



**A HUMBLE  
EFFORT TO  
PROMOTE  
LOCAL  
EVANGELISM**

**Rev. Paul T. Murphy**

*The following articles were written by Rev. Paul T. Murphy of Messiah's Reformed Fellowship in New York City, and originally appeared in Christian Renewal over many months. We are pleased to offer them together in this bound edition for the glory of God and the encouragement of believers in order for us to accomplish, by the grace of God, the very things we are called to do in these pages.*

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## **A Humble Effort To Promote Local Evangelism**

There are many who *could* address this topic. However, I have heard far too many people address this subject in an academic and doctrinaire way. This demonstrates that not all *should* address this topic. Thus I begin by stating my qualifications and experience. I have been an elder or pastor in our churches for over twenty years. Ever since my conversion I have had a burden for evangelism and to see lost people come to Christ as Savior and Lord. I have been involved in evangelistic enterprises all my Christian life. I have served my local congregation efforts, my seminary while in attendance, have taught seminars, trained people, am now a church planter in New York City, and seeking to see evangelism done in local congregations throughout the URC.

I have been a member and officer in Dutch Reformed churches for that whole time. I mention that because I want you to know that my comments and observations, while at times challenging and critical, come from my personal and pastoral experience. I address shortcomings and omissions in our midst towards the end that we are more balanced in our ministries and more useful to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. Having said all that allow some preliminary observations.

Most congregational growth in our circles has been biological (having lots of kids) and transfer (members from other congregations) growth. While these are generally referred to in a disparaging and dismissive manner, I want to affirm them.

Very often biological growth is jokingly called, “Dutch evangelism.” It is no joke. Since the great commission calls us to make disciples, what better way than to have children

and raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord? This is simply consistent with the design of the covenant. God is a God to believers *and* to their children. God ordinarily works in the line of families. It has been my delight to meet many families who can trace back the faith for multiple generations. One man told me that Christianity has been in his family line for 400 years! And that's not all.

In our circles it has been common to retain our youth. This is highly unusual in the North American evangelical context. What is routine is for church youth to leave the faith when they go off to college. This, I think, is not so much the fault of the college (as secular and anti-Christian as they may be). Rather it is most likely the failure of the church to see these children as beneficiaries of the covenant with all its attendant privileges and responsibilities. In our circles much time and energy is expended on the three-legged stool – church, school, and home. There is catechetical instruction through high school years. There is a commitment to Christian education (domestic or institutional) so that children learn to ‘think God’s thoughts after Him and see all of life through the lenses of Scripture, taking every thought captive to make them obedient to Christ. And there is in the home a deep piety affecting the hearts of all within its walls.

Truth be known, the Church in North America would be stronger and better off with far more ‘disciples’ if *every* church has the same emphases and distinctives that we in Dutch Reformed circles take for granted. I am thankful to God for our biological growth!

Furthermore, it needs to be said, that with such emphases and distinctives among us that members time and energy are pulled in different directions than just evangelism. Here we see once more the connection between doctrine and life. Our theology is covenantal and that has implications for how we live, especially with respect to our children. There is need for manpower to teach catechism, populate school boards, give adequate attention to family life, and all this in addition to church life with its committees and councils, etc.

This is contrasted with the typical North American evangelical church where “rapture theology” reigns. In such churches, since they believe that we live on “The Late, Great Planet Earth” (a lá Hal Lindsey), the only thing that matters is getting people saved, plucking brands from the fire, and getting them into the church. Thus all attention, effort, and energy are spent on evangelism. It is the be all and end all of the Christian life. Add to this then the idea that children of believers are not members of the covenant and thus not to be discipled and you have a recipe for aggressive programs of outreach. But you

have little, if any attention on making disciples of those in the church already. Doctrine *does* affect life! Biological growth is a good thing and should be seen for what it is, the blessing of God on the faithful nurture of covenant youth.

What about transfer growth? I think it is okay if and when people in other Christian communions come to Reformed doctrinal convictions that they can find a home in confessional churches. After all, we believe that doctrine unites not divides (contrary to the popular adage – doctrine divides, love unites). We are those who confess the Three Forms of Unity. We are thankful for churches that have confessions where we all confess the same truths. We welcome all those who would confess that the Bible teaches the same things we believe. Praise the Lord that there are places for such people to go. This too is a good thing.

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## **What Needs To Change?**

We have examined and affirmed biological and transfer growth in our midst. This is where most of our congregational growth has come from. While those means of growth may be fine, they should not be the exclusive means of growth in our churches. The Great Commission was given to the Church and the local church must be instrumental in seeing it fulfilled not only ‘over there’ but right here in our own backyards also.

Before we can discuss what needs to change, it is important to diagnose what has gone wrong. A proper remedy depends on a proper diagnosis. Why don’t we see outsiders coming to faith in Christ and joining our congregations? Why, after centuries living here in North America, are most congregations still exclusively Dutch? There are numerous answers to such questions. This series of articles intend to provide answers. But for now, I want to consider just one.

For generations we’ve taught our people to do missions by proxy. By that I mean we have taught them to pray and to pay for somebody else to do missions/evangelism. That is, we taught that evangelism is not the responsibility of every congregation and every Christian. Rather it is the work of those whom we support as ‘missionaries’ or preachers.

Now, do not misunderstand me. I am not advocating some idea like every Christian is a preacher, or every Christian is a missionary. Such ideas fail to recognize that preaching is the task of special office, minister of the Word and that a missionary is also a minister of the Word. The URC Church Order (Art. 47), for example, states “The church's missionary task is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted. When this task is to be performed

beyond the field of an organized church, *it is to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to this labor*, who are called, supported and supervised by their Consistories. The churches should assist each other in the support of their missionaries” (emphasis added).

I want to affirm that there is a difference, a distinction between witnessing and preaching, between evangelizing and preaching. A preacher/missionary is a man called and ordained by the Church to be a mouthpiece for Jesus Christ. He speaks *for* Jesus Christ as such. The Second Helvetic Confession says, “the preached Word of God *is* the Word of God”. That task is only for those men who are ordained ministers of the Word.

However, that is not to say there is no place for the layman, the person in the pew. And *that* has been our error. We have left the task solely to the Clergy. And that is a huge mistake.

I immediately want to add that we have been very good at doing missions by proxy. The support for missions among our people is exemplary and unmatched. The financial and prayerful support for the cause of missions is great. That is, we have done what we were told, and we did it very well. That is a powerful testimony to our devotion, gratitude, and obedient response to teaching/preaching. Such a response makes me optimistic that a similar response will meet the instruction to witness and evangelize locally.

Now is the time for every congregation to fulfill its responsibility to the Great Commission in their own community. Now is the time for every Christian to be mobilized for witness. Now is the time for every Christian to be equipped and expected to tell others about the Savior and His saving message.

This begins with expectations. Every church should be a missionary church seeking that the gospel is spread and converts made in it’s own community as well as ‘over there’. It should also be expected that every Christian is to be a witness for the Gospel.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:16, 17).

God is a missionary God. God the Father is a missionary Father, who sent a missionary Son (whose purpose, John tells us is the world's salvation). And together they sent a missionary Spirit Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit... (John 20:21-22) Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. (Acts 2:33) So that, from Pentecost forward, He might equip, empower, and enable His Church to be a missionary Church. Mission is at the heart of God, is the penultimate purpose for which the Church exists (worship being first & foremost), and must capture the heart of every congregation and every Christian.

