joseph was no accident. It was all by divine design. God allowed those people to be in his life for a purpose.

When Paul was in prison at Rome, the church at Philippi became concerned. They sent

financial aid and Epaphroditus to him. Paul's response was the book of Philippians. In chapter 1, verses 12 and 13, Paul explains that what happened to him resulted in the furthering of the gospel. He was chained to guards, so he won them to Christ. Paul didn't believe that he was in jail because of some misfortune or accident. His view was that he had a divine appointment.

Some people hate their circumstances. They feel they are in prison. The truth is, God has put them there to teach them and to use them. Their attitude needs to change and until it does, they will not have much impact on their surroundings.

Be Warm and Friendly to Everyone

After adopting a proper biblical attitude, every Christian should decide to be a warm, friendly, concerned neighbor to everyone. First Peter 3:8 says, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another, love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous." Believers are to be concerned, compassionate, and courteous. Such conduct is not just for special occasions like witnessing; it is to be the lifestyle of the saint.

When I meet people, whether on an airplane or at a social function, I automatically want to know them. That is done, at first, by asking questions such as "Where are you from, originally?" "What do you do for a living?" "Are you married?" These are three of my favorites. We talk about their family and their job. In other words, we talk about their favorite topic of conversation—themselves.

Now some will say, "That's not me. I'm not outgoing." My response to that would be, "Since when is your personality so sacred? Change!"

Use Good Judgement, But Present the Gospel

After you have gotten to know the person—unless there is a good reason not to—begin to present the gospel. That is, ask an opening question and start going through a basic outline of what a person needs to do to be saved.

Philip met the Ethiopian and with little or no introduction plowed into a discussion of spiritual things. Thousands and perhaps millions since have done the same thing. Church members taking a religious survey have led their neighbors to Christ on the first visit. Zealous students have led fellow students to Christ in the first conversation. Cold turkey evangelism works.

Yet the better part of wisdom may be to wait. There may be good reasons for not witnessing to a particular person in the first meeting. For example, if you know that you will have more contact with the person, it might be wiser to wait. Preaching the gospel to every member of the family the next time you see them after conversion is not a good idea. Family members are probably the most difficult to reach. Jesus said that a prophet is without honor in his own country. You will discover the same with your family, so be tactful, but don't be so tactful that you lose the attack. The same advice applies to your neighbors and your fellow workers. Do not witness to every fellow employee the first day on the job (unless they bring up the subject). But do make plans for getting the gospel to all with whom you work.

If you know the person has been “turned off “ by religion, definitely don’t jump into evangelism. Pushy parents, over-zealous preachers, and unwise peers have caused some to be turned off, and, therefore, they have turned away from the gospel. They want nothing to do with God, the Bible, the church, or Christianity. They need love, not another lecture.

If you know the person has an intellectual problem, start with this need. If a person does not believe that Jesus is God in the flesh and has intellectual objections to such doctrines, telling him he needs to trust Christ will probably have little impact. In his case, intelligently discuss this problem.

The real point is to begin. Give them the gospel.

Let’s face it. We are out to see people change. Too many Christians have soaked up the world’s idea that we should live and let live. God told us to preach the gospel so that people will be changed by the power of God. Some Christians are so weak that they are not trying to change others. They are fighting—struggling—to keep others from changing them.

How to Handle Interruptions

If you know of no good reason not to, attempt to present the gospel at every opportunity. You will be surprised at the favorable response. If people have a problem, they will let you know. They will ask a question or object.

If they ask a question that concerns the gospel presentation, answer it. These kinds of questions usually deal with clarification. If the question is an objection outside the issue of the gospel, ask them if it can be dealt with after the presentation. For example, if they blurt out in the middle of the “Roman Road,” “Do you believe that Jonah was swallowed by a whale?”, respond by saying, “That’s a good question. Would you mind if I finish the presentation and answer that afterward?” I usually write the question on a piece of paper so as not to forget it and to show them I intend to answer it later; then, I finish the gospel presentation. In many cases, people will trust Christ. They may even say afterward, “Oh, I’m not worried about that question, anyway.” If, when you get to the end of the presentation and are asking for a decision to trust Christ, they again bring up a question, then by all means, stop and answer it.

Sometimes people ask questions and bring up objections that are not original with them. They have heard someone else bring it up and it stuck with them. Those are the kinds of interruptions you can successfully temporarily sidetrack. These are, however, questions and objections with which the person has struggled. These have become “hang-ups.” If that is the case, you dare not continue until you deal with the objection.

Meet Them Where They are and Take Them as far as You Can

When you have determined where a person is, meet him or her at that point and take that individual as far as you can toward the Lord. It is as if every person you meet is on either side of a line. The line is salvation.

Everyone to the right of the line is a believer. Believers can be subdivided into categories ranging from babes to mature saints. Babes are immature, self-centered, and noisy. They need feeding, changing, and lots of attention, but they are beginning to learn.

As believers grow, they need counsel and direction. Mature believers are productive. They meet needs, yet they still have needs. They still need feeding and can need encouragement. In other words, all the believers you meet have spiritual needs and you need to be a positive ministering influence in their life. As much as they will let you and as much as you are able, you should be taking every believer in your life towards maturity.

Everyone to the left of the line is lost. This crowd can also be divided into categories and our job is to bring them as far as we can toward salvation. Some are religious. They accept the Bible as the Word of God and Christ as the Son of God. A witness needs to start where they are and take them as far toward salvation as possible. Others are plagued with pressing personal problems and may or may not be religious, but they are hurting. Again, the proper evangelistic approach is to begin where they are and take them as far as we can toward the Lord. That might mean relating to them how Christ has solved some of those same problems in your life. Still others are intellectual. They do not accept the Savior, the Scriptures, or even the supernatural. They have objections, questions, arguments, and rebuttals. With these, as with others, we must begin where they are and take them as far as we can toward salvation. That may mean suggesting a book for them to read. In the next several chapters, each of these unsaved groups will be discussed in detail. The point here is that we must start where they are and take them as far as we can.

Summary: A scriptural and practical approach to personal evangelism assumes that God is working and believers are friendly.

So, begin where non-Christians are and take them as far towards the Lord as you can. There may be a reason why a person is not receptive to the things of the Lord, but until that becomes an issue, proceed as if rejection is not going to happen.

The key is to begin. A trip of a thousand miles begins with the first step. If you don't start, you will definitely never finish. For fear of not being able to finish, many never start. In the case of evangelism, it is better to fish and catch nothing than not to fish at all.

Off Vancouver Island in the Pacific Ocean, there is a stretch of water known as the Zone of Silence. This area is acoustically dead. No sound penetrates it at any time. Because no buoy, bell, or siren can warn ships of dangerous reefs, there have been many shipwrecks in the area and many a vessel lies ruined on the ocean floor. Are you a zone of silence?

HOW TO LEAD A PERSON TO CHRIST

A number of methods have been developed to enable a believer to lead a non-believer to Christ. For many years the “Roman Road” approach was popular. The points of the presentation followed the outline of the New Testament book of Romans. A similar system called “Four Things God Wants You to Know” employed the same basic outline but used different verses. Then Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ introduced the idea of using a booklet that explained the Gospel. No sooner was the concept successful than booklets multiplied like rabbits. In the meantime, a Presbyterian pastor, James Kennedy, created an evangelistic explosion that, like Mount St. Helens, fell all over the United States. Today, there are scores of methods for leading people to Christ.

I have often wondered which method is biblical and best. How did they do it in the New Testament? How did Paul lead someone to Christ? How did Peter? At first, they didn’t have a Bible (that is, the complete New Testament), or a booklet. How did they teach others to do it? What was their method?

Then one day it dawned on me. We do have one clear instance of an evangelist leading someone to Christ. How did Philip, the evangelist, do it? What method did he use? Let us study this case history, described in Acts 8:26-40, to discern how to lead a person to Christ.

