

The Gospel – The Message of Jesus Christ

The Gospel and Evangelism

Evangelism is our Duty and Privilege

As we have learned in some detail, the Gospel is the message of Jesus Christ and what He has done to reconcile us to God and save us from sin and death. The fact that it is a message begs the question, “Who shall tell it?” And of course the obvious answer is, “Christians, those who have experienced the power and blessedness of His salvation.” The reason for this is twofold. First, that is our duty and second, that it is our privilege and delight. Let us first examine the fact that evangelism is the duty of Christians. It is a clear commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples, of whom all Christians are, to preach the Gospel and to make disciples.

Matthew 28:19-20 - 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." NASB

One might assume that maybe Jesus was speaking only to His disciples who were to be His Apostles, being that this command was given directly to them. However, it is obvious here that the command extends beyond the eleven to all those who would come after them. This is because the command he gave them was for them to teach their disciples to **“observe everything that I commanded you.”** Therefore the command to make disciples (which obviously includes evangelism), extends to everyone who becomes a disciple of Christ through the ministry of the Apostles, which includes every Christian in every age thereafter. This is also affirmed by Jesus statement, **“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** Obviously Jesus knew that this command would extend beyond the time of the disciples even until our time. In fact, one of the reasons we were given the indwelling power of the Spirit was to be a witness of Christ and to testify of the goodness of His salvation so that others may be saved.

Acts 1:8 - 8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. NASB

Not only is it clear that the Church is the witness of Christ to each successive generation until He comes, but the ministry of evangelism is exactly how the Church carried out Jesus commands as we see in the narrative of Acts.

Acts 8:1-4 - 8 And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. - And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. 4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. NASB

Here we see the Church being scattered because of persecution in Jerusalem, and being scattered to the surrounding regions. The Apostles however, remained in Jerusalem. So here we see the members of the body of Christ individually going about and preaching the word wherever they went. This is consistent with the idea of the priesthood of all believers, where we have been called to **“proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us.”**

1 Peter 2:9 - 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; NASB

Later in the same context, Peter tells us to be ready to **“make a defense”** (give an answer) for the hope that you have.

1 Peter 3:15 - 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; NASB

It is rather clear that unless we are acting as Christ's "*witnesses*" (Acts 1:8), and "*proclaiming His excellencies*" (1 Peter 2:9) that we will have no need to "*make a defense*" to anyone because no one will be asking about our hope because it will not be evident. But if we are in fact living as "*lights in the world,*" and His praise is "*continually in our mouth (Psalm 34:1),*" people will be rather curious how we can always be so joyful and encouraged in a world that is falling apart around us. Not only are these things true, but Paul clearly describes our evangelistic ministry to us in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. There he explains that "*knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.*" And this is because "*the love of Christ controls us*" and so therefore we Christians "*no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again.*"

2 Corinthians 5:11,14-15 - 11 Therefore **knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men**, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences..... 14 **For the love of Christ controls us**, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, that **they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf**. 16 Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

This persuading of men Paul tells us is because we have become "*new creatures in Christ*" and we have received the "*ministry of reconciliation*" from God and now because of this "*we are ambassadors of Christ*" who entreat others to "*be reconciled to God.*" This is what we are "*persuading men*" to do (2 Cor 5:11).

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 - 17 **Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, **and gave us the ministry of reconciliation**, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and **He has committed to us the word of reconciliation**. 20 **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God**. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. NASB