We must create a culture of evangelism in our congregations. Mark Dever explains, "I mean an expectation that Christians will share the gospel with others, talk about doing that, pray about it, and regularly plan and work together to help each other evangelize. We want evangelism to be normal-in our own lives and in our churches" (*The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, 17).

This starts with the expectation that every church should grow and reproduce not only biologically but with conversions. We need to dispense with the distinction between maintenance churches and missions churches. Every church is to be a missionary church spreading the Gospel in its community and seeking the conversion of the lost there. This will best occur when it occurs organically in the life of her members rather than through some top-down programs (more on this in another article). That will require yet one more expectation.

We must expect that it is every Christian's responsibility to witness for the Lord and to the Gospel. The Gospel spreads officially and unofficially, through ministers and members, by speaking *for* Christ and speaking *about* Christ, by preaching and by witnessing, in the pulpit and outside the walls of the church.

This ought to be common knowledge for those nurtured in the Heidelberg. Question 31 asks why Jesus is called Christ and tells us it is because He has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our Prophet, Priest, and King. Then, in its inimitable fashion, Heidelberg 32 asks why we are called Christian. It answers "Because by faith I am...a partaker of His anointing, in order that I also may confess His Name...." Note well, every Christian by virtue of his union with Christ is a prophet, priest, and king. And note

especially that part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian is to have a *prophetic* responsibility! We are to confess His Name to others.

This is talking about the forgotten office, the office of believer. To give verbal testimony to the faith, to be a verbal witness for Christ, to open our mouths and speak for Jesus is *by definition* part of what it means to be a Christian! A silent Christian, a non-witnessing Christian, a Christian not telling others about Christ and the Gospel is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron. In fact, according to the Heidelberger, it is to be less than a Christian!

This addresses a common objection heard by me from many when it comes to evangelism. The objection is “Well, evangelism is not my gift.” My answer is “So what?” While one may or may not have the gift of evangelism, The Heidelberger informs us that this is not a matter of giftedness. Rather it is a matter of office. As believer we are to be prophets, priests, and kings.

Heidelberger asks in question 86, “...why must we do good works?” and it answers, so that “...by our godly walk win also others to Christ.” Now, in this area we actually do quite well. I often hear people say, “I witness by my life.” That is very important, and I am thankful for those Christians who exhibit godliness and sanctification in their daily lives. In our churches are some of the finest examples of Christian piety and godliness that exist.

But let me ask you-how does anybody know why you live like that? How do they know you are not a Mormon, a member of some fanatical, fundamentalist sect, or something similar? They do not. They will only know if you tell them. You see word *and* deed are meant to go together. By life *and* lips we witness for our Lord. The catechism presents for us a beautifully balanced picture of the Christian life. It needs to be both not just either one or the other.

So, what needs to change in order for us to see outsiders come to saving faith in Christ? The expectation that every church and every Christian must own this responsibility. How to make this change?

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### **How To Make Changes?**

In order for us to see local churches fulfill the Great Commission we need to make changes. Specifically, we need to change the expectations of the local church and her members. Every church is a missionary church and every Christian is to give verbal witness for Christ. But how can those changes be made? Let's consider that.

Change should start with leadership. The Council must provide leadership to the congregation in this matter. Each office can contribute to creating a culture of evangelism in the congregation.

Pastors can do so in various ways. Of course, there can be evangelistic services held for the community. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones used to hold regular services that were evangelistic in nature, different from "called worship" for God's people. Mark Dever has helpful a suggestion when he states, "Make sure your sermons both instruct people about the gospel and appeal to people to respond to it."<sup>1</sup> The preacher should be available after the service to talk to people who have just heard God speak to them.

Congregational prayer is a wonderful way to keep the evangelistic obligation before the congregation. Pray for the lost, pray for missions and missionaries, pray for the hearts of congregants that they would have the heart of God for the lost, pray for opportunities and open doors for the gospel, for courage to take advantage of those times. Pray for family

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, 116.

members or congregational members who may be wandering sheep. Pray with passion and conviction so that people sense the burden.

The evangelistic task should be constantly held before the congregation's members so they see it is not an option but an obligation. Catechism classes, profession of faith classes, house visitation, and new members' classes are all opportunities to promote a culture of evangelism. Here's an idea – aim intensely for the next generation. I believe it is better and easier to instill and inculcate this into them than it is to try and change the present generation. Some ideas? Why not add a field educational component to catechism? Let the young people (high school students) go to a local mission work and participate. Send young people to one of our many mission fields to conduct evangelism. I have personally seen this revolutionize lives. We tend to under utilize the younger members of our congregations. They too are members of the church and should be expected to assume their responsibilities as such, including evangelism.

Of course, we could better utilize the senior members of the congregation also. They are often the ones with discretionary time and are an enormous resource of experience and wisdom. What a potential asset to be tapped for evangelistic use!

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:5 states that ministers must “do the work of an evangelist.” So preachers should lead by example and consistories should ensure that the minister is not so overwhelmed with caring for the flock that he has no time for evangelism. In many of our towns the minister is still a respected member of the community. He can build relationships with outsiders in the hope of having them come to worship and also to faith in Christ. The minister should equip the saints to evangelize (Ephesians 4:12).

Elders also play a role in cultivating a culture of evangelism. 1 Peter 5:3 says elders are to “be examples to the flock...” As the “fathers” of the congregation (1 Timothy 3:5) they ought to see that they are good examples in every area of life, including evangelism. The credentials submitted at Classis meetings ask every council if the elders engage in and promote the work of evangelism. Clearly, it is a responsibility of the elders.

One of the qualifications for elder is that they be hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2). I think this is fascinating. In being hospitable, elders have the opportunity to show visitors and outsiders what a Christ-centered home looks like. I have had the privilege to be in many of our people's homes over the years. They are usually stellar examples of Christianity.

Order, peace, respect, love, kindness, piety are all clearly evident in those homes. What an amazing testimony to the grace of God! Compare that to the homes of unbelievers where chaos reigns, selfishness prevails, and disharmony is the rule. There could not be a more stark contrast. By just having unbelievers in your home, without saying a word you are showing people what difference Christ makes in the lives of His people. They will be led to ask you for the reason for the hope that you have (1 Peter 3:15). The elders should be leading the charge to invite people into their homes. When visitors attend worship they should always have hospitality offered to them. It is a powerful witness!

Deacons too are instruments to develop a culture of evangelism in the congregation. As Nelson Kloosterman has correctly noted (in his lectures on office bearer training), deacons are stewards of congregational resources. The deacons should be aware of the gifts, talents, and abilities of the members. These then can be mobilized for ministry in service to the community. Diaconal ministry can be an effective outreach arm of the church. I will address this more in future articles. For example, deacons can conduct mercy ministry, financial stewardship, ESL (English as a second language) classes, and citizenship classes. Of course, this should all be done wedding word and deed. But it should be done. And the deacons can be the overseers to see it completed.

I trust you can see how such changes would alter the ‘infrastructure of the local church? Implementing such changes would go a long way to creating a culture of evangelism. But what about members? What can they do?

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## What Needs To Change? (Part Two)

We have been discussing the need for personal evangelism in the local church. What we need to see in our churches is more effort expended in our communities to win people to Christ as Lord and Savior. We have previously discussed what needs to change in our churches. I would like to start addressing *what needs to change in YOU*.