To Commence, Ask a Question

Philip had just concluded a citywide evangelistic crusade. He was traveling back to Jerusalem, evangelizing on the way, when he received word that he was to journey south. Once in southern Palestine, he came upon an Ethiopian eunuch. This was no ordinary Ethiopian citizen. He was a man of position and power, in charge of the treasury of Ethiopia. The fact that he was sitting in a chariot indicates that he was a man of high rank. Traveling in a chariot then would be like riding in a Cadillac limousine now. He was also a pious man, for he had been to Jerusalem to worship. That means that he was either a Jew (which is not likely), a proselyte, or a God-fearer. A proselyte was a Gentile who has converted to Judaism. They were circumcised and kept the Law. God-fearers were only loosely connected to Judaism. They attended the synagogues and read the Jewish Scriptures.

This pious political leader was sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah (Acts 8:28). He was reading aloud (anagnosis, the word used here, refers to public reading). Verse 30 indicates that Philip “heard” him read. Reading in ancient times was invariably aloud because the words were written together with no space between words, no punctuation, and no capital letters. Deciphering the text was facilitated by reading aloud. So, as Philip approached the chariot, he heard the Ethiopian reading and simply inquired, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The Ethiopian responded in the negative and invited Philip to aid him. Philip was able to explain the passage in Isaiah, as well as the gospel. Note that Philip started the evangelistic conversation with a question.

In his first epistle, Peter implies that a question is a way to start an evangelistic discussion. In 1 Peter 3:15, he instructs, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is

in you, with meekness and fear.” In other words, living a sanctified life will provoke questions. On more than one occasion I have led people to Christ because they saw the godly life of a Christian and started asking questions.

Whether you provoke a question with your lifestyle or pose a question with your lips, the transaction from a secular to a spiritual conversation is a question. The question is the line of demarcation. Once you cross it, it is easier to go ahead than to go back.

Successful methods today open with a question. Campus Crusade asks, “Have you ever heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?” James Kennedy’s method recommends two questions: 1) “Have you gotten to the place in your spiritual life where you know for certain that if you were to die today, you would go to heaven?” 2) “Suppose you were to die tonight and stand before God and He were to say to you, “Why should I let you into My heaven?” What would you say?” Jack Hyles’ method uses “If you died now, do you know that you would go to heaven?” Campus Crusade works with university students. Kennedy attracts professional people and Hyles’ church labors among the working class. Yet they all use the same basic principle to get an evangelistic conversation going—they ask a question.

If you have not done this before, your reaction might be, “That’s a bold approach. Won’t it offend people?” If you are genuinely concerned about people and if you are courteous, you will not offend them. I personally have used this method for more than fifty years and do not recall offending anyone by my approach.

A lady was waiting in a shopping mall for her husband. A Christian approached her, gave her a tract, and asked if she knew for sure she was going to heaven. As they talked, her husband returned and she had to leave. As they walked away, the husband asked, “What did he want?” The wife replied, “He wanted to know if I was going to heaven.” The husband responded, “That’s none of his business.” To which the wife said, “Funny, but if you could have seen the expression on his face, you would have thought that it was.”

To Communicate, Use the Scripture

What happens after the question is asked? In Philip’s case, he used the Scripture to present Christ (Acts 8:32). The New Testament recognizes that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. That is not to say that the Bible must be used, or that a tract, a leaflet, or booklet cannot be used. It is to say that the tract, or whatever, should at least quote the Scripture. Remember Hebrews 4:12. An evangelist is like a mailman: he delivers someone else’s message.

Philip used the Scripture and preached Jesus. He didn’t expound Genesis 1; he explained Isaiah 53. It was not creation he was communicating, it was Christ. If people are to be saved, they must hear about Christ (Acts 4:12). Jesus Himself said, “If I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all peoples to Myself” (Jn. 12:32).

Yes, Christ is the heart of the Scriptures,
He is the theme they convey.
So when you would witness to sinners,
Point them to Jesus, the Way.

Philip used the Scripture to preach Christ and His cross. Acts 8:32 says, “The place in

the Scripture which he read was this.” The Greek word translated place” (perioche) means a portion or section. Commentators generally suggest that Philip and the eunuch discussed the whole paragraph. The paragraph in Isaiah 53 deals with the death of Christ.

For that matter, Luke quotes part of the passage. What he quotes clearly proved they talked about Christ’s death. The point of Acts 8:32 is that Christ died like a lamb, submissively and silently. In verse 33, Philip goes on to describe the suffering of an innocent and unresisting victim. The phrase “in His humiliation His justice was taken away” means that in His death, justice was withheld. The fair trial due Him was not given Him. “Who will declare His generation?” is difficult to interpret. The meaning seems to be “He will die in the prime of life and leave no descendants.” The next sentence of verse 33 is the proof and demonstration of their sin. “For His life is taken from the earth.” Clearly the passage described Christ’s death. Thus, Philip used the Scripture to present Christ and His cross.

In leading a person to Christ, the cross must be presented. It is the heart of the gospel. (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Paul boldly proclaims, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). The cross is the power of God to salvation (1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 1:16).

To Close, Stress Faith

After Christ and His death for sin have been presented, the need for faith needs to be stressed. After Philip’s sermon on Isaiah 53, they continued journeying southward. This time, they traveled together. When they came to a waterhole the eunuch volunteered. “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). He could have heard about baptism at Jerusalem, but more than likely he heard about it from Philip. The evangelist indicated that there was one basic requirement for baptism—faith. That is in contrast to Judaism. In Judaism, two things kept him out: being a Gentile and being a eunuch, but all that is necessary for salvation is faith in Christ. The treasurer testified of his trust in the Savior and Philip baptized him.

Philip closed this transaction by stressing faith. There are two objections to that observation. 1) The conversation took place after the discussion of Isaiah 53 and the context was baptism, not salvation. How do we know that Philip stressed faith at the close of the original conversation? 2) The passage is not in some Greek manuscripts. How do we know this happened at all?

There may be a problem with concluding from this passage that faith ought to be stressed at the close, but there is no question that throughout Acts and the New Testament that is the issue. In Acts 10, Peter preached to Cornelius and his household. He used the Scriptures. He preached Christ, especially the gospel, and he stressed faith (Acts 10:43). In Acts 16, the Philippian jailer heard Paul and Silas praying and singing praises. He undoubtedly heard then about Christ, the cross, and conversion. When he asked, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul emphasized believe (Acts 16:30-31). These men stressed faith and made it clear that people needed to trust Christ.

Summary: The biblical principles of presenting the gospel are: 1) open with a question, 2) use Scripture to present Christ crucified, and 3) close with the issue of faith.

It is really simple, but most Christians feel inadequate. They will look at Acts 8 and think, but Philip was an evangelist, and I'm not Billy Graham. I could never do that. It is true that Philip is called an evangelist, but that is not until Acts 21:8. Throughout this passage, he is just Philip. In fact, at this point, he was not an evangelist.

If you want to know what it takes, note what he did. In Acts 8:27, he "went." In verse 30, he "said." Verse 35 says he "opened his mouth" and in verse 37, he "said" again. If you can go, open your mouth, ask a question, speak, and make a statement, you can lead people to Christ.

We think because we are not like men in the Bible, we cannot do what they did. For example, we look at Moses, who spoke to Pharaoh and worked miracles, led a million distraught Jews out of Egypt and parted the Red Sea, but we forget that Moses felt inadequate. When first called, his objection was "I can't speak." Maybe that is the requirement; for when we are weak, He is strong.

HOW I DO IT

For five years, I taught evangelism at Dallas Theological Seminary. Every year I gave a lecture on the biblical principles of leading a person to Christ. From Acts 8, I explained that Philip opened with a question, presented Christ from the Scriptures, and closed by emphasizing faith. Every year the same thing happened. A student would raise his hand and ask, "But how do you do it?" So every year, I had to explain how I did it.

That is what I would like to do for you. I would like to share with you how I present the gospel to a non-Christian. Before I do, I would like to make several preliminary observations.

The method is not inspired. I am not suggesting in any way that my method is the best or the only way to do it. God has not chiseled it in a stone or given it to me in a vision.

I am not even claiming originality. My method is basically the "Roman Road." I do not know who composed the Roman Road or where it was born, but I do know that it has been used by thousands of Christians for many years.

