

Evangelism: Theology, Message, and Methods

by *Samuel A. Owens*

If one goes by the current evangelistic statistics being bandied about in the Christian community today, the conclusion would logically follow that revival is breaking out in various places around the world. For example, we hear that there are over 75 million "born again" persons in the United States; that over 16,000 people per day are being added to the church in sub-Saharan Africa, that Kenya is a Christian nation. Mission groups and individuals share fantastic "war stories" of the vast numbers who "make a decision" for Christ through their ministries.

But where are the people who have "made decisions?" Where is the evidence of these supposed "revivals?" Surely if true God-sent revival were taking place there would be tremendous change in the life-style of individuals and in the face of nations.¹ But, for the

most part, one searches in vain for such evidence:

What is the problem? How can so many "make decisions for Christ" with so little effect? It would appear to be the case, as J.I. Packer has noted, that much of modern ministry/evangelism may be characterized as "well meant, God-shrinking, success-oriented."² While not at all questioning the motives of most of the current evangelistic endeavors, far too often success has come to mean, not obedience to God and faithfulness to the message and methods consistent with His Word, but the numbers produced, how many "decisions" can be counted.

It is the contention here that our main problems in modern evangelism are theological: either having a faulty theology, or making a separation between theology and practice. There is an obvious correlation between belief and practice. Our practice demonstrates

our true beliefs, and our beliefs should govern our practice. And truth (theology) should determine our beliefs.

This article is an attempt to focus anew on the theological foundation of true evangelism, and the resultant consequences for our modern evangelical message and methods. It is a message which has been sounded by others;³ we wish to bring it before the eyes of the church afresh.

Theology and Evangelism

It is evident in evangelical circles today that there is a great disparagement of theology. It is seldom preached from the pulpit and infrequently read by Christians. Indeed, A.N. Martin has commented that modern evangelicals suffer from a mentality that regards doctrine and theology as a medieval hobgoblin!⁴ There is often an inability to see how theology and practice fit together, and when this happens it is usually theology that gets thrown out. From this theological dearth flow improper evangelistic methods and often a less-than-biblical evangelistic message.

While there are obviously many biblical doctrines that impinge on the evangelistic mandate of the Church, the following stand out as central to the task: the sinfulness of man, the grace of God, the nature of regeneration and conversion, and the basis of assurance. Let's look at these in turn.

The Sinfulness of Man

Scripture is clear and unequivocal that man is a sinner. Man is a sinner by his actions (Rom. 3:23; Isa. 53:6; Psalm 14:1-3; Ecc. 7:20) and by his relationship to Adam (Rom. 5:12-21), which includes the imputation of guilt⁵ and the impartation of a sinful nature. This latter truth, traditionally spoken of as the doctrine of "original sin," is the aspect that has the most bearing on our present discussion.

Original Sin Defined

Original sin may be defined as "the sinful state and condition in which men are born." It is so designated because: "1) it is derived from the original root of the human race (Adam); 2) it is present in the life of every individual from the time of his birth, and ; 3) it is the inward root of all the actual sins that defile the life of man."⁶ Simply stated it refers to the corruption of our whole nature.

The Bible clearly states that all aspects of man's being are corrupt. "By nature" we are children of wrath — that is, objects of wrath (Eph. 2:3). By actions we are also objects of God's wrath, but this verse refers to something innate. Psalm 51:5 teaches that this is something that we have from conception, not something acquired by actions during our lifetimes.

Every facet of man's being is affected by original sin.⁷ 1) His intellect

is blinded (2 Cor. 4:4). His mind is reprobate or disapproved (Rom. 1:28). His understanding is darkened, separated from the life of God (Eph. 4:18). 2) His affections are degraded and defiled (Rom. 1:21, 24, 26; Titus 1:15). 3) His will is enslaved to sin and therefore stands in opposition to God (Rom. 6:20; 8:6-7). 4) His heart is deceitful and "incurable" (Jer. 17:9). This pollution has been ably summarized by P.E. Hughes:

Original sin, however mysterious its nature may be, tells us that the reality of sin is something far deeper than the mere outward commission of sinful deeds.... It tells us that there is an inner root of sinfulness which corrupts man's true nature and from which his sinful deeds spring. Like a deadly poison, sin has penetrated to and infected the very center of man's being: hence his need for the total experience of rebirth by which, through the grace of God in Jesus Christ, the restoration of his true manhood is effected.⁸

Result of Original Sin - Total Spiritual Inability

When we speak about man's spiritual inability, we mean two things: 1) the unregenerate person cannot do, say, or

think that which totally meets with God's approval, and therefore totally fulfills God's law; and 2) the unregenerate person is unable apart from the special working of the Holy Spirit to change the basic direction of his life from sinful self-love to love for God.⁹

Man since the Fall has no ability to please God or to obey Him (cf. Jer. 13:23; John 3:3, 5; 6:44, 45, 8:34-36; 15:5; Rom 3:10-18; 5:6; 6:16, 20; 8:7-8; I Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1-3; Rom 9:16, et.al.). This means "(a) that the radical moral dispositions of every man [are] opposed to that obedience/pleasing, and (b) man has absolutely no ability to change these dispositions or (c) to exercise volitions contrary to them."¹⁰

In other words, man is as bad off as he can be before God:

- He is *spiritually dead* Eph. 2:1
- He *walks* as a lifestyle in trespasses and sin Eph. 2:1-2
- He is an *enemy* of and *alienated* from God Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21
- He is *ruled* and *dominated* by *satan* and the *world* system Eph. 2:2
- He is *unable* to please God Rom. 8:8
- He is *unable* to be subject to the law of God Rom. 8:7
- He *cannot understand* spiritual truth I Cor. 2:14

□ He is under the *wrath* and *condemnation* of God John 3:18, 36 And the result is an utter inability to recover himself. Thomas Boston summarized man's predicament thusly:

Now, here is a threefold cord against heaven and holiness, not easily to be broken; a blind mind, a perverse will, and disorderly distempered affections. The mind, swelled with self-conceit, says, the man should not stoop; the will, opposite to the will of God, says, he will not; and the corrupt affections, rising against the Lord, in defence of the corrupt will, say, he shall not. Thus the poor creature stands out against God and goodness, till a day of power comes, in which he is made a new creature.¹¹

Man is helpless (Rom. 5:6) and hopeless (Eph. 2:12). The power of God must intervene! It must be the power of God in sovereign grace.

The Grace of God

The total depravity/inability is true, the human will cannot be the decisive factor in salvation. For the human will is in bondage to sin.¹² God must come in power to save if anyone is to be saved. As Scripture says, "the gospel is the

power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).

The Scripture clearly testifies that salvation is by the grace of God (e.g., Eph. 2:5, 8). From election¹³ to God's call of sinners to salvation, through justification and its attendants to sanctification, perseverance, and glorification, salvation is of God and from God and to God. It is God's call to salvation which has the most intimate bearing on the issue at hand, the message and methods of evangelism.

The questions arise: What is the relationship of conversion to grace? of God's call to salvation? Is grace unnecessary, and man can naturally respond to the general gospel call (a denial of original sin/depravity/inability)? Is "prevenient" grace given to all men (overcoming depravity in all), enabling all to respond to the gospel call? Or is there an effectual grace/call of God (given only to the elect), wherein the Spirit powerfully works to change the disposition of the heart, leading the person so called to respond with repentance and faith?