There must be a personal element to evangelism. This begins with each of us programming our hearts. *Please*, do not focus on programming your church. Instead focus on programming your heart. If your heart is not inclined towards people and desirous of their salvation then all the programs in the church will not help. *But*, if your heart is in the right place then you will not need to rely on programs because it is something that will flow from who you are. “Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men... for Christ’s love compels us...” (2 Corinthians 5:11, 14). We need to be conduits of the love of Christ to others.

Allow me to begin by speaking of motivation. What is it that should motivate you to evangelize?

1. *Fear of man*. Well, in my experience, what hinders most people is a negative motivation i.e. the fear of man. We fear man more than we fear God. The fear of man can either be a fear of what others think of us or will do to us, or a craving for approval and a fear of rejection. We do not evangelize and share our faith because we don’t want people to think we are religious fanatics, or rabid fundamentalists, or Bible thumpers.

However, we need to replace the fear of man with the fear of God. What does God think should be the dominating sentiment of our hearts? For an in depth discussion of this I would recommend Ed Welch's book *When People are Big and God is Small*. It is an excellent analysis and remedy for the fear of man.

2. *The love of Christ*. It should be the confession of every believer that "Christ loved me and gave Himself for me..." (Galatians 2:20) It is that personal apprehension and appropriation of His marvelous, gracious love that thrills our hearts. We love to sing "And can it be...that thou my God should die for me?" Yet it is just that experience of His love for you that should move you to tell it to others.

3. *The glory of God*. This is the great end of evangelism, its goal. The conversion of people is the penultimate goal. God's glory is the goal because God will be glorified in either of two ways – the salvation of the elect or the condemnation of the reprobate. In being faithful to our calling and office (remember Heidelberg 32, every believer has a prophetic responsibility) God will be glorified. This is the chief end of man so we *must* do this. This was the motivation behind the golden age of missions. It was what sent Whitefield across the Atlantic seventeen times. It was what spurred on Spurgeon and others to be such great evangelists. If we are those who truly seek to glorify God above all, then we must be engaged in the evangelistic enterprise.

4. *Obedience*. The great commission has been entrusted to the church. We serve Jesus as our Savior and Lord. Obedience to His commands is not an option but an obligation. Yet most Christians treat evangelism as an optional activity. Many are guilty of the sin of omission in this regard. Yes, let's call it what it is, sin. That alone is hopeful because our Jesus alone can forgive sin and He can grant repentance. Let us express our gratitude to Him by lovingly obeying Him by telling others the good news about Him.

5. *Compassion for others*. We should have the heart of God for others. We should be moved with compassion for those who, unless they repent and believe, will spend an eternity in the torments of hell. Can you really look someone in the eye, see the bankruptcy of their soul, know they are headed for the horrors of hell, and NOT tell them to flee from the wrath to come? How can you NOT tell them where they can find refuge and relief in the shadow of the cross and the empty tomb?

Do you really believe in hell? Do you really believe that God sends unrepentant sinners to hell? For you see, it is the doctrine of hell that provides the great motive for all I have said thus far. Hell awakens us to the fear of God (Matthew 10:28). Hell is what you and I have been saved from by the love of Christ (John 3:16). Salvation from hell makes us debtors to His grace and so we live for His glory and obey Him. Hell's reality makes us moved by compassion for others so that they will not go to that place of eternal torment and woe. Meditate on the doctrine of hell and let it change your heart. Then program your heart for outreach.

## Worship Or Missions?

“Missions exists because worship doesn’t.” so says John Piper. He is right because the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism 1). When men do not do that for which they are created, then they are the objects of evangelism and missions. It is instructive then that the Great Commission is given in the context of worship. “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, *they worshiped him*” (Matthew 28:16-17, emphasis added).

What ought we to learn from this? There is an inherent and reciprocal relationship between worship and evangelism. The relationship is one that needs to be noted because it serves as one of the most potent motivators for evangelism. The goal of missions and evangelism is worship and the end of worship ought to be evangelism.

Ask many people involved in evangelism why they do it and you will most likely hear that they do it to save sinners. But as great an end as that is there is still a greater end, the glory of God. We go forth with the message of salvation not only in order to save sinners but also to bring them in, to give God the glory due His Name. We are not interested in getting notches on our belts or numbers or decisions. Our interest is to have people baptized into a local church and join us for worship. Evangelism should result in God being glorified and enjoyed by redeemed sinners.

But even more important, but most often overlooked, is that our worship ought to lead us to evangelize. Remember Matthew 28? One commentator notes on the text “On mountain

heights heaven and earth, as it were, meet, and here the glorified Savior spoke of His power in heaven and on earth. With the vast expanse of the sky above Him and the great panorama of the earth spread beneath Him, Jesus stands in His exaltation and His glory – a striking vision, indeed” (Lenski). But, friends, we have a more striking vision than that each and every Lord’s day when we assemble corporately for worship. The author of Hebrews explains “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, *to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant*, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Hebrews 12:22-25).

You see, when we assemble for corporate worship we are no longer on earth but in heaven! Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 11:10 when he is talking about worship and says women need a sign of authority on them “...because of the angels”. When we worship we are in the presence of the risen and reigning King of the universe in all of His mediatorial glory, a glory greater even than that of Matthew 28.

Just think of what is actually happening in worship each Lord’s day. Hell deserving sinners are called into the presence of a thrice-holy God, One who is a consuming fire. And yet we are not consumed, but hear instead, “Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you...” The Lord speaks to us His Law to humble and correct us, His assurance to pacify our doubts and fears. He tells us of His love and mercy, we hear of His might and majesty, His glory and grace. Jesus Himself speaks to us through His ordained servant. We sing of all the wonders of the Lord and all He has done for us in Christ. And then to send us on our way, at the conclusion, we hear God’s good Word (*bene-diction*) as He puts His Name on us (Numbers 6:27) until we return to meet with Him next week.

Do you realize this? Are you aware of what is occurring in our Sunday worship? How is it affecting you? How is it motivating you? How is it changing your heart? How much do you want others to know and worship this God?

Corporate worship is an absolutely astounding event. There is nothing like it on earth. Because it is a heavenly event. And that ought to compel, indeed propel, us out the doors of the church into the world to tell others about this great and glorious God! “Let me tell you about this God I just met with. Let me tell you who He is and what He is like. Let me

tell you about His amazing grace and how He has satisfied the demands of His justice so as to be just and the One who justifies (Romans 3:26).”

We see in Scripture that worship is connected to expressions conveying the gospel: “But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more [worship]. My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long [evangelism].... (Psalm 71:14-15). Also Psalm 96:1-4: “Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; [worship] proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples [evangelism].”

“Missions exists because worship doesn’t.” This is so true. My hope and prayer is that our great and rich tradition of worship can be a catalyst for us to be more engaged in evangelism. May the Lord of the harvest bring it to be.

## Personal And Corporate Posture

I must ask you this question– are you putting all that’s been so far into practice? *That* is really the bottom line of the Christian religion after all. Orthodoxy must be accompanied by orthopraxis. We in the Reformed world tend to be cerebral and intellectual. We love to discuss and read about doctrine and theology. But at least as important is putting it all into practice. Jesus taught that only those go to heaven ‘who do the will of my Father in heaven’ (Matthew 7). Paul’s letters are structured by doctrine first then practice. James teaches that ‘faith without deeds is dead’ (2:26).

We cannot settle for saying we are Reformed in doctrine but not in practice. We may not be content with *believing* the correct things unless we are also *doing* the right things. I have previously challenged you that the area of evangelism is a weakness in our churches. We are in need of reformation at just this point. So, come on, get going! Let me help you prepare further for this work.