The method works. I have used the Roman Road in one form or another for over fifty years. I have used it as a teenager, a young adult, a middle-aged man. I have used it successfully on the East and West coasts, in the Midwest, the North, and the South. I have seen the Lord bring many people to Himself with this simple presentation of the gospel.

This method can be imitated easily. You can copy this method. Copyright, in this case, means the right to copy, and you can do it with ease.

The first thing I do is establish rapport. In a warm, friendly, tactful way, I try to find out as much as possible about the person, as I would if I met someone at a party. I ask such things as where he or she is from and what he or she does for a living. I usually ask about their family, for instance, how many children and how old they are. Obviously, not all these questions apply to all the people with whom I talk. The point is, I spend time getting to know the person. This also gives that individual a chance to get to know me. I want the person to feel comfortable and relaxed.

For me, the transition from talking about secular things to discussing spiritual things is a question. I personally use three questions: 1) "Do you know for sure you are going to heaven?" The response is usually, "No, I am not sure." or "I hope so." 2) Then I ask, "Has anyone ever taken a Bible and shown you how you can know for sure you are going to heaven?" That question almost always gets a negative reply. 3) So I ask, "May I?" That inquiry almost always gets a positive reply. Please note carefully that if a person should say no, which for me is extremely rare, I do not, contrary to the advice of some soul winners, proceed. In my opinion, to insist on preaching the gospel to an unwilling hearer is unbiblical, unwise, and unethical.

If you have not done this before, you might think these questions are frontal and offensive. My observation is that when Christians are courteous and genuinely concerned, people are not offended but really desire to talk about spiritual things. So, at this point, I take out my Bible and usually a piece of paper and a pen. Turning to Romans 3:23, I say, "To know you are going to heaven, you need to understand several things."

All Have Sinned (Romans 3:23)

I read Romans 3:23 and point out that it says all have sinned. I often write on a piece of paper, “All have sinned. Romans 3:23.” Then the first thing I do is say, “That includes me. I have sinned.” That is important. When talking to people about spiritual things, whether it is intended or not, they sometimes feel you consider yourself to be better than they are. Maybe it is because the whole assumption of this conversation is, I am going to heaven and you are not. After all, I am showing you how to get there. Most people feel that goodness gets you to heaven and badness keeps you out. So, without verbalizing it, they may feel that you think you are somehow superior. To avoid the pitfall, I begin by saying, “That includes me. I have sinned.”

Then I ask, “If I were to ask you if you were a sinner, what would you say?” That is as diplomatically as the question can be asked. By the way, this is a conversation, not a sermon. It is a dialogue, not a monologue. I want the other person to talk to me as well. At any rate, most people readily admit that they have sinned, especially in the non-threatening context of my admission that I have too. I usually say, “Right. This verse says all have sinned. That obviously includes both of us.”

Next, I ask, “What would you say sin is? We have both agreed we are sinners, now let’s define sin.” As you can imagine, I have received a variety of answers. The most common include, “I am not perfect” or “I have made some mistakes.” I then move the conversation from speculation to Scripture by asking, “What do you think the Bible means by sin?” People will often bring God in if they have not before. I point out that the Bible says that sin is breaking God’s law (1 Jn. 3:4).

Then I get specific. I do not list all the Ten Commandments, but I at least bring up one, and usually several. With children or even teenagers, I often ask, “Have you ever disobeyed your parents?” With adults, I use the ninth commandment: “Have you ever told a lie?” Everyone will admit that at some time in their life, they have lied. I point out that this is what sin is. It is breaking God’s law. One example is that we have lied.

I do not get too specific. I do not ask, “Have you ever committed adultery?” unless I know for sure the person has, and he or she knows that I know.

My transition to the next point is as follows: “We have both admitted to each other that we have broken God’s law. Anytime you break the law there is a penalty. If you run a stop sign, the penalty is a fine. If you rob a gas station, the penalty is jail. What is the penalty for breaking God’s law?”

The Penalty of Sin is Death (Romans 6:23)

Pointing to Romans 6:23, I read out loud, “The wages of sin is death.” Then, on those occasions, when I write out the outline, I write, “The penalty of sin is death. Romans 6:23.” The wages of work is money, but the wages of sin is death. In other words, what I earn—the penalty, the punishment of sin—is death. Death is separation.

The Bible speaks of two kinds of death, that is, two kinds of separation. The first is physical death, which is separation of the body and the soul. If I were to die right now, my body would fall to the floor, but my soul, the real me, would go somewhere else. But the Bible speaks of another death, one it calls the second death. This second death is separation

of the soul from God. Now, the penalty of sin is death, spiritual death, separation from God. To put it simply—hell.

My transition to the next point is, “All this is bad news, but there is good news.”

Christ Died in Our Place to Pay for Our Sin (Romans 5:8)

I read Romans 5:8 to the person. “God demonstrated His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” If I am writing out the outline, I write, “Christ died to pay for our sin. Romans 5:8.” Then I ask, “What is the penalty of sin?” “Death” is usually the answer. “Right. Now, what did Christ do?” The person usually answers, “Christ died.” Again, “Right. Now, put the two things together. The penalty of sin is death, but Christ died for us. That means He died in our place to pay for what we did. Frankly, this means that since Christ died, I do not have to pay.”

At this point, I illustrate. Years ago, when spanking was more common than it is today, I used it as an illustration. Today, I only use it in situations where I think it is acceptable. It goes like this.

Suppose a ten-year-old boy was standing here. Let’s also suppose that this boy had disobeyed his father, and his father said, “When you get home tonight, you’re going to get a spanking.” Then imagine I went home with the boy and said to the father, “Let me take the spanking for the little boy.” I know this may sound a bit wild, but let’s suppose the father agreed. If that happened, would the boy get the spanking? The obvious answer is no. I took his place and paid his penalty. Now that is what this is all about. I have sinned. The penalty is death, but Christ died for us. The boy disobeyed his father. The penalty was a spanking, but I got it instead of the boy. You see, because Christ died and paid for sin, we do not have to go to hell.

The illustration I usually use today is this. Suppose you and I are traveling together and I was driving. Imagine me getting stopped for speeding and, as a result, getting a ticket. Then suppose that I had to go to court on the spot and you went with me. If the judge imposed a fine on me and I did not have the money to pay, but you did, if you paid the fine, how much would I owe the court? The answer, of course, is nothing. I then make the application that I broke the law, but you paid. So I do not have to pay.

After giving the illustration, I emphasize the truth by using three fingers to review. Holding up three fingers and pointing to the first, I say, “I have sinned.” Pointing to the second, I repeat, “The penalty of sin is death.” Indicating the third finger, I emphasize, “Christ died for my sin.” The finger approach may sound like something you would use with children; I do. I also use it with adults, educated adults. Someone asked Bill Bright once. “Do you use the Four Spiritual Laws with college professors?” He replied, “Yes, and I read the booklet more slowly.”

I cannot emphasize enough that the death of Jesus Christ is the issue. It must be carefully presented. The Spirit of God will use the preaching of the cross to enlighten and save.

On more than one occasion, I have literally seen the spiritual “lights” come on at this point in the presentation. The person says, “Wow. You mean Christ died and that settles it?” I have seen the Holy Spirit take over in such a way that I didn’t have to finish. Overwhelmed by the truth of Christ’s death, people trusted Christ before I could tell them

they needed to do just that. I would like to say that all, or most, conversions are like that, but that is not true. So I go to the fourth and final point. My transition to it is to simply say, “There is one thing God asks of you.”

FAITH IN CHRIST SAVES FROM SIN (EPHESIANS 2:8-9)

Finding Ephesians 2:8-9, I read aloud, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” On the outline, I write, “You must trust Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9.” I then explain that a person must have faith in Christ to be saved from sin. Works we do for God cannot save from sin because our works do not pay the penalty for sin. It is not what I do for God that saves; it is what God has done for me.