Biblically, the call of God is seen in two different facets.¹⁴ Verbal (universal) calling (which is the emphasis of the word in the synoptic gospels) is the call which comes through the proclamation of the gospel, inviting (Matt. 11:28; John 7:37), urging (2 Cor. 5:20), and commanding

(Acts 2:38; 16:31; 17:30) sinners to repent and believe (see Matt. 22:14). The universal call is genuine, serious, and earnest:

It is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel.¹⁵

The effectual call (normal use of the word outside the synoptics) of God is not merely a general invitation but that mysterious yet effectual work of God through the Holy Spirit which brings man to saving faith in Jesus Christ. It always results in the salvation of God's elect. To those not called this way, the gospel remains foolishness (cf. I Cor. 1:21-25). See Rom. 8:30; 11:39; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; Col. 1:9; Acts 13:48; Phil. 1:29; John 6:44; 2 Pet. 1:10; 2 Thes. 2:14, et.al.¹⁶

God is thus the efficient cause of regeneration/conversion.¹⁷ Our salvation is of the will of the Father (James 1:18), through the resurrection of the Son (I Pet. 1:3; Col. 2:9), by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5, 6; Tit. 3:5). Note the statement of the

relationship between the divine and the human in the following verses: John 1:12-13; 3:16 (in the context of 3:5, 6); Acts 16:14; 13:48; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 18:27; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil 1:29; John 5:21; Eph. 2:5; I John 5:4; 2:29 (the one who "has been born..." - perfect passive); John 6:37, 44 ("dragged"), 45, 64, 65; John 10:3-6, 16, 26-29; Matt. 11:25; 16:15-17; 13:10, 11, 16; Luke 8:10; 10:21; I Pet. 1:3, 23; James 1:18; the uses of "call" - e.g., Rom. 8:30; 2 Tim. 1:9; I Cor. 1:9.

It is thus clear that, as the fourteenth century saint Thomas Bradwardine said (following Augustine), "When we act we are the ones who act, but He acts so that we may act." Salvation is a gift offered to all; it is a gift given to His elect.

Historically, the Protestant Reformers all were at one in these two points: the helplessness of man in sin and the sovereignty of God in grace; and in proclaiming these they were following in the footsteps of Paul; Augustine, Wycliffe, etc. (and of Jesus as is clearly seen in the gospel of John - e.g., 5:21; 6:37, 44, 65; 10:26; 17:6). Note the comments of Packer:

The doctrine of justification by faith was important to them because it safeguarded the principle of sovereign grace; but it actually expressed for them only one aspect of this

principle, and that not its deepest aspect. The sovereignty of grace found expression in their thinking at a profounder level still, in the doctrine of monergistic regeneration—the doctrine, that is, that the faith which receives Christ for justification is itself the free gift of a sovereign God, bestowed by spiritual regeneration in the act of effectual calling. To the Reformers, the crucial question was not simply, whether God justifies believers without works of law. It was the broader question, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ’s sake when they come to faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith. Here was the crucial issue: whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith; whether, the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self-effort.

‘Justification by faith only’ is a truth that needs interpretation. The principle of *sola fide* is not rightly understood till it is seen as anchored in the broader principle of *sola gratia*. What is the source and status of faith? Is it the God-given means whereby the God-given justification is received, or is it a condition of justification which it is left to man to fulfill? Is it a part of God’s gift of salvation, or is it man’s own contribution to salvation? Is our salvation wholly of God, or does it ultimately depend on something that we do for ourselves? Those who say the latter...thereby deny man’s utter helplessness in sin...and [is] a betrayal of the Reformation (because it denied the sovereignty of God in saving sinners, which was the deepest religious and theological principle of the Reformers’ thought).¹⁸

As Spurgeon noted, “True religion is supernatural at its beginning, supernatural in its continuance, and supernatural in its close... It is *all of grace*.”¹⁹ This biblical truth obviously has ramifications for modern evangelicals in the message and

methods of sharing the good news of Christ.

The Nature of Regeneration

Regeneration is the act of God whereby spiritually dead persons are made alive (imparted with spiritual life) through the Holy Spirit. It is God's transformation of individual believers, His giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives. It is entering into the blessings of the New Covenant (Ezek. 36:25-27; Jer. 31:31-34).

Regeneration is described variously in the New Testament. It is a new birth from above (John 3:3, 6-7); a "quickening" (making alive) (Col. 2:13; Eph. 2:4-5); a renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5); a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17); a "new man" (Eph. 4:24).

The nature of regeneration may be described thusly: 1) It is solely the work of God (John 1:13). It is a creation by divine generation. 2) It is an instantaneous change of man's nature from spiritual death to spiritual life. 3) It is decisive (2 Cor. 5:17). The regenerate man has ceased forever to be the man he was; the old life is over, a new life has begun. 4) It is mysterious (John 3:8).

From the nature of regeneration flow many consequences.²⁰ For example, Regeneration involves a whole reversal of the person's natural tendencies (Gal. 5:24-25) and a counteracting of the effects of sin (Eph. 2:1-10). It is the

beginning of a process of growth which continues throughout one's lifetime (Eph. 2:10). And it produces a "new sensitivity to spiritual things, a new direction of life, and an increasing ability to obey God"²¹ (I John 2:29; 3:4-9; 5:18; 2 Pet. 1:3ff; Rom 6:2).

In other words, when a person has been truly regenerated by God, his life changes. A life of faith and repentance is begun. Although indwelling sin remains and conflict is real (Rom 7; Gal. 5), the dominion of sin is broken (Rom 6), and he can no longer live a lifestyle of sin (I John 3:4-9). He does not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit, being led by the Spirit (Rom. 8). There is a God-consciousness and a God-directedness characteristic of his life, and he perseveres in holiness (Heb. 12:14; 3:6, 14).

The Nature of Conversion

Regeneration, the implanting of a new life within us, is inseparable from conversion, the action of a person in turning to Christ. It is spoken of variously as a "turning to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (I Thes. 1:9), "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21), "believing in the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16:31), etc. From Scripture it is evident that conversion involves two components—faith and repentance. These are not to be separated, for true

faith involves repentance and true repentance involves faith.

True saving faith involves the whole person. It involves the mind of man—Certain truths must be known.²² It involves the affections—an assent to the revelation of God’s power and grace as applicable to the needs of the soul. It involves the will and heart—trust which shows itself in a surrender of the soul as guilty and defiled to Christ (Matt. 11:28-29) and a reception and appropriation of Christ as the source of pardon and life (John 1:12; Rom. 10:9, 10). True faith thus involves self-renunciation, reliance on Christ, and appropriation of Christ to ourselves.