Here are some preparations for you to become engaged in evangelistic activity.

1. *You must have an infinite capacity for disappointment.* Get ready for this, for it can certainly be one of the most discouraging aspects of evangelism. You will invest time and effort and your heart into somebody only to have them disappoint you. Here is where the sovereignty of God is very helpful. Remember that we are only instruments in His Hands. One sows, another waters, but God gives the growth (1 Cor.3: 7). Jesus taught that He has His sheep out there, and they “must come” (John 10:16). We need to be available for Him to use.

2. *Be patient with people and give them your time.* In our hustle, bustle days perhaps nothing communicates your concern and sincerity more than giving people your time. Most people are not converted in a dramatic moment but it occurs at the conclusion of a series of events or encounters over time. There will be questions asked, baggage dealt with, ‘issues’ of family, history, etc. that may need to be dealt with. Hang in there and demonstrate your sincere concern for their spiritual well being. I have found this to be a valuable asset in my local evangelism. Particularly in New York City where most people won’t give you the time of day, when people see you spending your time with them and for them it makes an impact. Is there a time to stop witnessing? Yes. Jesus teaches that we are not to throw our pearls before swine. Paul at times said “Your blood be on your own heads” and then moved on. When is that point? When the context is examined I would say it is when there is a self-conscious, hostile rejection of the message. At that point you may move on.

3. *You must possess a love for the lost.* How do you get that? First, you have to see yourself as a sinner deserving of nothing from God but His wrath and judgment. You and I are sinners saved by grace alone. There was nothing we did or that we are, in ourselves, to commend us to God. How you see yourself will affect how you see others. You cannot be self-righteous and be an effective evangelist. Do you see ‘sinners’ as beneath you or less than you? Or do you see them with eyes of pity and compassion as those who are ‘lost’? Just think of what that term really means, lost in this life and lost for all eternity unless they repent and believe in Jesus.

Second, you need to see them as those who will suffer the horrors of hell for all eternity. Meditate on the doctrine of hell, pray as you consider it. It is truly frightening! I hope it will affect you so that you will never look at a person in the same way again. Can you look at them, know that hell is their destiny (apart from Christ’s blood and righteousness), and remain unmoved? Remember, hell is what you were saved from in God’s infinite and incomprehensible grace. Don’t you want that for others?

4. *You must make room for sinners in your congregation.* I thank God for the treasures and traditions He has given us in our churches. There is over 400 years of faithful Christian influence and culture. I have benefited immensely from my own association with the Dutch Reformed. But you know what? New converts do not have that. It is unrealistic and unreasonable to expect them to be ‘up to speed’ on the culture of our churches! Those things with which you were raised and which you might take for granted are totally unfamiliar to a new convert. They need to be lovingly taught and brought up to

speed on many things. We have riches to share but until they get it, what is called for is longsuffering.

How would somebody be received in your church if they came into the narthex with a McDonalds coffee cup? Or if they were in a t-shirt and cut-off jeans? Or if they had tattoos and piercings all over? Come on now, be honest. If Samson, Barak, Jephthah, and Gideon can be found in the hall of fame of faith then I suggest that sinners should be welcomed into our midst. If the Bible teaches us anything it is that saving grace and massive imperfections can co-exist in the same person (e.g. David).

5. *Create a welcoming atmosphere for visitors at worship.* Have you ever been a first time visitor to a strange church? It can be intimidating. You know nobody, are unfamiliar with how to act, and ignorant of how to worship. Yet we often expect visitors to be on the same page as the rest of us!

Be sensitive to such people and put yourself in their shoes. Make sure they get introduced to people, help them during worship (where in the Bible is Haggai? which hymnal are we using?), extend an invitation to coffee or even lunch after worship, make sure that they are included in the conversations (not everybody can play Dutch bingo!). It would be a good exercise for you to visit a strange church just to know what it is like. Then you can better identify with visitors.

Let the words of a familiar hymn be your prayer:

*O lead me, Lord, that I may lead  
The wandering and the wavering feet*

*O use me, Lord, use even me  
Just as Thou wilt, and when, and where.*

## What Is The Great Commission?

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20)

We all know it, we have heard it many times, we sing about it, read about it, and yet we may yet have a lot to learn about it. I would like to explore this commission, given by the risen Christ to His Church in order to help promote more evangelism in our local churches.

If Christianity depended on what you in your local church did in the next generation, would there be Christianity in the next generation? That question puts you in the sandals of the disciples as they heard Jesus speak these words to them. You see, you (in your church) need to take ownership of the Great Commission as if you were the only Christians alive. This is an obligation *not* an option. You need to stop treating this as an elective on the course selection sheet of the Christian life, as a choice from column A or B in the Chinese restaurant. You need to take this much more seriously than ever before.

I will examine this commission in its various parts, starting by looking at the comprehensiveness of the Great Commission (hereafter GC).

Note the global language Jesus uses “ALL authority, ALL nations, ALL things (everything), ALLways”. The GC aims at the comprehensive application of Christ’s authority over men through conversion. Jesus claims unlimited authority in every area of life and every realm (in heaven & on earth). The gospel is decidedly THIS worldly and has consequences for all of life. As our forefather Abraham Kuyper said, “there’s not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine, this belongs to me.’”

In Galatians 3:8 we read “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you.”” When Matthew begins his gospel account he tells us “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham...” What Matthew is going to record for us then is how Jesus, as the son of Abraham, is going to fulfill the promise of Genesis. So then it comes as no surprise that Matthew concludes his gospel narrative with the Church being commissioned by Jesus as His instrument in the world by which *all nations will be made His disciples*. The promise to Abraham will be fulfilled as the Church propagates the gospel so that the blessing for all nations comes to pass. Here we also see Psalm 2:8 come into play “...I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. “What an encouragement – Jesus is not sending His Church on a fool’s errand. He is not commissioning us to a doomed effort. He is enlisting us as His people to take His message to His world for His glory.

*Crowns and thrones may perish,  
Kingdoms rise and wane,  
But the church of Jesus constant will remain.  
Gates of hell can never gainst that church prevail;  
We have Christ’s own promise, and that cannot fail.*

[Onward Christian Soldiers]

So what are you waiting for? Why are we not reaching our communities with the good news? If Christianity depended on what you in your local church did in the next generation, would there be Christianity in the next generation?

## What Is The Great Commission? (Part Two)

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20)

Last time we considered the comprehensive character of the Great Commission (GC). We saw that Jesus aims at the comprehensive application of His Lordship through men's conversion. But now we want to ask - What *is* Jesus actually commissioning His Church to do here? What is it He wants her to do? What *is* the GC?

When the text is examined we see that there are three participles, *going* (obscured by the NIV), *baptizing*, and *teaching*. Many in the Christian Church have focused on one of these three as constituting what it is that Jesus wants His Church to do.

1. *Going*. There are churches for which the whole of their existence is going. For them evangelism is the reason for being the church, it is the only thing that matters. Plucking brands from the fire is almost all that they care about because Jesus told His Church to be a going church. These churches care little about anything else other than evangelism. (Most often this is the result of a Rapture mentality. Christians who believe in the Rapture, as popularly taught in Dispensationalist circles, think that the world is going to hell on a greased slide, that satan is in control of the planet, and that the best thing that could happen is for Christians to get raptured out of here and go to heaven to be with

Jesus. Such thinking has resulted in a de facto abandonment of any activity other than evangelism since we “should not polish brass on a sinking ship”. Thus all non-evangelistic causes are frowned on or dismissed as irrelevant.)