I explain that faith, in the New Testament, consists of two elements. The first element of biblical faith is accepting something as true. In the case of Christ, it is believing: 1) that Christ is the Son of God, 2) that Christ died for me, and 3) that Christ rose from the dead. I ask people if they believe these things are true. The second element in biblical faith is trusting something or someone. In the case of faith in Christ, people must trust Christ, that is, depend upon Him—plus nothing—for the forgiveness of sins.

I say to people, “Let me make this clear. We are saved by faith, that is, by trusting Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to get us to heaven. It is not just believing the facts about Christ; it is trusting Christ to get you to heaven.” Then, I illustrate the concept of faith. Finding a chair, I say, “I could stand beside this chair and say, ‘I believe it will hold me up. I believe it has four legs, a bottom, and a back.’ But it is not holding me up.” I then sit on the chair and say, “Now I’m trusting the chair. I not only believe the facts about it, but I’m depending on it to keep me off the floor. It is one thing to say I believe it will hold me up. It is another to trust the chair to hold me up. Biblical faith is sitting on the chair.”

After illustrating the concept of faith, I invite people to trust Christ by simply asking, “Would you like to trust Christ right now? That is, would you like to tell God that you are willing to depend on Christ plus nothing to get you to heaven?”

If people say, “Yes,” I then say to them, “All right, let’s pray together. This is what we’ll say. ‘God, I admit that I have sinned. I believe Jesus Christ died for my sin, and I want to trust Him to save me right now.’ Before you pray, I want you to understand that saying the prayer does not save you. Trusting Christ does. So, when you say this, I want you to say it to God, and remember that this means that you are telling Him that as of now you are going to trust in Christ to get you to heaven, plus nothing else. Okay, bow your head and repeat after me.”

I repeat the prayer, sentence by sentence, and have them repeat it after me. As soon as we have finished praying, I ask, “If you were to die right now, where would you go?” If people have really understood, they will say, “Heaven.” I then respond by asking, “Why should God let you into heaven?” I expect them to tell me, “Because Christ died to pay for my sin” or “Because I have trusted Christ.”

Then, I explain, “When people trust Christ, the Bible says they know Him, and yet it also teaches that we are to get to know Him better and better. It’s like meeting a person. You know him, but not very well. You know Christ, but you need to get to know Him intimately. This is done by communication. You talk to Him and He talks to you.

Spiritually, this is through Bible reading and prayer. I suggest you start reading the book of Philippians. Read it all the way through in one sitting every day for thirty days. That book only has four chapters. If you are a slow reader, it will take 15 minutes. Then choose another book of the Bible.” (For a more detailed discussion on follow-up, see chap. 26.)

On many occasions, by glancing at my watch, I have noted the time when people prayed, telling God they were trusting Christ. After I’ve established that they have the assurance of salvation, I put the date and the time they trusted Christ on the outline, or if I have not written out the outline, I write the date and time on a blank piece of paper. I give them what I have written, telling them that this is the time they were born spiritually. I also write on the piece of paper that they should read the book of Philippians.

Summary: My way of leading someone to Christ follows the theological outline of Romans and covers all of the points of the message demanded by the Great Commission.

The issue is you also need a method of leading someone to Christ. Christ commands that the gospel be preached to every creature. The very nature of that task necessitates that every Christian be involved. If you are to carry out your responsibility, you must have a practical way of presenting the penetrating facts of salvation.

That is not to say that you must adopt my method; it is only to say that you need to get a method. All I ask is that your method be biblical and clear. Nor is it to say that you will never vary from even your own method. You will; I do—frequently. But if you have no method, you will probably not witness at all; and if you do try to witness without a method, you will more than likely do a poor job. If you have a method, you will present the gospel more often and more clearly. Furthermore, when you do depart from it, you will know why and what you are doing.

So, if you do not have a method that is biblical and clear, start with the Roman Road. Other methods are available. The point is to start with a method. Change it if you wish, modify it if you must, but start with a method.

A lady once told an evangelist, “I don’t like your method.” He replied, “I’m not totally satisfied with it myself. What’s yours?” She answered, “I don’t have one.” To which the evangelist responded, “I like my method better than yours.”

THE RELIGIOUS LOST

Spiritually speaking, there are at least three kinds of lost people in America: the religious, the plagued, and the intellectual. If you introduce the subject of salvation in a conversation, religious people will start talking about their religion. There is a growing group of Americans who, when you bring up salvation, will want to discuss a pressing personal problem. I call these “the plagued.” And, of course, there are intellectuals who, when the Bible comes up, will raise objections.

These three types appear on the pages of Scripture. In fact, they appear in the gospels during the life of Christ. It is fascinating to watch the way Christ dealt with them. He did not use the same exact approach in each case. In this chapter, we will discuss the religious lost.

Have you ever talked to people about the Lord and had them tell you how religious they were? What do you do then? Have you ever witnessed to someone and they informed you that they felt people had to work their way to heaven by being good or doing good? How did you respond to that? Or did you ever present the gospel only to have people say, “I believe all of that,” even though you knew they were not saved? How do you handle that?

I recall witnessing once to an elderly lady. Her response to me was, “As soon as my son-in-law gets out of service, he’s going into the ministry.” Many times when I have talked to people about their relationship to Jesus Christ, they respond by talking about the next closest thing to Him that is close to them. Perhaps this is part of being spiritually “blind.” The problem is how to deal with the religious lost. Jesus teaches us by example in John 3.

Many Are Religious—But Lost

Nicodemus was a religious man. John 3:1 says he was a Pharisee. The very word has negative connotations and, granted, there were some negative aspects, but it was not all negative. For one thing, the Pharisees believed the Old Testament. The Sadducees did not. The Pharisees believed in the existence of angels and the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees denied both doctrines. The Pharisees were religious conservatives. The Sadducees were liberals. Furthermore, the Pharisees were zealous. They not only had points to ponder in their heads, but they also had passion in their hearts. Their zeal was for the Law. So eager were they to keep the Law of Moses that they added law upon law upon law. That is where they got into trouble. They had so many little laws that they could not possibly keep them all. They tripped over themselves in the process of trying. Thus, they became hypocrites. Nicodemus, being a Pharisee, accepted many of the presuppositions that Jesus did. He also readily admitted that Jesus was from God.

People like this exist today. They are not hypocrites, but they are religious people who accept all our presuppositions—and yet are lost. They may not understand the details or what all that means, but they have a good attitude toward God and the Bible.

Religious People Need to be Confronted with the Gospel

Nicodemus came asking about spiritual things and Jesus, with almost no introduction, told him, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). Jesus confronted this religious man with spiritual truth immediately. To fully appreciate that, flip the page and compare John 3 with John 4. In John 4, Jesus did not immediately confront the woman at the well. He slowly, tactfully, diplomatically, and yet effectively presented her with some spiritual issues. The reason is that hers was an altogether different case (more about that in the next chapter). The principle here is to confront the religious person with the gospel. Clearly and simply present a religious man with the gospel of the grace of God. That is what Jesus did. At the end of His conversation, He told Nicodemus that no man has ascended to heaven, but the Son of Man had come to die and only believers would have eternal life (Jn. 3:13-15). In a similar fashion, we need a clear and simple presentation of the gospel and we need to use it on the religious lost.

We have the idea that religious people already know, but they don’t. The church has not told them. Their pastor has not preached it; they have not heard it. So with religious people, take a Bible and clearly spell it all out to them.

A simple presentation of the gospel may do it, but it may not. In the years I’ve done this, I have discovered two issues that often come up and need to be dealt with. One is “works.” It is amazing; of all people, religious people ought to know better, but they don’t. Many think works are necessary for heaven. When that issue comes up, I do one of two things. I either use Ephesians 2:8-10 or John 3:16.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says salvation is by grace through faith “not of works.” Verse 10 goes on to say, “We are His workmanship ... for good works.” I point that out and draw a circle on a piece of paper. I write in the circle “baptism” and say, “If I were to stop people at random on the street and ask, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ and they said, ‘Be baptized,’ would they be saved?” People will usually say, “No.” I draw another circle and put in it “church membership.” Again I ask if that will get a person to heaven. People will again say, “No.” I repeat the process, adding “right living,” “good works,” and “Jesus Christ plus good works” in different circles (sometimes I draw all these circles at once and ask, “Which one are you standing in?”) Then I draw a circle and put “Jesus Christ plus nothing” in it. This technique has helped me to communicate that salvation is by faith and not by works.