Likewise, true repentance includes an intellectual aspect (a knowledge of the holiness and majesty of God, Isa. 6:5), an emotional aspect (a heartfelt sorrow for sin, 2 Cor. 7:10), and a volitional aspect (a turning from sin and a change of purpose and motivation, Matt. 16:24, e.g.). Biblically repentance is *metanoia*, a change of mind or heart, a change in the entire person and in his outlook on life; and it is *epistrepho*, a total change in behaviour, a reversal of one’s life style, a complete turnaround.²³

At their core, both faith and repentance are mysteries: both are the task of man, yet both are the work and gift of God. We are commanded to believe, and justification is by faith

(Rom 3:28; 1:16; 10:17; John 3:16; 20:31; 1 John 5:4, Acts 16:31). Yet faith is the fruit of election (Acts 13:48); the result of regeneration (1 John 5:1; John 1:12-13) and an operation of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). The Father enables us to come to Jesus (John 6:65); Jesus is the Author of our faith (Heb. 12:2); and God is said to bestow faith (Phil 1:29; Eph 2:8-9). Likewise, repentance is the act of man (Isa. 55:7; Exek. 33:11; Matt. 4:17; Acts 3:19; 17:30; 26:18; 26:20) and is also the work/gift of God (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). Conversion is a deep miracle—a gift of God (e.g., Acts. 16:14) while at the same time the response of the one called in faith and repentance.²⁴

Thus, simply put, conversion, means commitment to God in response to mercy from God, and consists in repentance and faith. In Scripture these two overlap. Repentance is not just regretful remorse, but a total about-turn in one’s thoughts, aims, and acts, so that one leaves the paths of self-willed disobedience to serve God in faith and faithfulness. Faith is not just believing Christian truth, but forsaking self-confidence and man-made hopes to trust wholly in Christ and his cross for pardon, peace,

and life, so that henceforth one lives to one's lover-God in thankful, penitent obedience.²⁶

The Basis of Assurance

From whence comes assurance of salvation, the settled conviction that one is truly converted and is indeed a child of God? In Scripture the assurance of salvation is grounded in three areas: the Word of God, the ministries of the Holy Spirit, and a changed life.

The first foundation of assurance is the Word of God. Involved in this foundation are 1) the recognition of the immutability of the gifts and calling of God; 2) an acceptance of the promises of God as true for me; and 3) an intelligent understanding of the nature of salvation: salvation reaches the highest place of privilege and blessing; the believer has been justified, regenerated, redeemed, reconciled—all by the propitiatory atonement of Christ and all of grace.

The second foundation of assurance are the ministries of the Holy Spirit. There is first of all the inner witness of the Spirit and the conviction He gives that I am a son of God (Rom. 8:16).²⁷ Secondly, there is His special working of making real the presence of God (John 14:21-23).

The third ground of assurance is the resultant life-style of the converted (2Pet. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; I John).²⁸

This life-style is ethical—obedience to

the commands of God (I John 2:3-6; 3:4-10), doctrinal—correct belief regarding Christ (I John 2:18-27; 4:1-6), and relational—love for the brethren (I John 2:7-11; 3:11-18; 4:7-21). These lead to confidence and assurance (I John 3:21; 5:13-21).

As we have noted in other areas, there is the possibility of both true and false assurance. True assurance involves the interplay of the three grounds mentioned above.²⁹ It is an assurance that may be more weak or strong at different periods of one's life. And an increase of assurance is continually to be sought in the communion with God which is on-going. But there is also a false assurance which can be had. We see many professing a saving relationship with Christ who are living like the devil, having no God-centered life nor a desire for holiness. Note the following contrast between true and false assurance:)

- 1). True assurance begets unfeigned humility; false assurance begets spiritual pride (I Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:14).
- 2). True assurance leads to increased diligence in the practice of holiness; the false leads to sloth and self-indulgence (Ps. 51:12, 13, 19).
- 3). True assurance leads to candid self-examination and a desire to be searched and corrected by God; the false leads to a disposition to be

satisfied with appearance and to avoid accurate investigation (Ps. 139:23, 24). 4). The true leads to constant aspirations after more intimate fellowship with God which is not true of false assurance (I John 3:2, 3). 5. True assurance rests upon what God says; false upon what man says (Heb. 6:17, 18; Ps. 118:8; Pr. 28:26).³⁰

These doctrines—the sinfulness of man, the sovereign grace of God, the nature of regeneration and conversion, the basis of assurance—are crucial in any evaluation of modern evangelistic methods and the message which is being shared. It is to these which we now turn.

The Message and Methods of Modern Evangelism

As one surveys the message and methods of much (most!?) modern evangelism it becomes readily apparent that what is being said or done is not in congruence with the doctrine of Scripture. To say the least, “it is rare today to hear proclaimed the diagnosis of our predicament which Luther—and Scripture—put forward: that man is hopeless and helpless in sin, fast bound in Satan’s slavery, at enmity with God, blind and dead to the things of the Spirit.”³¹ As a consequence, “how rarely do we hear faith spoken of as Scripture depicts it—as it is expressed in the cry of self-committal with which the contrite heart, humbled to see its

need, and made conscious of its own utter helplessness even to trust, casts itself in the God-given confidence of self-despair upon the mercy of Christ Jesus.”³² Either modern evangelicals have abandoned the Scriptural doctrine, or they are involved in practices which contradict it. Let’s examine this further.

The Message of Modern Evangelism

Differences between much of today’s preaching and that of Jesus are not petty: they are enormous. The chief errors are not in emphasis or approach but in the heart of the Gospel message.³³

Modern evangelism is conspicuous by its distilling of the gospel into “Four Laws” or the “ABC’s of New Life” or “Steps to Peace with God,” etc. There is no doubt that there are central and elementary principles of the gospel: sin, redemption by the blood of Christ, and the demand for faith and repentance. Yet, as Murray rightly notes, two facts must be kept in mind:³⁴ 1) The Scripture pattern will not support the conclusion that the central message of the gospel is the exclusive content of the message of evangelism, and; 2) the central message itself cannot properly be presented or understood except as it is presented in the context of the whole counsel of God.

In other words, the biblical message of evangelism is the whole counsel of

God. The Spirit uses the truth of God to change lives, whether it be to bring a sinner to conversion or to build up and instruct the saint. When God is preached, the Spirit can use that truth to convict men of their smallness and sin, and of the greatness and holiness of God. When Christ is uplifted, men are pointed to the Saviour and Lord. When sin is preached, men are shown their state before a holy God, their utter helplessness and hopelessness. When wrath, condemnation, and hell are preached, men are shown their destiny outside of Christ. When the cross is declared, its saving efficacy is made known. When heaven is proclaimed, the hope of those in Christ is set forth.

What has been the result of our distillation of the gospel into a few "key points," of our failure to preach the whole counsel of God? In a nutshell, the emphasis of evangelism has been perverted (however unintentionally): it has become man-centered rather than God-centered. Let's analyze this further by a series of questions.³⁵

First, where is the preaching today on the character of God? How is He exalted and brought honor? Does the sinner know who God is, this One with whom he has to do, this One whom he has offended, and who threatens him with destruction? Does he know the One who is able to save him?