2. *Baptizing*. For these churches liturgy is the most important thing, their reason for being as a church. Go to such congregations and the focus is on worship, liturgy, smells and bells as the main purpose for which Christ constituted His Church. Other aspects of the churches life are relegated to minority status if anything.

3. *Teaching*. Here we come closer to home. For these churches the main thing is doctrine, teaching, confessions, sound preaching, catechetical instruction, confessional integrity. They are the most important things in the churches life and the reason Jesus called His Church. These churches are so focused on *protecting* the truth that they have lost sight of the need of and command to *propagate* the truth. I would think that many of my readers find themselves here rather than in the former two categories.

Now, do not misunderstand me. It is not that any of the above three are unimportant. However there is the always-present possibility of becoming unbalanced in our view of the Church’s task. But note well, none of the above three are what constitutes the GC. When we look at the text we can see that the main verbal command in the GC, as spoken by our Savior, is to *make disciples*. What is it that Jesus commissioned His Church to do? *Make disciples*. What about the three participles? Well, they are the how to. The main command is to make disciples and the participles tell us how we are to do that, i.e. by going, baptizing, and teaching. Understand now? Let’s examine this more closely.

What is discipling? I would define it as follows: turning people *from* sinful rebellion against God to a faithful commitment to Jesus Christ. You can hear faith and repentance are included in that definition. They are essential for one to be a disciple. You can also see how the comprehensiveness of the GC is addressed here too. That is, the disciple is to be obedient to Christ in all of life, not just a limited area.

How are we to accomplish this task and so be faithful to the GC Jesus gave His Church? By going, baptizing, and teaching.

First, we make disciples by going. This is a radical change from how God instructed His people in the OT to relate to the peoples and nations around Israel. In the OT God

instructed His people to be racially, ethnically, and geographically distinct, separated, and segregated from the peoples around them. The nations were to *come to them* and see how they lived according to the commands, precepts, and directives of the Lord. Then when the nations saw how they lived they would be impressed. This can be seen in Deuteronomy 4:5-6:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

You can see how radically Jesus changes the relationship of His people to the peoples around them in the New Testament. Now, the Church is to be in the world though not of the world. The antithesis between Church and world is no longer *where* we live but *how* we live. No longer are we to be segregated and separated from the world by ethnic, racial, or geographic boundaries. Rather we are to be in the world in order to *win* the world for the Lord.

I think the point should be plain. For all the good that Abraham Kuyper taught I, along with Cornelius Van Til, think he was wrong here. He taught that the antithesis was a matter of segregation and separation. Hence, we have made the mistake of putting the antithesis in the wrong place. I have even heard those in our churches say, "If somebody wants to hear the gospel, let them come to church. It is preached here every week. We don't have to do evangelism." This is a serious error in light of Jesus' coming and teaching in the GC. We must be a going people if we are to be faithful and be used of the Lord to gather in His elect. Evangelism is *NOT* an option but is essential to the life of the Church. We may not be content to solely preserve the truth we must propagate it as well.

Second, we make disciples by baptizing. Simply put, unless a person is baptized into a local Christian Church they should not be considered a Christian. Baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant, the initiatory rite for membership in the Church (see 1 Cor. 12:13), and is thus ordinarily indispensable. I would go so far as to say that evangelism has not accomplished its task unless and until a convert is received by baptism into the Church. Church membership is not optional. One cannot say they love the Head but despise the Body.

In contemporary evangelicalism today this is a glaring omission. Evangelistic crusades and methods commonly omit the necessity of church membership even if they stress baptism. As a result there are far too many “lone ranger Christians” around who profess to have committed to Christ but neither neither neither neither neither worship nor participate in a local church. This is wrong; it is plainly contradicted by what Jesus teaches here in the GC. I don’t care how many sinners prayers have been said, how many times a person has walked the sawdust trail, how many times there have been “all eyes closed, all heads bowed,” unless someone is baptized into a local Christian Church they ought not be regarded as a Christian. Why? Because baptizing is one of the means which makes disciples.

Third, we make disciples by teaching. Isn’t it interesting that the GC is given in educational terms? Christian education is essential to making disciples. That is one thing our tradition has emphasized and rightly so. We should be encouraged that this emphasis has resulted in passing the faith on from one generation to the next. That is we have done a very good job here. When it comes to making disciples of our own covenant youth we excel. Praise the Lord for that! However we cannot rest content with “Dutch evangelism”. We must also gather in those from outside the covenant and make them disciples also.

Allow me to address those who are the disciples made in the covenant. What are you doing with all *your* education? You have been the beneficiaries of Christian education, faithful preaching, catechetical instruction, and family devotions. What are you doing with all of that learning? We are to be conduits of the Lord’s blessings not cul de sacs. What an overwhelming abundance of truth, doctrine, and Bible teaching you have received. What enormous potential you possess to make disciples by teaching them all that you have been taught. Are you teaching others and making disciples?

R.B. Kuiper, in his *The Glorious Body of Christ*, talks about this need through an illustration. He points out that the Sea of Galilee is loved, admired, and enjoyed by many because it is fed by the melting snows of the Lebanese mountains making it a refreshing, beautiful body of water. It, in turn, feeds the Jordan River, which stretches down to the Dead Sea. He then compares that to the Dead Sea. Though it receives and is fed by the Sea of Galilee it feeds no one and nothing. In contrast to the Sea of Galilee it is oily, dirty, stinky, and dead. Do you get the point? One receives and gets but in turn gives and feeds. The other just gets and receives but neither gives nor feeds in return. Which are you? If

the Lord has richly blessed us then that lays upon us the obligation and responsibility to be a blessing to others.

What about you and your church? Are you obedient to the GC? Are you making disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching?

## Complications?

Last time we saw that the Great Commission is *to make disciples*. Jesus teaches us that His Church is to do this by *going, baptizing, and teaching*. In this article I want to consider what are some of the complications with why we do not see this happening in our local churches.

1. *Theological complications*. The first complication is neglecting the office of believer. R.B. Kuiper, in his book, *The Glorious Body of Christ*, speaks of this as *the universal office* as opposed to the *special offices* of minister, elder, and deacon. The office of believer is an important component of any church's local evangelism. I think we have hindered our efforts in local evangelism by not emphasizing this. Let me put it this way – it is the responsibility of every Christian, as a Christian, to be a witness for the Gospel. Yet we have left this task largely to the ‘professionals’ i.e. the ministers and the missionaries. This is wrong and in need of correction. We cannot and must not neglect the office of believer if we are to conduct local evangelism in our communities.

As those raised on the Heidelberg we ought to know this responsibility very well. Question 86 states “by our godly walk win also others to Christ.” Question 32 states I am called a Christian “Because by faith I am a member of Christ and thus a partaker of His anointing, in order that I also may confess His Name...” Notice that therefore by word and by deed, with speech and with conduct we are responsible to let others know about Christ, the faith, and the message of salvation. Failure to do so means we are less than Christian! By definition the Catechism teaches that this is part and parcel of what it means to be a believer. This is your responsibility, your duty, part of your thankfulness to

the Lord for His mercy and grace to you in Christ. Why then are so many silent? Can you see why this is a huge complication?