I have also used John 3:16. I read it to them as written and then I quote it to them as their view would revise it. That is, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him and gets baptized, does good works, lives right, and gives money to the church, should not perish but have everlasting life.” The sarcasm communicates the truth.

The other snag is very often the concept of faith. As we have seen in the chapter on faith, the Greek word contains two ideas: believe and trust. A person must both believe the facts about Christ and depend on Christ to be saved. The problem is that we say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31) and Americans think that to believe, they need only to believe the facts.

At this point, illustrations are indispensable. I have already mentioned the illustration of the chair. It is one thing to believe the chair will hold you up, but it is another to sit in it. The same truth can be illustrated with a car, an airplane, or an elevator. I like to use the airplane when illustrating that it is all Christ and none of you. Getting to heaven is like

getting to Japan from Los Angeles. You can't make it on your own. You must depend on an airplane. I like to use the elevator to illustrate that it is Christ plus nothing else. To get to the top of a tall building, you must put both feet on the elevator. You cannot put one foot on the elevator and one foot on the floor.

Summary: Confront religious people with the gospel.

The problem with the religious lost is that they are religious and because they are religious, they see no need to trust Christ for salvation. They are indifferent. It is easy for us to become indifferent towards their indifference. We become unconcerned because they are unconcerned. Or, we are indignant because they do not believe the right things. They do not understand. Discussion degenerates into debate and we blow our whistle. When my son was four and my daughter was two, they tried to summon birds in our backyard by blowing a whistle. As odd as it sounds, some try to attract others by making noise.

We will never attract anyone by blowing our own whistle. Rather, we must see the need and simply confront the issue. Some people look at a lost religious person and see a barrier and a problem. Others see the possibility of winning someone to Jesus Christ.

THE PLAUGED AMERICAN

For years I crisscrossed the United States as an evangelist. I preached from Connecticut to California, from St. Paul to St. Pete. During those years, I became a student of non-Christians. One of the things I discovered was that not all sinners are exactly alike. The more I observed and studied, the more I became convinced that lost people can be grouped. I also discovered that Jesus encountered different types of unbelievers and did not use the same approach with everyone. As a result of examining the American scene and expounding the Scriptures, I have concluded that there are at least three different, distinct kinds of unsaved people in this country: the religious lost, whom we looked at in the last chapter, the plagued, and the intellectuals.

The plagued American is one who, when you bring up salvation, will bring up a pressing personal problem. The conversation between Christ and the woman at the well illustrates this person and the procedure to be followed.

A Growing Group is Plagued

Jesus left Judea and headed for Galilee. Instead of taking the normal route of crossing the Jordan River, traveling north, and then re-crossing the Jordan into Galilee, He went straight north. Such a course was direct and shorter, but the Jews did not go that way because it was through Samaria and the Jews hated the Samaritans. As Jesus and the disciples journeyed across Samaria, they came to Sychar. Being weary from the journey, our Lord rested at Jacob's Well, while the disciples went into the city for food.

While Christ was resting and waiting, a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. He asked her for a drink, which ultimately led to a discussion of salvation. Once the subject came up, all kinds of personal issues came out. The woman had several personal problems.

For one thing, she was a Samaritan. The Samaritans were racially mixed. When Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom, many of the Jews were exported, and many foreigners were imported. The Jews who stayed and the Gentiles who came intermarried. The offspring were half-breeds called Samaritans. The Jews hated them and would have nothing to do with them.

She was also divorced. In fact, she was not only divorced, but she had been divorced five times and was now living with a man who was not her husband. Divorce is one of the most devastating experiences of life. People can bury their mate, grieve for a time, and then go on. With divorce, there are scars. Even the innocent party has scars. He or she usually feels rejected, hurt, forsaken, guilty, and bitter.

The woman at the well was a social outcast. She came to the well at noon and alone. Normally the women came later and together. Because of her divorces and living with a man who was not her husband, she was alienated. She probably didn't have a female friend. She was probably the subject of jokes and gossip. They laughed behind her back and maybe to her face. She felt unloved, hated, rejected. She no doubt hated herself.

There is a growing group in America who are plagued with pressing personal problems. They are usually more concerned with their immediate personal problems than with the

ultimate and permanent issue of salvation. In this group are individuals who feel unloved, rejected, and alienated. There is the fellow whose father did not accept him, or neglected him. Or he could never please his father, no matter how hard he tried. There is the girl with a broken romance or marriage. In this group are also people who are bitter. Because of their treatment at home, they become bitter and carry that bitterness into their adult life.

Often the bitterness is directed toward the church, the preacher, or religious people. An overzealous religious parent, preacher, or peer has tried to cram religion down their throats. Or, they have been hurt or deceived by a religious person. The guilty are also in this circle. They have sinned, and they know it. They feel guilty because of their sin and are plagued by it.

When my brother was in seminary, he worked in an office that had several secretaries. One day he got into a conversation that naturally turned toward spiritual things. Feeling it was the right time, he asked, "Do you know for sure you are going to heaven?" The secretary responded, "Oh, I'm divorced." That is the kind of response you will often get from a plagued people. You bring up salvation and they will bring up a pressing personal problem. How should you respond?

Cultivate the Plagued With Love

When Jesus encountered a religious person, He confronted him with the gospel. When He met a plagued person, He cultivated her with love. That is not to say He did not love Nicodemus or that He did not give the gospel to the woman at the well. It is to say that His primary approach for the Pharisee was confrontation and with the plagued woman, it was cultivation.

Cultivation includes several things. First, we must listen. In John 3, Jesus did most of the talking. In John 4, He listened. In John 3, only three verses record what Nicodemus said and what he said was usually a question. In John 4, nine verses concern what the Samaritan woman said. God both speaks and listens (Ps. 116:1-2). As plagued people begin to open up to you, ask questions about them and their problems. Then listen. Ask more questions about them and their problem. Then listen. Ask more questions. Then listen some more. Ask still more questions, and listen again. Listen, listen, and listen. This is difficult for a Christian who is sitting on an arsenal of answers, but it is necessary. Howard Hendricks said, "If a person is really hurting, you aren't going to get through to him by sheer enthusiasm. When I encounter a person in this condition, I give him a chance to talk. It shows I'm interested in him as a person, and I may get a chance to really help."

After you listen, you will have to speak. What you say first may determine what they hear—or even if they hear. Rather than immediately diagnosing the disease and prescribing a remedy, you must identify with them. When I meet plagued people, I talk with them until they say to me, "You understand me." Needless to say, that is easier said than done. How do you do it? The answer is you tell them about the same thing or something similar happening to you. For example, I have talked to many plagued individuals who were suffering from a low self-image. In those cases, I tell them in detail about myself when I was a teenager. I had a great inferiority complex. The key here is "in detail." When they hear me out, they know that I know how they feel.

The problem with this is that they may be telling you something with which you cannot

identify. There is nothing in your background like it. What do you do then? The answer is you tell them about the same thing or something similar that has happened to someone you know. I have never been a widow, but I have known a few. By listening to them and watching them, I have been able to understand a little of what their experience is like. On a few occasions, I have talked to widows and told them about the experiences of other widows I have known. They then know that I am aware of at least a bit of what they were experiencing.

But what if you have never known anyone with a similar experience? Then tell the plagued person about the same thing or something similar happening to someone, even if it is only someone you have read about. Jesus told parables to communicate spiritual truths, but those parables also helped people to identify with Him. Jesus never ran away from home and He never lived in a pigpen. Yet He told the story of the Prodigal Son; and every prodigal who has ever heard it has identified with it. One of the highest compliments I was ever paid came from a highly intelligent, highly educated lady with whom I was counseling. After we had talked for some time, she said, “You understand. You understand not only the facts but my feelings.” When people with whom you are talking senses that you have identified with them.