And this brings us to our second point, that it is our great delight and privilege to share the good news of the Gospel with others. Is it not the great desire of our hearts now that we have received the mercy of God in Christ to see others come to faith and repentance and be saved? Isn't this what Paul meant when he said, "*knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.*" In fact, one must wonder if so called Christians have no desire to see others saved, if they really be Christians at all. But in fact we do want to see people be saved as this is one of our chief desires in life now. It gives us meaning and purpose as Christians as we have a sincere love for our fellow man and wish for them to be "*reconciled to God*" and find the hope and peace that we have received in Christ. More than this, it is because we have a great love for God that we would not keep silent about the glory of His grace to us in Christ and that we shall tell it to the ends of the earth. This is something that glorifies God in a very distinct and direct way. When we speak of the excellent greatness of the salvation of God through Christ Jesus, we are telling forth the high praises of God for the greatest thing He has done in all of History. This magnifies the greatness of the mercy of God in Christ and causes people to see the whole purpose of God in creation. In short, sharing the Gospel in evangelism glorifies God in a way that speaks directly to God's plan of redemption like no other things we can say. Consider this quote from **J.I. Packer in his book, "Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God"**..... "*May I stress again, if we ourselves have known anything of the love of Christ for us, and if our hearts have felt any measure of gratitude for the grace that has saved us from death and hell, then this attitude of compassion and care for our spiritually needy fellow men ought to come naturally and spontaneously to us. It was in connection that aggressive evangelism that Paul declared that "the love of Christ controls us" (2 Cor5:14). It is a tragic and ugly thing when Christians lack desire, and are actually reluctant, to share the precious knowledge that they have with others whose need of it is just as great as their own. It was natural for Andrew, when he found the*

*Messiah, to go off and tell his brother Simon, and for Phillip to hurry to break the good news to his friend Nathaniel (John 1:40). They did not need to be told to do this; they did it naturally and spontaneously, just as one would naturally and spontaneously share with one's family and friends any other piece of news that vitally affected them. There is something very wrong with us if we do not ourselves find it natural to act in this way, let us be quite clear about that. It is a great privilege to evangelize; it is a wonderful thing to be able to tell others of the love of Christ, knowing that there is nothing that they need more urgently to know, and no knowledge in the world that can do them so much good. Dear friends, let us consider the great need of the lost people around us. How important and serious is the issue of salvation? We should consider it a great privilege to have the knowledge of Christ and on this basis, a great privilege to share it. Is it not the most important thing in the life of anyone we know? Will it not do them more good than anything else you can say or do for them? Is it not the highest act of love to tell them how to be saved and reconciled to God? It is indeed and therefore let us open up our mouths and tell of His wondrous grace! Furthermore, let us consider what a shame it is to withhold the Gospel from those who so desperately need it.....**J.I. Packer** goes on..... "We should not, therefore, be reluctant and backward on the personal and individual level. We should be glad and happy to do it. We should not look for excuses for wriggling out of our obligation when occasion offers to talk to others about the Lord Jesus Christ. If we find ourselves shrinking from this responsibility and trying to evade it, we need to face ourselves with the fact that in this we are yielding to sin and Satan. If (as is usual) it is the fear of being thought odd and ridiculous, or of losing popularity in certain circles, that holds us back, we need to ask ourselves in the presence of God: Ought these things to stop us from loving our neighbor? If it is a false shame, which is not shame at all but pride in disguise, that keeps our tongue from Christian witness when we are with other people. We need to press on our conscience this question: Which matters more – our reputation or their salvation? We cannot be complacent about this gangrene of conceit and cowardice when we weigh up our lives in the presence of God. What we need to do is to ask for grace to be truly ashamed of ourselves, and to pray that we may so overflow in love for God that we will overflow in love for our fellow men, and so find it an easy and natural and joyful thing to share with them the good news of Christ." Dear friends, let us find the courage needed to rise above our fear of man and to share the good news of our Lord's precious sacrifice. Let's face it. Jesus was a Gospel preacher and we are all followers of Him. I am not quite sure how you read this, but in my mind, that makes us all Gospel preachers to some extent or degree. Dear Christian, are you glad to have been saved by Christ? Good heavens man, tell somebody!*

God is Sovereign in Salvation

This brings us to the question then, how does evangelism work? Is it really our job to "save people?" Is the Gospel a tool in our hands that we use to save people and cause them to come to faith? Is it really our job to convince people somehow of their need to be saved and of Christ's provision for them to do so? Well, the very clear answer to these questions is NO of course not and YES of course! As paradoxical as this may seem let us not be confused by this but rather clearly understand the doctrine of salvation as the Bible teaches it. In short, God is the One who saves people through the life and death of Christ by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, but He uses the Church as a means of telling the message of Christ so that His elect people can be saved from every tribe and language, people and nation. Therefore, God is sovereign in who will be saved, but we are the means of bringing them to faith, by our obedience in sharing the Gospel with them which is "*the power of God unto salvation for all those who believe,*" regardless of race, class, or gender.