The personal character of evangelism is important. Carl Henry affirms this “*A one to one approach, initiated by every believer, still holds the best promise of evangelizing the earth*” (emphasis added). Kenneth Scott Latourette, a Yale historian adds historical perspective: “*The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession, but men and women who carried on their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those they met in this natural fashion*” (emphasis added). Peter DeJong, my predecessor at Dutton Church and a veteran missionary of foreign and home missions efforts said, “*One of the biggest handicaps to our local evangelism programs is often the indifference of our members to their missionary calling and their failure to welcome those who do come into our worship from outside. On the other hand, one of the biggest factors in the success of winning people has often been either interest of a Christian neighbor who tried to reach them, rather than the efforts of a busy minister*” (emphasis added). Amen, sir!

This is confirmed by statistical evidence. The influences that lead people to eventually become members of churches are:

Pastor’s influence: 3-6%

Sunday School programs: 4-5%

Diaconal ministries: 3-4%

Visitation programs: 3-6%

Crusades & revivals: .001%

Family and friends: 75%

Isn’t that astounding? The majority of people who come to faith and church membership have that happen through already established relationships! That sounds very covenantal and ought to be right up our alley as Reformed believers (more on this in a future article).

All of this is to stress the need for us to overcome this complication, correct it, and utilize the vast army of evangelists already positioned in our congregations.

## **Complications In Fulfilling The Great Commission (Part Two)**

Last time we considered the first theological complication – neglecting the office of believer. This time we shall consider one further theological complication – the doctrine of election.

You may be familiar with the caricature of Reformed belief by non-Reformed people. They think that we believe that if God elects those who will be saved then there is no motivation to evangelize. It is believed that election makes evangelism unnecessary. While such thinking is wrong (more on this in a moment) there may be good reason yet for non-Reformed people to believe we think that way. For many Reformed believers the doctrine of election is an excuse for evangelistic inactivity. Such inactivity is inexcusable.

Maybe you are like the head of a mission board some years ago. I believe it was William Carey, fired up with a passion for missions and seeking to be sent to the field, made his case to the board. Before a map of the world he beseeched the board “All these nations are without Christ!” The chair rose in reply “Be calm sir, if God wants those people saved He will do so very well without you”

Sadly, there are people like that. However, such thinking is often an excuse for evangelistic lethargy or worse, it is the language of theological ignorance! Reformed theology teaches that along with God sovereignly ordaining the ends of evangelism (the salvation of His elect) He has also ordained the means to that end. A clear example of this is found in Ephesians 1.

This chapter is the locus classicus for the doctrine of election. Throughout Paul stresses the sovereignty of God in salvation. He says in verse 4: “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world; v.5 He predestined us to be adopted.” In verse 11, “in him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.” It is as clear as can be that God chooses, He does it before creation, and this is according to His plan and will not ours. Yet notice carefully what Paul says in v.13, “and you also were included in Christ *when you heard the word of truth, the gospel*” (emphasis added). Those whom God elects come to faith when they hear the gospel, not apart from that. Thus they need to hear it.

Paul, the greatest missionary in church history, did not pit election against evangelism. Romans 10:13-14 is consistent with the above: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" The elect need to hear and then, and only then, will they be brought to saving faith.

Election, far from being an enemy of evangelism, is our greatest asset. Election saves us from despair in our evangelism. Like many other missionaries and evangelists, I experience frequent discouragement from lack of a response to my efforts. But if it is God alone who saves, and the elect have been chosen from before the foundation of the world, then I am not the one responsible for results. Conversion is not the result of the right use of means (as Charles Finney taught); rather, it is the fruit of God’s eternal election. It is, Paul says, “God, who makes things grow” (1 Corinthians 3:7). You and I are simply responsible to get the message out there, scatter the seed, and watch what God will do.

Election also assures that there will be converts. Jesus teaches this in John 10:16: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I *must* bring them also. They too *will* listen to my voice.” The elect must come and Jesus assures us they will come. What hope, what confidence is supplied by this doctrine.

Election also serves to keep us humble and dependent upon the Lord of the harvest. If conversion depends on God’s sovereign work then we must always pray for Him to lead, guide, and use us and His Word through us. Jonah teaches, “salvation comes from the Lord” (Jonah 2:9) This is modeled for us by Paul in Romans 10:1: “My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.” Notice that right in the midst

of those chapters spelling out God's sovereignty in election, Paul states that it was his desire and prayer for the Israelites to be saved. Paul knew that the Kingdom advances on its knees and that he was totally dependent on God's work for his labors to bear fruit. We should do no less. Yet many Reformed people lack fervent prayer for the lost. Perhaps this also is due to a mistaken view of election? More on this in another article.

I hope I have helped you to see that election ought not be a hurdle to overcome but rather a help to spur us onward and outward. So, what are you waiting for?

### **Complications In Fulfilling The Great Commission (Part Three)**

We have seen some theological complications with why we do not see the GC being fulfilled. In this article I want to consider some cultural/spiritual complications.

1. *Too many of us are insulated and isolated from unbelievers.* We have mistaken the antithesis as metaphysical instead of ethical (*not* where we live *but* how we live). Many have confused faith identity with ethnic identity (“If you’re not Dutch, you’re not much”).

Of course, we have jobs that take us on our daily forays into ‘the world’. But we have few, if any substantive relationships with unbelievers. We exist for the most part in a holy huddle with little contact with those who are without God and without hope in the world. But you cannot be the salt of the earth or the light of the world if you are enclosed in a holy huddle.

This often begins in childhood when we teach our children to have nothing to do with unbelievers. Now, do not misunderstand me here. We need to protect our children and I am not talking about sending them as missionaries (as some evangelicals do when they send their kids to public schools). But one’s parental concern can instill wrong thinking and behavior in a child. We need to teach our children to be **IN** the world without being **OF** the world. They should have normal exposure and experience with those in the world. This is an invaluable time to guardedly guide our children and their hearts. Teach them about sin, its effects and consequences, reasons why or why not we have certain

practices. Teach them to have a heart for the lost as they see the ruinous damage sin causes.

The sad fact is that when we are isolated and insulated from the world we often view unbelievers with a superior and negative attitude. We have lost all recognition that “there *but for the grace of God go I*”. So should we not instead be gracious towards others? Of course we should.

2. *Covenant pride and exclusivity are serious impediments to evangelism.* The GC says we are to make disciples of *all nations*. Salvation is by *grace* not *race*. Consider Jesus’ dealing with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus crossed many ‘lines’ in this encounter. He met with a woman. That was a no-no in His day. He met with her alone, which would have been scandalous (until even recently a man alone with a woman would have been highly suspicious). She was from the despised Samaritan half-breeds so race formed no barricade. Yet Jesus not only talks with her but also dignifies her by being vulnerable, making His needs known to her so she can do something for Him.

Or think of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. Jesus there teaches that we are to love our neighbor. He defines a neighbor as anyone in need of our help, even an enemy (as the Law also taught see Ex. 23:4-5). The parable is intended to make the expert in the law (Lk. 10:25) *and us* examine the prejudices in our hearts. After all, it was the Samaritan *not* the Jewish religious leaders who loved their neighbor.

At times I have heard people refer to ‘outsiders’ as “They’re not *our* kind of people” or “This is *our* church”. Some in the past went so far as to institutionalize this in a ‘chapel’ system where those who were not ‘like us’ were directed for worship and church. This is a form of ecclesiastical affirmative action, a dual standard way of doing church. There is one way for us and another for those who are not like us. But we will be separated and segregated in any event. How distorted is that in light of a Gospel which was intended to break down barriers!?