After you have listened and identified with them, you must show by your actions that you care about them. If you have listened well and identified properly, you have already done that to some degree, but more needs to be done. Be patient. First Corinthians 13 describes love. Of all the characteristics of love that are listed, most are negative: Love is not this or that. Of the few positive attributes of love, patience heads the list. Patience is a great part of love. To communicate to people that you love them, you must be patient.

When people have a problem, they do not want to talk about it. When they first start talking about it, they will be slow in getting it out. They may stammer. They may struggle. They may even sit in silence for a moment. Paul urges us to be patient toward all men (1 Thess. 5:14).

The other thing you can do to communicate your caring is to spend time with the individual. For some reason that I am not sure I understand, spending time with someone communicates your care and concern like nothing else you can do. Perhaps it is because when you are unloved, no one has time for you. Or, maybe it is because the essence of love is giving, and taking time is the essence of giving of yourself. This much I do know: it works.

I once led a college student to Christ in Minnesota. She had some theological problems that I had to deal with and I took the time to do it. Several years later, she called me to ask about witnessing to someone she knew at work. The person was a cultist and, frankly, I was concerned that she not get confused. I also knew enough of that particular cult to know that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for her to win her friend to Christ.

So I gave her the information she asked for and added some advice. I simply said, “Don’t waste a lot of time with this person.” The college student snapped back, “If you had not spent time with me, I’d never be where I am today.” She was right. Love, patience, and time can do what arguments, evidence, logic, and persuasion can never do, especially with hurting people.

Tell them that you are concerned and you care. When it comes to communicating concern, there is no substitute for words. Tell them you care about them. It is biblical (see 1 Thess. 2:8).

Cultivating people with love includes giving them the gospel. Be tactful, but don't lose the offense. True love levels with them. James says, "Be swift to hear, slow to speak" (Jas. 1:19), but do speak. They need your listening ear and your loving heart, but these things will not solve the problem. They need Jesus Christ, so make sure that you tell them about Him.

The gospel speaks clearly and lovingly to plagued people. To those plagued with sin, Jesus is the Savior. To those unloved ones, Christ is the world's greatest lover. To the broken-hearted, He is the healer. To the rejected, He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother. To the lonely, He is the one who never leaves nor forsakes. Tell them about Him and how He relates to their problem.

Summary: Cultivate the plagued with love.

Listen to them, show them Christian love and concern by spending time with them, and level with them. In short, make personal evangelism personal. Give the gospel, but also give yourself.

Not everyone needs this approach. There are some who accept biblical presuppositions and who are prepared; the Nicodemuses and the Ethiopian eunuchs of the world need only a simple presentation of the gospel. But not all the harvest is white and ready for harvesting. The plagued of this world need careful cultivation. They need the Lord and His forgiveness, but someone will have to earn the right to be heard before the plagued people will hear. The psychologically hungry hear only a growl in their emotional stomachs. That growl drowns out the gospel. Feed the hungry, and they will hear. Love the lonely, and they will listen. Be all things to all that you might, by all means, win some.

One other word. If there is any group that needs this, it is the "turned off." Some have been "shafted," stabbed in the back, by a so-called Christian. These turned-off ones will be won only by love—love expressed and exercised over a long period of time.

Someone has said, "Every man is an island and we must row around him to know where to land." In some cases, a port has been prepared and the Good Ship Salvation can dock without any trouble. In other cases, walls have been built and the gate will open only to a friend.

THE INTELLECTUAL WOLF

When Jesus sent out the seventy, He warned, “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Mt. 10:16). The disciples, like lambs, would be defenseless. Wolves, who are vicious and destructive, would attack. Every ambassador of Christ feels that way—defenseless, facing a destructive foe. The wolves Jesus had in mind were religious animals. When the disciples witnessed, the religious wolves growled, showed their teeth, and attacked. These wolves exist today.

But in America, we sheep are not as afraid of the religious wolf as we are the intellectual wolf. We fear that when we speak for Christ, some intellectual wolf will rear its head, show its teeth, and pounce on us. Oh, how we fear intellectual wolves! We feel defenseless, convinced that with their superior knowledge or logic, they will tear us apart. Imagine trying to convince a Ph.D. in philosophy that there is a God, a Ph.D. in history that the Bible is inspired, or persuading a scientist that humans did not evolve. How do you reason with an angry student who claims that God is unfair for condemning those who have never heard the gospel? Those are the intellectual wolves.

You may never have witnessed to a Ph.D., but if you witness much, you will meet someone who is an intellectual or someone who has been influenced by an intellectual. What do you do? How does a defenseless lamb handle a destructive wolf?

Some Unbelievers have Intellectual Objections

Jesus encountered those who had intellectual questions and objections. Some were deliberately and maliciously attempting to trap Him.

Others were simply not yet convinced. Perhaps the attitude of the intellectual is best expressed by Thomas. Thomas was probably a believer at the time, but his attitude in John 20 was exactly the same as many intellectuals.

Jesus had been crucified and resurrected. He had appeared to some of the believers but not yet to Thomas. When told about the resurrection, Thomas said, “Unless I see in His hand the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (Jn. 20:25). Thomas had heard the entire resurrection story with all of its details from Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and the other disciples. Thomas listened unmoved and unconvinced. The unanimous testimony of all those people, whose character he knew so well, amounted to nothing. She insisted, “I must see for myself, or I will not believe.”

This type of person exists today. When you bring up Christianity, they will bring up an intellectual problem. These people either do not accept our presuppositions, or they have an intellectual problem with some facet of Christianity. They are usually well-educated or well-read. University students fall into this category, but, frankly, not all students are intellectuals, nor will all of them bring up intellectual objections. Some students go to school to get an education, some go for sports, some go for a good time, some to get a good job, and some to get a husband. Although any university student may ask an intellectual question, not all will.

Convince the Intellectual with Evidence

When Jesus appeared again, He dealt with Thomas. He did not condemn him for his unbelief. He did not say Thomas should not have asked questions like that. Rather, He gave him evidence. John 20:27 says that He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands, and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Jesus began with his objection and gave him evidence.

Peter taught the same thing in principle. In 1 Peter 3:15, he instructs us to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” Give a reason for the hope. The principle is to give a reasonable answer to the stated objection.

Let me illustrate. One intellectual objection to Christianity is, “Where did Cain get his wife?” The answer, of course, is that he married his sister. There are two problems with that answer. The first problem is that we know Adam had sons Cain, Abel, and Seth, but we cannot name any of his daughters. Now, if Adam did not have any daughters, how could Cain marry his sister? The answer to that difficulty is that Adam did have daughters. Genesis 5:4 says so.

That brings up a second problem. Today a man cannot marry his sister because if a brother marries his sister, the mathematical possibility of the weakness of their line coming up in their children is very great. The only way to solve that problem is to have perfect parents. That, of course, is exactly the case with Cain and his sister. If the biblical account is accurate at all, Adam and Eve were created by God and Cain and his sister had perfect heredity. There was not a prohibition against marrying a near kin at the time because there was no need for it. Later, when the weaknesses developed in the human race, the prohibition against marrying a near kin was established to protect offspring.

The point is that there is a reasonable answer to the question, “Where did Cain get his wife?” and you need to give it to those who ask that question.

This kind of approach creates a problem. Some conclude they can never witness because they will not be able to come up with all those intellectual answers. Some might even be tempted to compile a huge list of possible questions to get ready. Before you do either of these things, consider the following.

You Can Handle the Questions

Non-Christians usually do not ask the questions Christians ask. Believers hear the Bible and theology discussed and debated. After a while, we get the impression that there are a thousand theological, technically tough questions, and some non-Christian is going to dump two hundred of them on us the next time we witness. That is not the case. Granted, there may be many biblical and theological questions, but we forget that most non-Christians are biblical illiterates. They do not ask the questions we do or the ones we think they do.

Paul Little worked with university students on university campuses for years. Once, at a Christian college, a number of Christian students wanted him to conduct a mock “bull session” like the ones he had in fraternity houses on secular campuses. The Christians assumed that they were the fraternity men and that he had come to speak. He gave them

one of his presentations and let them ask questions. After the experiment, Little said, “I think it’s rather significant that they asked all kinds of questions that I’d never been asked in my fifteen years of visiting secular campuses.”