Much of modern preaching is anaemic, with the life-blood of God's nature absent from the message. Evangelists centre their message upon man. Man has sinned and missed a great blessing. If man wants to retrieve his immense loss he must act thus and so. But the Gospel of Christ is very different. It begins with God and His glory. It tells men that they have offended a holy God, who will be no means pass by sin. It reminds sinners that the only hope of salvation is to be found in the grace and power of this same God. Christ's gospel sends men to beg pardon of the Holy One.³⁶

Is it not a great mistake to assume that sinners know who God is? The whole gospel message depends upon the character of God. "If you rush into four easy steps to Heaven with a man who has a defective view of God, you will deceive him and yourself. You may lead him to pray after you, and you will be praying to the God of glorious holiness. But when he repeats 'God' in his prayer, he will be praying to another God, or at best to his 'unknown God.'"³⁷

Second, where is the preaching of the law of God? In saying this, we are also saying, where is the preaching of the sinfulness and depravity of man? For, "by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20). We give lip service to the concept of sin, but very rarely are

God's holy standards clearly set forth, so that man may be shown to be a sinner, ungodly, unrighteous, helpless, under wrath and condemnation, and indeed, an enemy of God (Rom. 5:6-10). We want to quickly get to the cross of Christ, but a man will not flee to a Saviour unless and until he sees himself for what he is—an ungodly person who deserves the condemnation of God, a person who can do absolutely nothing to save himself. It is only when a man has been wounded by the law of God that the balm of the gospel can have its effect.³⁸ It is the sharp needle of the law that makes way for the scarlet thread of the gospel.³⁹

Third, where is the preaching of repentance toward God? Where is the emphasis on the fact that Christ saves from sin, not in sin? That salvation means separation from this present evil age? We tell people to “accept Jesus as your personal Saviour” (a phrase not found in Scripture); we speak of “faith,” but we do not speak of repentance. Yet, as we saw above, there is no true faith which is not a repentant faith. We emphasize an “abundant life,” “happiness,” “fulfillment,” “peace.” We do not emphasize a break with sin and repentance toward God.

Fourth, where is the preaching of hell? Many who call themselves evangelical have abandoned the historic Christian doctrine of the eternal

punishment of sinners in hell.⁴⁰ Most who say they believe it do not preach it. When is the last time you heard a sermon anything like Jonathan Edwards' “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (which God used in the conversion of many!)? And even when we speak of hell, we water it down to mean only “eternal separation from God” rather than the biblical picture of hell being the presence of God in eternal wrath and torment.⁴¹

The message of evangelism is woefully lacking today. We must get back to preaching the whole counsel of God, and do away with our simplistic, man-centered message, as well as the idea that we have not really preached “evangelistically” unless we give a pat formula of content. We must return to a God-centered gospel.⁴²

The Methods of Modern Evangelism

When we speak of methods of evangelism, we do not mean the variety of situations in which the gospel may be presented (e.g., one-to-one, large group, small group, to specific target audiences, etc.), but the manner in which the message is shared, the elements involved in the presentation, and so forth. We have already touched on the weaknesses/dangers of much modern evangelism as it relates to the content of the gospel message. To methods we now turn.

Foundational Principles

Before we evaluate these methods, it is good to remind ourselves of some foundational principles of evangelism. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has identified some of these for us:

1. The supreme object of this work is to glorify God... The first object of preaching the gospel is not to save souls; it is to glorify God. Nothing else, however good in itself, or however noble, must be allowed to usurp that first place.
2. The only power that can really do this work is that of the Holy Spirit.
3. The one and only medium through which the Holy Spirit works is the Word of God... The medium which is used by the Holy Spirit is the truth.
4. The true urge to evangelization must come from apprehending these principles and, therefore, of a zeal for the honour and glory of God, and a love for the souls of men.
5. There is a constant danger of error, and of heresy, even amongst the most sincere, and also the danger of a false zeal and the employment of unscriptural methods.⁴³

Historical Perspective

In addition, we must remember that our theology determines our methods. A brief look at history can aid us in our perspective. Charles Finney must get the credit for introducing the “modern” way of doing evangelism. We can compare the “modern” type of evangelism with the more “traditional” evangelism by comparing the theology and approaches of Finney and George Whitefield.⁴⁴

For Finney, the sinner has natural ability to turn whole-heartedly to God once he is convinced that that is the right, proper, and needful things to do. Accordingly, the whole work of the Spirit in conversion involves moral persuasion, i.e., making vivid to our minds the reasons for laying down our rebel arms and surrendering to God.

Since everyone, if he will rouse up his “dormant moral powers,” can at any time yield to God and become a Christian, it is the evangelist’s duty always to preach for immediate decision and commitment.

Whitefield’s theology of evangelism is different from Finney. For Whitefield, the sinner is unable to turn to God, being totally depraved. No one seeks for God. Accordingly, the work of the Spirit involves, not only conviction, but effectually calling the dead sinner to new life. Conversion is a gracious sovereign work of divine power.

In the manner and time of conversion God is sovereign. It is never man, but always God, who determines when an elect sinner shall believe. It is the duty of the evangelist to preach the gospel, faith issuing from the preached Word (Rom. 10:17), not from a “call to decision.”

Methods of Finney and Whitefield

Finney says of a typical mission sermon, “I tried to shut them up to present faith and repentance, as the thing which God required of them... present and instant acceptance of Christ.” For Finney evangelistic preaching was a battle of wills between himself and his hearers, in which the task was to bring them to the breaking-point. Evangelism in the church involves a “campaign” of meetings, or at least becomes an activity which is additional and auxiliary to the regular functioning of the local congregation.

In contrast Whitefield insisted on the preaching of four truths: the duty of receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour and Master; the danger of settling in religion for anything less; the impossibility of coming to Christ without renewing grace; and the necessity of seeking that grace from Christ’s own hand. The way to the will is through the mind. Truth is proclaimed and used by the Spirit to

effect the will and affections drawing men to Christ.

Evangelism in the church is a normal part of preaching and the life of the church. Indeed, all sermons are “gospel” sermons. Evangelism is conceived of primarily as an enterprise, often long-term, of faithfulness in delivering the gospel message, and only secondarily as a special gathering solely for “witness.” Here is where modern evangelicals often fail to think through the issues. For if Finney’s doctrine of the natural state of sinful man is right, then his evangelistic methods must be judged right also, for, as he often insisted, the ‘new measures’ were means well adapted to the end in view... But if his view of man is wrong, then his methods must be called into question—which is an issue of importance at the present time: for it is Finney’s methods, modified and adapted, that characterise a great deal of evangelism today. If Finney’s doctrine is rejected, such methods are inappropriate to a degree, and actually detrimental to the real work of evangelism.⁴⁵

Flowing from this historical perspective, we see that the predominant modern methods which must be called into question are associated with how a sinner is instructed to “close with Christ” at the end of an evangelistic presentation.

“Decisional Regeneration”

The first “method” of modern evangelism which must be questioned is that of “calling for a decision.” The sinner, after being told the “elements” of salvation, is instructed that he must initiate the work of conversion-regeneration by becoming willing, and God will complete it; he must do what he can and God will do the rest. Once he has made a firm “decision for Christ,” he is told (on the basis of such texts as John 1:12) that the Divine work has also been accomplished.⁴⁶

As Adams notes,⁴⁷ “The great theological difference between modern evangelism and biblical evangelism hinges on this basic question whether true religion is the work of God or of man. At best, the doctrine of ‘Decisional Regeneration’ attributes the new birth partly to man and partly to God.”⁴⁸ “The ultimate defect and error... is that it excludes the Holy Spirit from the real decision, and asserts that man is able to convert himself.”⁴⁹

Modern evangelistic methods emphasize the “decision.”⁵⁰ But by doing so a pattern of conversion is constructed which is sub-scriptural and which the natural man can attain to. When repentance and faith are depicted as being possible to the unrenewed man it “opens the way to an experience in which the self-will of the sinner and not

the power of God may be the main feature.”⁵¹

We must see the seriousness of the dangers of this modern type of evangelism. As Packer rightly observed regarding Finney’s method:

Believing that it is in everyone’s power to accept Christ at any moment, Finney equated the immediate response that the gospel requires of all with instant conversion on the part of all. But by making this equation he made it impossible to avoid doing damage to some souls. If one tells people that they are under obligation to receive Christ on the spot, and calls in God’s name for instant decision, some who are spiritually unprepared will “pray a prayer,” accept directions, “go through the motions,” and go away thinking they have received Christ, when in reality they have not done so because they were not yet able to do so. So a crop of false conversions results from these tactics in the nature of the case.⁵²

The “Altar Call”

One of the staples of modern evangelism is the “altar call,” the call for public response on the part of those professing Christ at the end of an

evangelistic service. It is a surprise for most to learn that the “invitation” as it is given today has no precedent in Scripture or in church history prior to Finney.⁵³ We have seen Finney’s doctrine that man has natural ability to believe and repent, and that conversion is the direct result of moral persuasion by the appropriate use of means. He also held that true converts could be identified immediately.⁵⁴

But the “altar call” suffers from the same dangers as noted above. In the words of Lloyd-Jones,

The ‘appeal,’ or ‘altar call,’ to use the American term, is responsible for confusing conversion with a decision to come forward. Because unregenerate people, for all manner of reasons, are capable of responding to the call to the front, an impression of spiritual results far beyond the reality is being created. At the same time, the virtual identification of saving faith with the decision to walk forward is bound, in many cases, to confuse individuals as to their real spiritual condition. It is wrong theology—God has given to every man the ability to believe—leading to a wrong practice. Certainly the evangelist is to appeal for faith

and repentance, but the time when the truth is made effective unto salvation belongs to God alone.⁵⁵

The combination of a faulty, man-centered message and the equation of “response” with regeneration creates many problems. The most serious error is the many spurious conversions which result. The evangelist must exercise care lest by a mere appeal to self-interest he induces a ‘decision’ which, far from being saving, is perfectly consistent with a person remaining in an unregenerate condition. A presentation of the gospel chiefly in terms of its ability to fulfill man’s need of happiness and other blessings, and which fails to show that man’s wrong relationship to God is much worse than everything else in his condition, may well receive a considerable though temporary success (cd. Luke 8:13-14). A salvation conceived not as something primarily that brings us to God but as something that gives us something requires no real conviction of sin in order to its acceptance.⁵⁶

The use of an “altar call” is also denial in practice of the biblical teaching on the question of, ‘from where comes faith?’ Romans 10:17 informs us that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word concerning Christ” (or as the NEB puts it, “faith is awakened by the message,

and the message that awakens it comes through the word of Christ"). The Holy Spirit uses the preached word to produce faith in the sinner. It is not produced by the invitational "extra" which is added at the end of the message (see, e.g., Acts 10:44ff.; 13:48; 16:14). In modern evangelism the preacher/evangelist "preaches the Word of God, and then adds something: a human appeal to the sinner to exercise his freedom by deciding for Christ. This appeal is added to the sermon because the [speaker] believes that the Word itself does not have the inherent right and power to bring the sinner to a surrender to God unless his freedom grants prior assent."⁵⁷ There is no need for the "added extra" at the end. Great preachers such as William Perkins, Richard Baxter, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones did not use the modern public invitation system. And we do not need it either.⁵⁸ The preaching and the call for decision should not be separated. The preaching is the call for decision; the appeal is implicit throughout.

False Assurance

As part of the doctrine of "decisional regeneration" comes the giving of false assurance of salvation to many. Preachers, evangelists, sharers, and counselors assure an individual that his

salvation is certain because he has prayed the prescribed prayer and answered "yes" to all the right questions. He is told that his salvation is secure because God will not lie and, since he has made a decision, God has fulfilled His promise to "come into his life and forgive his sins." To doubt is to bring the veracity of God into question.

But on the basis of this counseling "a man may make a profession without every having his confidence in his own ability shattered; he has been told absolutely nothing of his need of a change of nature which is not within his own power, and consequently, if he does not experience such a radical change, he is not dismayed."⁵⁹ People leave the evangelistic encounter with assurance of salvation, but often without regeneration having taken place, still in an unconverted state. One has only to be involved in the follow-up of such professors to realize how prevalent this situation is. "Results" and "statistics" are emphasized at the expense of regeneration.

However, as noted above, a decision to "believe" without evidence of a changed heart is no basis for thinking that anyone has become a Christian. Furthermore, the basis of salvation, the death of Christ, is not to be made the exclusive basis of the believer's assurance. For "the salvation of the

Christian includes Christ's work in the believer and that work provides evidence of salvation which is distinct from what Christ has done for the believer. This evidence does not mean that sanctification is to be seen as the foundation of assurance but the Spirit uses the evidence of experience to strengthen and confirm assurance" (I John 2:3; 3:14, etc.).⁶⁰

A person may indeed be assured of possessing a saving relationship with God. But that assurance must have a Scriptural foundation. As we saw earlier, this involves the Word of God, the ministries of the Holy Spirit, and the changed life of the believer.

Result: The Need for Something "More"

The theology of "decisional regeneration" leads to another problem. As noted above, many "converts" of modern evangelicalism are often as worldly after their "decisions" as before. As a result, rather than questioning their methods and their theology, evangelicals have introduced the concept of "categories" of Christians: for example, those who have taken the gift of eternal life without turning from sin vs. those who have done both; those who have allowed Jesus to be their Saviour but not as yet their Lord; etc. We end up with a "class" of Christians who have not broken with sin, who give no evidence

of new life, yet are told that they are secure and on the way to heaven.

"Trying to patch up a faulty evangelism, the church has adopted a faulty follow-up."⁶¹

In other words, the teaching of "decisional regeneration" and its attendants "depreciates the biblical doctrine of regeneration/conversion by implying that the change in the regenerated sinner may amount to little or nothing. It then often goes on to say that the important change which affects a man's character and conduct is the second step which makes him a 'spiritual Christian.'"⁶² However, Scripture clearly teaches that it is regeneration that makes the decisive change (2 Cor. 5:17).⁶³

There are many other dangers to such teaching, most of which have been mentioned before:⁶⁴ 1) There is a separation of the blessings of the New Covenant, which blessings (forgiveness of sins and a changed heart) are inseparable (see Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26ff.). 2) There is the failure to distinguish between saving faith and spurious faith. 3) There is often a failure to emphasize repentance in the Christian life. 4) There is the danger of giving false assurance. 5) It promotes a low view of sin. 6) And there is the danger of a low view of Christ and the cross.

Other Improper Methods

The modern methods of evangelism noted above constitute major areas which need to be reconsidered in light of biblical theology. However, there are other methods which also must be mentioned, although space prohibits any detailed evaluation.