To be evangelistic we *must* have a genuine and sincere love for our neighbor, even our enemies. We want them to come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

3. *Legalism.* I define legalism as putting man’s rules above God’s rules (E.G. the old Fundamentalist ditty “Don’t drink, don’t dance, don’t chew, don’t go with boys that do).

When we require and mandate things that God has not required or when we forbid and prohibit things God has not forbidden then legalism has reared its ugly head. Legalism is a symptom of pride (thinking we know better than God what is right, true, and pure). It is piosity *not* piety. It is really worldliness masquerading as spirituality (see Colossians 2:8, 16, 20-23). This particularly can be a deathblow to evangelism in a church. It is an enemy of the gospel of grace. The more legalistic a church is, the less genuine outreach there will be.

## Complications In Fulfilling The Great Commission (Part Four)

We have been noting some complications with why we do not see the GC being fulfilled. In particular, we considered isolation from the world in a holy huddle, covenant pride and exclusivity, and legalism. Here we will consider one other complication.

*Pride and self-righteousness are major obstacles to evangelism. They serve to elevate you above everybody else. They deceive you into thinking they are terrible sinners unlike me.*

Jesus dealt with these in the parable of the publican and the Pharisee:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14)

Notice that Jesus tells this to people afflicted with self-righteousness, looking down on all others. Notice also three basic traits of the Pharisee that are problematic: one is pride. He

sees himself as better than most people. Two is a critical spirit. His supposed devotion to God becomes the occasion for a negative attitude toward others. After all *they* are sinners unlike me. Three is a lack of mercy. Yet God wants those who serve Him to show mercy to sinners just as He has done “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6).

Whenever Israel forgot the mercy of God to them they became proud and the Lord had to send prophets to them to call them to repentance. This is no different an issue in the NT. Paul speaks to us Gentiles (who were tempted to boast against the Jewish people) in Romans 11:20 “So do not become proud, but fear.”

Jesus preached the parables in Luke 15 for just such people as you and me.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." *Then Jesus told them this parable.*

Notice what prompts Jesus to tell the parables: people were muttering about His association with sinners. Of course, they would *never* do such a thing. Notice further into the chapter that Jesus states that the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine and goes after the lost sheep until he finds it. You can almost hear the listeners thinking of themselves as the 99 righteous who are not lost, who have no need to repent. That is a self-righteous person. In fact, the real focus of the three parables is the elder brother in verses 25ff. Listen to him: “Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.” The elder brother *is* the one muttering about welcoming sinners. The elder brother is the one who thinks he has never sinned (disobeyed). The elder brother is the one who views his service to his father as slavery!

Here the heart of a proud, self-righteous person is exposed for all to see. They do not know grace. They do not see their own need for grace. They do not know that it is God Himself who rejoices when a sinner repents! The parables teach us that not just sinners but righteous, religious people need the grace of God. That's you and me!

“The face of each one of us is covered with the shame of our own sin. This means that we are never in a position to look down on other people, no matter how serious their sin or false belief. If we were to despise, rebuke, and condemn the people around us, we would be despising, rebuking, and condemning ourselves.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J. Barrs, *Learning Evangelism From Jesus*, Crossway 2009.

What you and I need to constantly remember is that we are sinners, we need the gospel, and we need it every day. It is only when we see our need of grace that we can convey that to others. It is only when we see ourselves as sinners saved by grace that we can communicate grace to others. It is only when we have humble hearts, captivated by the love of God for sinners that we will have God's heart for the lost. Let us pray for such hearts and then pray for God to "use me, Lord, use even me, just as Thou wilt, and when, and where."

### **Correctives For Our Complications**

We have been considering a number of complications with why we do not see the Great Commission (hereafter GC) being fulfilled amongst us. There are others beside the ones we have seen. We shall return to examine them in the future. Now, on a more constructive note, I want to return to the GC and see what Jesus has to prescribe as an antidote to our problems. As our loving Lord He rarely sets forth our sins without also presenting a remedy. And here in the GC He supplies us with much needed help.

In the conclusion to the GC Jesus supplies us with all the confidence we need and most often lack. I have been promoting the task of evangelism since I was converted over twenty-five years ago. In that time I have heard almost every reason (excuse?) there is for why people are not engaged in their evangelistic task. They go something like this – “I wouldn’t know where to start” “I have never been trained” “I do not know my Bible well enough” “I am unaware of answers to their questions” “I wouldn’t know what to say” “I haven’t been to seminary, that’s just not for me” “I do not have the gift of evangelism” “I am too shy to talk to others” “I don’t know how” – familiar? BUT, do you hear a recurring pronoun there? *I, I, I, I, I, I, I – IT’S ALL WRONG!*

No matter how beneficial all those things might be, your confidence must *NOT* come from yourself. Your confidence needs to come from Christ and Him alone. And it is just that confidence that Jesus gives you in the GC. There He promises His Church two things in which they can confidently carry out the task He has commissioned them for. They are *His power* and *His presence*.

1. *His power.* “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...” Jesus here declares His power over all things, in every realm, it is total. In the Greek language in which it was written the word order is emphatic “*given to me...*” Just picture it. Standing there is the resurrected Lord of all. He has just conquered satan, death, and hell. He declares that He has the authority (i.e. power) to do the unthinkable. That is why it is important to note that v. 19 is the conclusion and consequence of His declared power “*therefore go and make disciples of all nations....*” Do you believe Him? Will you? Does that give you confidence? You betcha! So, make disciples!

2. *His presence.* “...and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Having declared His authority, He now delegates it. The Greek again is emphatic: “I with you I am” or we might say, “*I myself am with you.*” What have you got to fear? What reason will you give for inaction? What are you worried about?

One commentator states: “This shows that what would otherwise be absolutely impossible now becomes gloriously possible, yea an assured reality.” This has ever and always been the confidence God gives His servants when He calls them to a task. Moses, Joshua, Elijah, the prophets, and Paul were all given this confidence: “I am with you”; therefore, do not be afraid!

Now, put yourselves in the sandals of these disciples. There you are on the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea gazing out at the vast expanse of the Roman Empire. The religious authorities are opposed to you, as are the political authorities. The powers that be have just crucified your Master and even He has told you to expect the same end. And then He speaks these words to you as He commissions His Church “Make disciples of all *these* nations...” What would you think? What would you, in your heart of hearts, be thinking? I know what I would have thought – “yeah, right” But don’t you see? That is rank unbelief and disobedience when the risen and reigning King of the universe speaks and bids you go.

And that is the only thing stopping His Church today – unbelief and disobedience. Let us do that which we often sing:

*Trust and obey,  
trust and obey.  
There’s no other way,*

*to be happy in Jesus,  
than to trust and obey.  
What He says we will do,  
where He sends we will go;  
Never fear, only trust and obey.*

May the Head of the Church, the Lord of the Harvest, the Commander of the hosts of heaven instill in you confidence, confidence in Him for the task set before us.

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### **Now What?**

We have finished considering the content of the Great Commission (its comprehensive character, constitution, along with some complications with why we do not see it fulfilled; the helpful context of worship, and the confidence Jesus provides). Now what? Well, I want to remind you that this is the responsibility of every Church and every Christian. Every church is to be a missionary church not just those “on the mission field” like us in New York City. And every Christian has the responsibility to witness for the Lord and to the faith.

Every church should grow and reproduce not only biologically but also with conversions. We need to dispense with the distinction between maintenance churches and missions churches. Every church is to be a missionary church spreading the Gospel in its community and seeking the conversion of the lost *there*.