Well, if that is the case, what do non-Christians ask? Most non-Christians ask very basic questions, and there are only a few. Paul Little lists seven: What about the heathen? Is Christ the only way to God? Why do the innocent suffer? How can miracles be possible? Isn’t the Bible full of errors? Isn’t Christian experience psychological? Won’t a good moral life get me to heaven?

Don’t worry about these questions. Witness! If one comes up, and you can answer it, do so. If you can’t, tell them you can’t. One of the best pieces of advice a theologian ever gave me was, “If you don’t know, say you don’t know.”

When someone asks you a question you don’t know, find the answer. Ask your pastor. Read a book. Google it. There are answers. Find the answers and write them in a notebook so you will have them next time.

Therefore, when someone gives you an intellectual objection to Christianity, always begin by giving a reasonable answer to the stated objection. It has been my experience that some people who bring up intellectual objections have honest intellectual questions. They want answers. These people will usually accept good answers, or at least they will accept the reasonableness of the answer.

Moral Issues Behind the Questions

There are others, however, who will not accept reasonable answers. These people tend to argue. When that happens, the issue is not intellectual; it is moral. So go after the moral issue. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:25, “And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed.” In such cases, I have observed three moral issues.

One such issue is guilt. I was once conducting a question and answer session with high school teenagers. I told them they could ask me any question on any subject and I would try and answer it. Their questions were typical of ones I had received in similar sessions scores of times. As the session drew to a close, one girl towards the back, who had not said anything, raised her hand. I nodded and she said, “The Bible says God loves everybody. Then it says that God sends people to hell. How can a loving God do that?” I gave her my answer and she came back to me with arguments. I answered her arguments and she answered my answers. The conversation quickly degenerated into an argument. I did not convince her, nor did she convince me. After a few more questions, I dismissed the session.

After the session, I approached her and said, “I owe you an apology. I really should not have allowed our discussion to become so argumentative.” Then I asked, “May I share something with you?” She said, “Yes.” So I took her through a basic presentation of the gospel. When I got to Romans 3:23 and suggested that all of us were sinners, she began to cry. It was then that this high school senior admitted she had been having an affair with a married man. The one thing she needed was forgiveness. I finished the presentation of the gospel and she trusted Christ. The reason she did not believe in hell was that she was going there! In her heart, she knew she had sinned. Her conscience condemned her, but rather than face the fact of her guilt, she simply denied any future judgment or future hell.

When people object to Christianity and do not accept the reasonableness of a reasonable

answer, their problem is moral, not intellectual. If the moral problem is guilt, they will often respond to a simple presentation of the gospel. I have, on those occasions, entered into the intellectual discussion. Then, after the intellectual debate, I have asked, “May I just present something to you?” I have found that just giving them the gospel will sometimes do what all of the intellectual arguments will not do—break down the barriers.

A second moral issue I have discovered is bitterness. Many people have been turned off by Christians or Christianity. They have had Christianity crammed down their throats, or they have been stabbed in the back by a Christian or their former church. Their response was bitterness. I once witnessed to a fellow who had all kinds of intellectual objections. He was steeped in philosophy and eastern religions. He hurled all kinds of questions at me. I answered them one by one and then discovered that he would not accept the reasonableness of my answers. So finally I said to him, “Steve, it is my experience when someone resists the reasonableness of Christianity, it is because they have been wounded and they are hurting.” That got his attention. He looked at me and asked, “What do you mean?” I responded by suggesting that I could be wrong in his case, but that it had been my observation over the years that people who would not accept the reasonableness of Christianity were either guilty or bitter. That opened him up. He shared with me his bitterness toward his father, who for years pressured him into going to church.

I was not able to lead Steve to Christ, but I was able to present the gospel to him, whereas before he had argued with every sentence. He at least listened and said he would give it serious consideration.

There are still others who are not guilty or bitter; they are just sinful. The moral issue is their stubborn, sinful self-will. When I encounter this type of person, I say something like this: “Isn’t it possible that what I am telling you is really true and you’ve just refused to accept it for the simple reason that you do not want to bow to anyone, not even God?” I have even suggested on these occasions that the person at least needs to be honest with the facts. I tell them of a student I spoke to who said to me, “I can’t answer your presentation, but it is reasonable. It’s just that I refuse to accept it.” Then I tell the person that if that is the case, I will honor his right to refuse to accept it, but the least he can do is admit that Christianity is reasonable.

Summary: The way to deal with unbelievers who have intellectual objections to Christianity is to give them a reasonable answer and if they do not accept the reasonableness of the answer, suggest that the real difficulty is that because of such issues as guilt, bitterness, or self-will, they are choosing not to believe.

In witnessing to intellectuals, there are two extremes we must avoid: anti-intellectualism and intellectualism. Anti-intellectualism is the attitude that says, “Don’t bother me with intellectual questions. Don’t get sidetracked with people’s problems. Just preach the simple gospel.” The result of such an approach is that the thinking non-Christians will conclude that their honest questions have no answers. Intellectualism says that answers will win people. To us, the answers may be so persuasive that we are convinced they will persuade anyone. We fall into the trap of relying on the answers. But the gospel is the power of God to salvation. Unless the Holy Spirit works, all our work will be fruitless.

John R. Stott struck the balance when he said, “We cannot pander to man’s intellectual arrogance, but we must cater to his intellectual integrity.” We must attempt to show the

intellectual reasonableness of Christianity by giving people reasonable answers and communicating the gospel clearly.

There is only one way to God—the gospel. But there are many ways to the gospel. The route may be direct, as with the religious person, or it may be indirect. The road may be straight, or it may contain curves. You have to travel the road people are on where you find them. Just make sure that no matter where you find them, or how many roads they take, or how many rest stops they insist on, you guide them gently toward the gospel of Jesus Christ.

BIBLICAL FOLLOW-UP

There are as many ways to follow up a new convert as there are denominations and parachurch organizations. Every successful evangelist develops a new approach that is usually a rehearsal of an old method. One system takes the new babes in Christ through ten steps to maturity, as if they will be spiritually mature by the time they finish the ten lessons. A more modest approach puts all the information in one small booklet and admits that it contains only the first steps for newborn believers. If reading is too much work, audio versions are available.

What material should be covered in follow-up? Must a method always begin with the assurance of salvation? That certainly seems logical, but is it scriptural? Is that how the apostles started? What method should be employed: booklets, books, or a bag full of audio recordings?

FOLLOWING THROUGH

Before we follow up, we should follow through. Follow-through is what is done in the initial conversation after people trust Christ. Follow-up comes later, once we are sure people have trusted the Lord.

Follow-through consists of discussing five things. The first is assurance. After I have prayed with people, I usually ask, "If you were to die right now, where would you go?" I want them to tell me, "Heaven." Notice I ask this question before I go to 1 John 5:13, or any other verse on assurance. I want to know what is going on in their mind. Frankly, 1 John 5:13 has been used to trick people into thinking that they have assurance when they really don't. If people tell me, "Heaven," then I ask, "Why should God let you into His heaven?" The answer I am after is either, "Christ died for my sins" or "I have trusted Christ." Once I am convinced that they understand, only then do I show them 1 John 5:13. I use the verse to teach them that the Bible says they can know they are saved.

After discussing assurance, I talk about "getting to know Him." I explain that when people trust Christ, the Bible says they know Christ and yet, it also teaches that we are to get to know Him better and better. It is like a person you have just met: you know him, but not well. Likewise, Christians know Christ, but now they need to know Him intimately. That is done by communication. You talk to Him and He talks to you. Spiritually, that is done through Bible reading and prayer. I suggest a new convert start with the book of Philippians, reading in all the way through in one sitting every day for thirty days. After each day's reading, they should pray, thanking God for His blessings and asking Him to meet their current needs.

Follow-through also includes telling new Christians to be baptized. I explain to them that it is not necessary for salvation. It is only a symbol. A wedding band is not essential for marriage. It is only a symbol of unending love. I also urge them to get it done as soon as possible.