For example, what James Stewart calls "Hollywood Evangelism"⁶⁵ is all too prevalent; preaching a popular Jesus, dealing in Madison Avenue techniques and depending on the psychology of the world rather than trusting the Spirit,⁶⁶ an emphasis on glamour and entertainment rather than on the Word of God, a perversion of the cross of Christ.⁶⁷

And we have changed the nature of evangelism itself. From the mission of the Body of Christ which is centered in the local church, we have often divorced it from the church and made it the domain of parachurch groups and individual men holding their own "crusades." Mass evangelism has for many replaced the normal way of life evangelism characteristic of the New Testament, whereby individual Christians "gossip" the good news to those around them in home and workplace; it has also all too often replaced the preaching of the church itself.⁶⁸ And even those who are involved in personal evangelism believe (and are told that) they have to be

"trained" in a certain technique in order to be effective.⁶⁹

We have also changed the theology of revival. The biblical understanding of revival is that of a work of God's sovereign grace through His Spirit, awakening the spiritually dead to living faith in Christ and renewing the inner life of believers. It is essentially a corporate phenomena, the extension to many, at the same time, of that same divine power which is present in the conversion of every individual.⁷⁰ While God uses means (e.g., stirring up His people to pray; 2 Chron. 7:14), the bringing and timing of revival is of God. Finney was influential in changing this understanding to a more man-centered outlook (and his theological descendants have taken it even further). He spoke of the "law of revival," namely that the Church's praying, repenting, and seeking God guarantees an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in revival blessing, comparing it to the way God guarantees the farmer's crop if proper sowing and care are undertaken.⁷¹ And we thus have "revival meetings" for a week or two each year, as if these automatically bring forth spiritual renewal.

Summary

Modern methods of evangelism are very often contrary to, or at best, incongruent with, Scriptural truth. They have been developed with the

assumption that God has already done what He can to save man, and is now idly standing by waiting to see what sinners will decide to do with Jesus and His salvation. It is as if the Spirit were not in the world to convict of sin, reveal Christ, and regenerate sinners. They must exercise the power of their natural wills.⁷²

The results have too often been spurious conversions and false assurance given to the unconverted. This is not to say that genuine conversions have not also resulted (for God “graciously blesses truth even when error sits alongside it”).⁷³ But the dangers of the new methods go beyond any benefits (for biblically the true converts would have been converted with the proper methods).

A few genuine decisions may occur among the many... There is, however, a very grave harm done to any who are thus superficially affected, and this harm might sometimes outweigh the good that is done. In reply to this it is argued that nothing can outweigh the value of one soul that is saved; yet when the harm of a false decision is analyzed, it will be seen that the after-state of bewilderment and discouragement which results in an attitude that is almost unapproachable and hopeless, has its unmeasured results as well.⁷⁴

We must employ true, biblical methods in our evangelism, methods

which are true to the biblical message. These will be methods which demonstrate a dependence on God in our preaching, on the only One who can save a sinner.⁷⁵ They will be methods which do not urge or coax a person to respond who has not first given evidence of a divinely-wrought sense of need, methods which do not give assurance to a sinner who has not an afflicted conscience.⁷⁶ And we will give proper invitations, not inviting men to come to an altar, but to Christ.⁷⁷

The gospel is “the power of God unto salvation.” All too often modern evangelicals have turned it into “the power of man unto decision.” We must recover the message of evangelism, and understand that true evangelism “preaches the whole counsel of God with explanation and application to sinners,”⁷⁸ which includes preaching on the character of God, the depravity and inability of man, the propitiatory atonement of Christ. And we must trust God by His Spirit to use the message preached to give them new life, to convert them. Sinners must see that their only hope is to call on God to do for them what they cannot do for themselves.

There must be no divorce between biblical theology and the message we give, and the methods we use (cf. I Cor. 2:1-5). We must realize that much of the modern approach to evangelism,

with its techniques and methods, is unnecessary if we really believe in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His application of God's message, and then we must change our methods.⁷⁹

Dr. J.I. Packer's small book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*⁸⁰ (written over 30 years ago!), outlined the truth presented in this article. In it, he included some very helpful questions to ask ourselves in bringing evangelistic methods into line with Scripture. These questions are in need of being asked anew to us today. Starting from the key principle that there is only one method of evangelism—the faithful explanation and application of the gospel message—the test for any proposed strategy, or technique, or style of evangelistic action must be this: will it in fact serve the word?⁸¹ “Is it calculated to be a means of explaining the gospel truly and fully and applying it deeply and exactly? To the extent to which it is so calculated, it is lawful and right; to the extent to which it tends to overlay and obscure the realities of the message, and to blunt the edge of their application, it is ungodly and wrong.”⁸²

In working this out, Packer asked the following of any evangelistic plans and practices:⁸²

Is this way of presenting Christ calculated to impress on people

that the gospel is a word from God?

Is this way of presenting Christ calculated to promote, or impede, the work of the word in men's minds?⁸⁴

Is this way of presenting Christ calculated to convey to people the doctrine of the gospel, and not just part of it, but the whole of it?

Is this way of presenting Christ calculated to convey to people the application of the gospel, and not just part of it, but the whole of it?

Is this way of presenting Christ calculated to convey gospel truth in a manner that is appropriately serious?⁸⁵

In another place, Packer asks other penetrating questions which can help us:⁸⁶

1. Do I believe the historic biblical question of ruin, redemption, and regeneration?
2. Do I hold to the vital necessity of conversion?
3. Am I as real as I should be in choosing means (means fitting correct theology) to the end that I desire, and am charged to seek, namely, the conversion of souls?

4. Am I to be primarily and almost exclusively concerned with evangelistic campaigns and with the attempt to make them more efficient by new methods and techniques? Or should we not concentrate more, as the church has done throughout the centuries, upon praying for, and laying the basis of Christian instruction for, revival as it is described in the Bible?

The work of evangelism is a great and glorious work. The Church corporately and Christians individually have the wonderful privilege and the awe-inspiring responsibility of being involved in this mission. May our message be the whole counsel of God, and may our methods be consistent with the message.

Notes

¹ For a good discussion of the nature of true revival as a sovereign outpouring of the Spirit of God see David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Crossway, 1987); see also the writing of Jonathan Edwards, the theologian of revival - *Works* 1:344-364, 365-430, 532-619, 234-343; 2:257-277.

² In his forward to E. Elliot, *No Graven Image* (Crossway, 1982), p.vii.

³ For example: Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Banner of Truth, 1972); James Adams, *Decisional Regeneration* (Sword & Trowel, 1973); R.B. Kuiper, *God-Centered Evangelism* (Banner of Truth, 1966); James A. Stewart, *Evangelism* (Revival Literature, 1955); J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (IVP, 1971).

⁴ *What's Wrong with Preaching Today?* (Banner of Truth, 1970), pp. 16, 17.

⁵ "We simply cannot understand how we sinned in Adam; the Bible does not tell us. Nor can we understand how the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to us; the Bible does not answer this question either. What the Bible does tell us is that we sinned in Adam, and that the guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed to us; further than that we should not go. Sin remains a mystery, not only in its

commission but also in its transmission." - A.A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Eerdmans, 1986), p. 157.

⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1941), p. 244.

⁷ This has been spoken of as the "total depravity" of man and means that the inherent corruption extends to every part of every person. For a clear brief discussion see A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Banner of Truth, 1972), pp. 328-9. Note the following concise comment by Donald Bloesch [*Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (Harper and Row, 1978), I:90]: "In the perspective of biblical faith total depravity can be thought of as having four meanings, all of which are valid. First, it refers to the corruption at the very center of man's being, the heart, but this does not mean that man's humanity has ceased to exist. Second, it signifies the infection in every part of man's being, though this is not to infer that this infection is evenly distributed or that nothing good remains in man. Third, it denotes the total inability of sinful man to please God or come to Him unless moved by grace, though this does not imply that man is not free in other areas of life. Fourth, it includes the idea of the universal corruption of the human race, despite the fact that some people and cultures manifest this corruption much less than others."

⁸ *Christianity Today*, vol. 13, no. 17 (May 23, 1969), p. 13.

⁹ See Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Victor Books, 1986), pp. 218-219.

¹⁰ Hodge, *Outlines*, p. 339. Pages 325-347 contain a succinct discussion of these concepts.

¹¹ *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (Banner of Truth, 1964), p. 128.

¹² See Martin Luther's masterwork, *Thee Bondage of the Will* (Revell, 1957). For Luther, the doctrine of man's spiritual inability was the jugular vein of Christianity, the essential issue (see page 319); for him, as Packer says in the introduction, "the doctrine of the bondage of the will in particular was the corner-stone of the gospel and the very foundation of faith" (p. 43). For it is only a man who is humbled by his sinfulness and inability who will cry out to God and flee to Christ, the Saviour.

¹³ Biblically, election is that phase of God's eternal purpose whereby He certainly and eternally determines by means of unconditional and loving choice who will believe and be saved. It is not mere purpose to give salvation to those who may believe, but rather it determines who will believe. Cf. Matt. 22:14; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:33; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thes. 2:13; et.al.

Election is not based on anything in man, whether foreseen works or foreseen faith. Neither of these has a basis in Scripture.

For a good discussion of the doctrine of election, see Paul Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Eerdmans, 1985). See especially his summary of the biblical doctrine of election on pages 13-14.

¹⁴ Some reject the biblical concept of effectual calling. They teach that God gives grace to all men to accept or reject the gospel; the ultimate determination in salvation is not God's grace, but man's free choice. Thiessen (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p. 155, original edition) defines this prevenient grace thusly: "God... restores to the sinner the ability to make a favorable response to God. In other words... God in His grace makes it possible for men to be saved." Normally such passages as John 1:9; Titus 2:14; and Romans 2:4 are used to support this notion. Most of the support, however, comes from the belief that effectual calling/grace destroys the responsibility of man, and that a command to believe assumes the ability to do so. Since man is depraved and unable to respond, God must take the action. This he does for all by granting prevenient grace.

In response we note that this "prevenient grace" is nowhere taught in Scripture. In addition, a study of the word "call" will clearly show that those effectually called respond. Romans 8:30 teaches that all who are called are

justified and glorified. Unless we opt for universal salvation, we must recognize that there is a calling which goes out to some, not others, and is effectual, a calling which comes from God as its source.

¹⁵ Canons of Dort, II.5; cf. also III-IV.8.

¹⁶ "Effectual calling is the efficacious summons on the part of God the Father, in accordance with and in pursuance of His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, addressed to sinners dead in trespasses and sins, a call that ushers them into fellowship with Christ and into the possession of the salvation of which He is the embodiment; a call immutable in its character by reason of the purpose from which it proceeds and the bond it effects" [John Murray, *Collected Writings*, (Banner of Truth, 1977) 2:165].

"The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ (John 6:63), by working faith in us (Eph. 2:8), and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling (I Cor. 1:9). Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit (2 Tim. 1:8-9), whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery (Acts 2:37), enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ (Acts 26:18), and renewing our wills (Ezek. 11:19), he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel (John 6:44)" [*Westminster*

Shorter Catechism, questions 30 and 31].

¹⁷ See the excellent discussion of the relationship between the divine and human in D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (John Knox Press, 1981), pp. 163-198.

¹⁸ "Historical and Theological Introduction" to Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, op.cit., pp. 58-59.

¹⁹ "The only thing of my very own which I can contribute to my own salvation is the sin from which I need to be redeemed" (William Temple, *Nature, Man, and God*, p. 401).

²⁰ See Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Baker, 1985), pp. 944ff.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 946.

²² "How much (or, how little) knowledge of gospel facts and truths does one need to come to a genuine conversion? The answer has to be given in functional terms: enough to make one certain, through the Spirit's convincing and convicting action, that one needs a new life that is right with God, and that the only way to have such a life is to trust oneself absolutely to the mercy and direction of Jesus Christ as living personal Saviour and Lord" (Packer, "The Means of Conversion," *Crux XXV.4* (December 1989): 19).

²³ For a good discussion of repentance see William Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance* (Westminster, 1943),

and Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Banner of Truth, 1987).

²⁴ For an excellent statement on the relationship between regeneration (new birth) and conversion (repentance and faith) see Samuel Hopkins, "Regeneration and Conversion," in *Introduction to Puritan Theology* (ed. Edward Hindson [Baker, 1976]), pp. 172-195.

²⁵ See A. Alexander, "A Treatise in Which the Difference Between a Living and a Dead Faith is Explained, 1791," *The Banner of Truth* 335-336 (August/September 1991):39-54.

²⁶ J.I. Packer, *I Want to be a Christian* (Tyndale, 1987), p. 121.

²⁷ What is meant by this witness of the Spirit is not "an impression on the imagination, by some immediate communication from the Spirit, that your sins are forgiven, and that you are a child of God." Rather, it is "an influence of the Spirit of God, exciting such a love for God and Jesus Christ, such clear views of their character, as that the subject of it knows from experience and from Scripture, that he is a child of God and an heir of salvation." The former is often a type of enthusiasm. From Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Banner of Truth, 1987), p. 490.

²⁸ See Robert Law's fine treatment of this theme in his commentary on I John, *The Tests of Life* (Baker reprint, 1968).

²⁹ The contribution of Jonathan Edwards here is helpful and illuminating. Murray (*Ibid.*, pp. 264) ably summarizes some of his thoughts as found in *The Religious Affections* (*Works* 1:234-343):

"Edwards' conviction was that the NT teaches no one experience as being the permanent source of the believer's assurance. One 'witness of the Spirit' is not enough any more than one 'experience' at the supposed time of conversion is enough. For assurance is never to be enjoyed on the basis of a past experience. There is need of the present and continuing work of the Holy Spirit. And this inward work of the Spirit, giving assurance, is not an alternative to the assurance obtained through resting in Christ, or through one 'immediate witness,' rather it is the basis of all true spiritual comfort—a comfort which may exist in many varying degrees of strength. Further, Edwards insists, from Scripture, that action on the part of the believer is involved in order to assurance. Walking in obedience to God and the comfort of the Holy Spirit belong together (Acts 9:31) and, therefore, such assurance as is maintained permanently, without any regard or care for holiness of life, is false assurance.

The 'witness' of the Spirit is never to be separated from the Word of God nor from the evidence of grace in the heart and life."

³⁰ Adapted from A.A. Hodge, *Outlines*, p. 479. See also Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pp. 250-260.

³¹ Packer, introduction to Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, op.cit., p. 60.

³² Ibid.

³³ Chantry, *Today's Gospel*, p. 90.

³⁴ John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Banner of Truth, 1976): 1:125.

³⁵ I am indebted to Chantry for the general structure of these. His discussion of the message of Jesus in the incident of the rich young ruler is insightful in demonstrating the "counsel of God" in evangelism.

³⁶ Chantry, p. 25.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

³⁹ Samuel Bolton, quoted in Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁰ For example, see Clark Pinnock, "Fire, Then Nothing," *Christianity Today* (20 March 1987): 40-41.

⁴¹ For an excellent discussion of the nature of hell, one which does not water down the teaching, see John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Baker, 1980), pp. 49-93.

⁴² There is nothing wrong in employing a "tool" to guide us in, for example, one-to-one evangelism. But experience shows that the "tool," rather than being

a guide in unfolding the counsel of God with proper content and emphasis, usually becomes the message itself. And most such "tools" suffer from the problem of being man-centered.