The fourth item in follow-through is telling people about church. I suggest that they find a Bible-teaching church to attend, where they can learn the Word of God and grow.

The fifth and final part of follow-through is to ask if the new Christian has any

questions. New converts will either have none or will ask something very elementary.

Follow-through is vital. These are the first impressions on the newborn Christian babe's mind. In golf, proper follow-through is absolutely essential for the ball to go straight. Follow-through will launch the new believer in the right direction. But after follow-through comes follow-up. I believe the biblical concept of follow-up is given to us in Acts 2:37-42.

Baptism

Follow-up consists of five activities. In Acts 2, Peter preaches and three thousand are saved. Verses 41-42 of that chapter tell us what happened next. First, these new converts were baptized. Thus, baptism is part and parcel of follow-up.

When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He taught that we were to win people to Christ, baptize them, and teach them the Word of God. The instructions are clear. The orders are simple. Yet, many zealous soul-winners do not follow those instructions. Baptism is where they become disobedient. There are two common errors.

Some Christians do not baptize at all. Parachurch organizations are constantly disobedient at this point. Their excuse is that they are not a church and they do not want to become a church, so they skip baptism. But if people are going to do what Jesus Christ commanded, they must baptize or at least tell people the Bible says to be baptized.

The second common error is to reverse the order, putting teaching before baptism. In Matthew 28 and throughout Acts, instruction follows baptism. It does not precede it. Missionaries are particularly guilty of committing this error. Their excuse is that they must wait and see if the decision was real. Evidently, that was not the attitude of the apostles.

The truth of the matter is that baptism in the New Testament times was done as soon after conversion as possible. In Acts 8, it was performed in the desert. In Acts 9, it was accomplished as soon as someone could be found to do it. In Acts 10, it was done immediately. In Acts 16, it was executed after midnight. There is no evidence at all that anyone in the New Testament waited for any period of time—ever.

Instruction

Acts 2:42 indicates that after baptism, “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” The word translated “continued steadfastly” (*proskartereo*) means “to adhere to.” They not only adhered to a system of belief, but they also followed the instruction of the twelve.

Notice that it was the apostles’ doctrine. The Jews were accustomed to listening to and learning from a rabbi’s doctrine. It could be said that they continued steadfastly in the rabbi’s doctrine. The early Christians continued in the apostles’ doctrine, meaning of course, that they listened and learned from the apostles.

The question is, “What was the apostles’ doctrine?” What did they teach? The answer is that eventually, the apostles’ doctrine took written shape in the New Testament. The apostles’ doctrine is the New Testament, especially the epistles. Matthew, Peter, Paul, and John were apostles who wrote down their teaching. Tradition says that Mark wrote what Peter preached. Luke was the traveling companion of Paul. Thus, apostolic doctrine is the

New Testament and a practical division of New Testament teaching would be: 1) God, including all the members of the Trinity, 2) the Bible, 3) man, including sin, salvation, and sanctification, 4) the family responsibilities, 5) church responsibilities, and 6) the world, including Satan, government, and your job.

Fellowship

The third part of follow-up is fellowship. Acts 2:42 says, “They continued steadfastly in fellowship.” The Greek word translated “fellowship” is *koinonia*. The basic idea of the word is to “share, have in common.” The sharing should be sharing physical things (Acts 2:44-45; Phil. 1:5), or it could be socializing. The context here seems to indicate a religious fellowship the disciples had with each other. This much is certain: fellowship involves a relationship with people. Part and parcel of follow-up and spiritual growth is having a relationship with other believers.

The early Christians did not just learn the apostles’ doctrine like a student in a classroom. They became members of a family and developed relationships with each other. Follow-up cannot be done through books or audio recordings alone. There must be personal follow-up with other believers. Follow-up is not just dispensing information, it is developing individuals. That demands fellowship.

This may be the most important factor in follow-up and spiritual growth. The precepts and principles from the Word are important, but the personal relationship may be the key to a young Christian’s getting those concepts. Material and content are important; the apostles’ doctrine ought to be taught, but, frankly, regardless of the material used and the subjects covered, relationships are more important (assuming that at least some portion of God’s Word is taught). Babies respond to the people feeding them as well as the food being fed. Babies need someone to care enough to listen as well as to lecture. Cold facts on a page, no matter how accurate, cannot take the place of a personal relationship.

I have taken believers through various kinds of material on numerous occasions. There is no doubt in my mind that when people listen to my lectures, I am not really discipling them. But when they begin to ask questions, they begin to learn. When they begin to open up and disclose problems to me, they begin to grow. Time and time again, I have taught people personally, and after the lesson, they started sharing their hurts. Then they began to interact with spiritual truth and grow. That is why fellowship is such a vital part of follow-up. No book, audio, or even church service can take the place of fellowship.

Breaking Bread

The fourth part of the Acts 2 follow-up is the breaking of bread. A few interpret this to mean that these believers ate ordinary meals together in their homes. Indeed, the term breaking of bread was used, even in the New Testament, of eating an everyday meal (for example, Lk. 24:35). In this passage, the phrase “breaking of bread” could refer to either the “love feast” before the Lord’s Supper, the Lord’s Supper, or both. Most commentaries take it as a reference to both.

The early church observed the Lord’s Supper differently than most churches today.

They had it every Sunday evening (Acts 20:7). They began with a “potluck” meal, which was called a love feast (Jude 12). They used the bread and wine as symbols to remember the body and blood of our Lord. In Corinth, the love feast was abused. The rich were gorging themselves and getting drunk, while the poor were going hungry. That is the problem that Paul speaks to in 1 Corinthians 11. Several hundred years later, because of such abuses, the love feast was forbidden by the Council of Laodicea (320 AD). Other councils concurred and, gradually, it fell into disuse. Thus, today, there is nothing resembling the love feast in most churches.

Be that as it may, the New Testament clearly teaches that believers are to observe the Lord’s Table (which some churches call “communion”). Teaching a new convert to observe the Lord’s Table is part of follow-up.

Prayers

The fifth and final factor in biblical follow-up is prayers. The first believers were Jews. As Jews, they observed regular group prayer meetings. After they became Christians, they still attended those Jewish prayer meetings (see Acts 3:1), yet they evidently began their own appointed seasons of united prayer within the new community. Acts 2:42 refers to those prayer meetings. It was not closed, private prayer; it was community, public prayer. In the Greek text, there is an article (tais) before “prayers.” Richard Rackham, one of the classic commentators on Acts, suggests that this implies regular hours of prayers.

Babes need to learn to talk to the Father. They need to learn to praise, confess, ask, and intercede. Like many other skills, prayer is learned by doing.

Nothing encourages new believers more than seeing God answer prayer. It lets them see that the Lord is alive and loose in the world. The Lord seems particularly pleased to manifest Himself to a babe in Christ by answering prayer. At the same time, the babe needs to experience the “no” of an all-wise Father.

What about the Local church?

If all these elements are included in follow-up, the observation will be that biblical follow-up is a New Testament local church. What Acts 2 demands cannot be done apart from a local church. Churches, not parachurch organizations, baptize and observe the Lord’s Supper. The moment an organization starts baptizing and observing the Lord’s Table, it becomes, in effect, a local church. God’s program for this age is the church. God’s plan for maturing believers is a local church. Biblical follow-up is a New Testament local church.

Summary: Biblical follow-up consists of getting new believers involved in Bible teaching, fellowship, the Lord’s Table, and praying, that is, being involved in a New Testament, local church.

God’s illustration of the church is a family. In 1 Corinthians 4:1, Paul calls himself a father. In 1 Thessalonians 2, he refers to himself as a mother. He called those he won to Christ his own children. He called Timothy and Titus his sons in the faith. All these

believers were brothers and sisters. For natural growth and normal development, a child needs a father, a mother, and a family—an extended family. As a machine cannot raise a child physically, neither can books and audio recordings rear a child spiritually. As friends cannot rear a child like a family, neither can a parachurch group rear a spiritual child like a church. Biblical follow-up is done in a local church.

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