⁴³ *Knowing the Times* (Banner of Truth, 1989), pp. 5-6.

⁴⁴ Adapted from chapter eighteen of J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Crossway, 1990).

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 294.

⁴⁶ Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Banner of Truth, 1966), p. 104.

⁴⁷ See James Adams, *Decisional Regeneration* (Sword and Trowel, 1973).

⁴⁸ See the Westminster Confession X.1-2 for a concise statement of this relationship.

⁴⁹ *Decisional Regeneration*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans* (Banner of Truth, 1987), p. 19.

⁵¹ Iain Murray, *Forgotten Spurgeon*, p. 104.

⁵² *Quest*, pp. 299-300.

⁵³ See Erroll Hulse, *The Great Invitation* (Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1986).

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

⁵⁵ I. Murray, *Lloyd-Jones*, 2:339.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2:327.

⁵⁷ James Daane, *The Freedom of God* (Eerdmans, 1973), p. 17. He goes on to add: "In the light of this, it follows that

the more [a church is dominated by this type of theology], the more that church will resort to finding ways and means of influencing sinners, and the less faith it will have in its public preaching services and ministry of prayer. In many evangelical church services more time and greater zeal is devoted to the post-sermon appeal to unbelievers than to prayer to God.

“The degree of imposition and manipulation of the sinner’s freedom may at times be minimal, but this is determined more by the personal preferences of the preacher than by theological considerations” (pp. 17-18).

⁵⁸ Lloyd-Jones gives an excellent discussion of this issue, including reasons for not using an altar call, in *Preaching and Preachers* (Zondervan, 1971), chapter 14. See also Hulse, *The Great Invitation*.

⁵⁹ Murray, *Forgotten Spurgeon*, p. 105.

⁶⁰ I. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith* (Banner of Truth, 1990), 2:726. For a concise statement of the biblical doctrine of assurance, see the *Westminster Confession* 18.1-4.

⁶¹ Chantry, p. 54. Regarding this issue of “categories” of Christians, J.C. Ryle noted (*Holiness*, Revell, n.d., p. xv.): “The Word of God always speaks of two great divisions of mankind and two only. It speaks of the living and the dead in sin—the believer and the

unbeliever—the converted and the unconverted—the travellers in the narrow way and the travellers in the broad—the wise and the foolish—the children of God and the children of the devil. Within each of these two great classes there are, doubtless, various measures of sin and of grace; but it is only the difference between the higher and lower end of an inclined plane.

Between these two great classes there is an enormous gulf; they are as distinct as life and death, light and darkness, heaven and hell. But of a division into three classes the Word of God says nothing at all!”

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶³ “Many talk now-a-days about ‘Consecration’ who seem to be ignorant of the ‘first principles of the oracles of God’ about ‘Conversion’” (Ryle, *Holiness*, 5th ed. 1900, p. viii).

⁶⁴ Adapted from Ernest Reisinger, *The Carnal Christian* (Banner of Truth, n.d.).

⁶⁵ Stewart, *Evangelism*, pp. 7-21.

⁶⁶ In much evangelism today “there is a tendency to employ the methods of modern business, high-pressure advertising, public opinion polls, mass suggestion, and success stories to swing the masses into the church [or at least to make them come forward!]. The danger of this technique lies in the subtle [or not so subtle] emphasis from the objective truth of the Christian Gospel

to its pragmatic value to society. The result... is to transform the Gospel challenge of 'repent and believe' into the cynical technique of 'How to Win Friends and Influence People'." [quoted in Stewart, p. 22].

⁶⁷ "All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likeness is superficial; the differences, fundamental.

"From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique—a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. This new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis not as before.

"The old cross would have no truck with the world. For Adam's proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. It carried into effect the sentence imposed by the law of Sinai. The new cross is not opposed to the human race... It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure...

"The new cross encourages a new and entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist... preaches not contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that

Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level. Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

"The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him... It saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, 'Come and assert yourself for Christ.' To the egotist it says, 'Come and do your boasting in the Lord.' To the thrillseeker it says, 'Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship.' The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.

"The philosophy back of this kind of thing may be sincere but its sincerity does not save it from being false. It is false because it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross...

"That evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the Bible and cruel to the souls of its hearers. The faith of Christ does not parallel the world, it intersects it. In coming to Christ we do not bring our old life up onto a higher plane; we leave it at the cross. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die.

"We who preach the gospel must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish goodwill between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, the world of sports or modern education. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum."

- A.W. Tozer, *Man: The Dwelling Place of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1966), pp. 42-44.

⁶⁸ There is nothing wrong with mass evangelism (there is clear instance of it in the NT!), and it should be encouraged. But its message and methods must be biblical. And any groups or associations conducting it should not depreciate or replace the local church: the church is the God-ordained agent of evangelism (Matt. 28:19; Acts 13:1-4).

⁶⁹ "The idea of training people to do evangelism is new and modern" (I. Murray, *Lloyd-Jones*, 2:579). True Christian testimony is spontaneous; there is something within which urges and compels.

⁷⁰ Packer, *Quest*, p. 36; I. Murray, *Lloyd-Jones*, 1:202ff. See also the books cited in endnote 1.

⁷¹ See his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Cambridge, MA, 1960).

⁷² Chantry, p. 82.

⁷³ Packer, *Quest*, p. 300.

⁷⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *True Evangelism* (Zondervan, 1919, 1967), p. 75. See also the comments by Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (London, 1967), Vol. 2, p. 13; and Packer, *Quest*, pp. 163-4.

⁷⁵ See Chantry, chapter 6.

⁷⁶ Chafer, p. 76. See the masterful and insightful work by Robert Bolton, *A Treatise on Comforting Afflicted Consciences* (reprinted from the 17th century edition by Soli Deo Gloria, Ligonier, PA, 1991). He shows us how to avoid giving false assurance as well as how to give proper and true assurance to those professing Christ.

⁷⁷ See the examples of this in the sermons of Paul and Peter, and in the sermons and writings of great preachers throughout church history who held to the "doctrines of grace" and fervently preached Christ, men like George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and the Puritans. See, for example, I. Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, pp. 100-102; Hulse, *The Great Invitation*.

⁷⁸ Chantry, pp. 91-92.

⁷⁹ For further study regarding these themes, the reader may profitably consult the works of the Puritans, such as those of Baxter, Owen, Sibbes, Bunyan, Flavel, Brooks, Bolton, etc.;

and the writings of John Murray and Jonathan Edwards (especially his *Religious Affections*).

⁸⁰ Intersivarsity Press, 1961

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-90.

⁸⁴ "Is this way of presenting Christ an attempt to move men by the force of feeling, or of truth? Not, of course, that there is anything wrong with emotion; it is strange for a person to be converted without emotion; what is wrong is the sort of appeal to emotion, and playing on emotion, which harrows people's feelings as a substitute for instructing their minds" (p. 88).

⁸⁵ "Is it calculated to make people feel that they are indeed facing a matter of life and death? Is it calculated to make them see and feel the greatness of God, and the greatness of their sin and need, and the greatness of the grace of Christ? Is it calculated to make them aware of the awful majesty and holiness of God? Will it help them to realize that it is a fearful things to fall into His hands?" (p. 89).

⁸⁶ *Quest*, p. 308.