In the book of Acts we see Jesus instructing them, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). This forms the outline for the book. My point is simply that Jesus instructs the Church to begin where they are: in Jerusalem. I suggest that each congregation is to begin in its Jerusalem i.e. its local area of ministry. Where are you members located, where do they live, work, go to school, shop, and mix with others? That is your primary area of responsibility. Every church needs to be obedient to the Great Commission and that includes those in our own backyards.

This should be a priority in our congregations. That priority should be reflected in our budgets, our prayers, and our efforts. Examine the infrastructure of the church to see if it is so. If it is, then praise the Lord and carry on. If not, then adjustments need to be made.

Also it is every Christian's responsibility to witness for the Lord and to the Gospel. The Gospel spreads officially and unofficially, through ministers *and* members, by speaking *for* Christ *and* speaking *about* Christ, by preaching *and* by witnessing, in the pulpit *and* outside the walls of the church.

Each Christian should be praying for and giving towards missions and evangelism. But is also each member's responsibility to witness and testify to the faith and to the Lord. There are a number of passages in the N.T. that demonstrate this.

John 14:12 states, "I tell you the truth, *anyone who has faith in me* will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." What Jesus here means is that there will be a far greater number of conversions and a far wider spread of the gospel than was seen in His ministry. Think of it and you can see it is true. Jesus' itinerant preaching ministry was limited to Israel (roughly the size of New Jersey, 100 by 70 miles) and the majority of His preaching was northern Galilee region. Additionally He did not see huge numbers of people converted. We know that He came to His own (the Jewish people) but they did not receive Him. And when we come to the upper room in Acts there are only 120. While that may not have been the totality of converts, it is no large number either.

Yet all of that changes on the day of Pentecost. Peter preaches in chapter 2 of Acts and three thousand are converted. Acts has often been referred to as the NT book of numbers for all the conversions recorded there. And go back to John 14. Who is it there that will do these even greater things than Jesus? Not just ministers, or missionaries, or ordained people but rather anyone who believes i.e. the regular, pew-sitter.

In Acts 8 :1-4 we read, "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and *all except the apostles* were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. *Those who had been scattered preached the word* wherever they went" (emphasis added). The word for preached here is the word that means "to evangelize." Here we see

that it was not just the Apostles who were engaged in the task of evangelism. Rather it was all *except* the Apostles.

We see something similar in Acts 11:19-21: “Now *those who had been scattered* by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.” Once again it is the average member, not the Apostles who here spreads the gospel.

In 1 Peter 3:15 we read, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” This passage is spoken to all Christians. Its application is universal and indiscriminate. It states clearly that it is the responsibility of every Christian to give verbal witness to the faith when asked. The surrounding context is particularly instructive in that it relates how one lives before a watching world and how that leads to an opportunity to verbally witness (more on that in the next article).

One last passage. In Matthew 5:13-16, we read, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Again we see that these are things that are the responsibility of every believer not just the ordained few.

Although words and deeds are a necessary combination for the believer's witness, for our purposes now it is enough to note that these passages demonstrate beyond doubt that every member must be a witness for the Lord.

Let us start the New Year with renewed devotion and dedication to be faithful to every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord including those about our local church and her members.

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## Salt And Light

*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)*

Evangelism is the responsibility of every believer not just the ordained few. While affirming special office we must not dismiss or denigrate the office of believer, which also has prophetic, priestly, and kingly duties (HC 32).

A Christian's verbal witness is primary in evangelism (the communication of a message). Yet there is another, equally important aspect of our witness i.e. your behavior and conduct before a watching world. It is that which our Lord addresses in the above text.

Jesus says that Christians *are* two things: salt and light. He goes on to say that Christians are to *do* something: let your light shine. For those who have grown up singing the Sunday school ditty, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine," you have probably been accustomed to think of letting your light shine as giving verbal witness. But that is not what Jesus is talking about here. Rather He is talking about your conduct, your behavior, your way of life, your good deeds. Jesus says that people should see how you live in the world. but not of the world, and glorify God. This is something we should be

self-conscious about since it is the most obvious and the most active part of our witness to the world.

Every day you go into the world and have an opportunity to let you light shine. You do so in your communities in social relationships. Think of all the regular contacts you have each week (I am indebted to Jeff Doll of Cornerstone URC in MI for the following lists):<sup>1</sup>

### **Friends & Relatives**

- Fishing/hunting buddies
- Walking/jogging partners
- Sports pals
- Shopping friends
- Classmates
- Team members (bowling, softball)
- Mother's club members
- Golf partners
- Children
- Spouse
- Uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins
- Parents & grandparents
- In-laws

### **Clubs & Organizations**

- Health Clubs
- Sports booster clubs
- 4-H
- Community volunteer organizations/auxiliaries
- Special interest groups

*(Note: You might want to prayerfully consider the possibility of becoming involved with a special interest/hobby group as a means of meeting people to evangelize.)*

### **Neighborhood & Community**

- Neighbors

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<sup>1</sup> This material is featured in RYS's publication entitled "Covenant Evangelism" and is adapted from the "Friend to Friend" program developed by FSI.

- Restaurant workers
- Coffee shop round table regulars
- Barbers and beauticians
- Grocery store personnel
- Postal workers
- Newspaper deliverer
- Teachers and PTA members
- Tutors and music teachers
- Physician and dentist
- Pharmacist
- Chiropractor
- Childcare provider

Consider how Scripture calls us to live before a watching world: “I urge you to live a life *worthy of the calling* you have received” (Eph. 4:1). For all the theological emphasis we place on calling we sometimes forget that we have a calling to a certain kind of life, that we live before a watching world all the time. “Whatever happens conduct yourselves in a manner *worthy of the gospel* of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). What do people see when they observe you at the store, at leisure, at work? “Be wise in the way you act *toward outsiders*; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:5-6). Do you need to watch your mouth in public? Many Christians do. “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you to do, so that your daily life may win *the respect of outsiders...*” (1 Thess. 4:11-12). Notice how the last two verses in particular have reference to outsiders. We are reminded that the world is watching. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). People should see the love of Christ (see verse 34) at work, in practice, when they see how we relate to one another. That can be a powerful witness to the world. In the midst of a pagan society that increasingly is alienated from one another, the love of Christians in the Church can be compelling. It has been the case for us here in New York City. It should be for all churches.

For most of us we spend our waking moments on the job. And Scripture is explicit about that as well. “...so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.” (Titus 2:10) Notice how, in context, Paul is talking about your work life “Teach slaves [read: employees] to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to

please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way..." (vv 9-10). Think of your business relationships:

### **Business/Work Associates**

- Factory/business co-workers
- Salesman and suppliers
- Farm hands
- Veterinarians
- Employer and employees
- Lawyers
- Insurance providers
- Bank attendants
- Mechanics
- Financial/business consultants

The best way to witness on the job is NOT to stop work and spend time in sharing the Bible or praying with a co-worker (except on breaks) BUT to be a good worker! Christians should be exemplary workers. Why? Paul answers "*It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*" (Col. 3:24) We answer to a higher authority than any supervisor on earth. We are to work *Coram Deo* (before the face of God).

Now, returning to Matthew 5: how does this lead people to glorify God? That is where the necessity of verbal witness comes in. It is only when people know *why* we live the way we do that they can give the praise to our Father in Heaven. Otherwise they may think we are members of a cult like Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons or some other religious group. There needs to be a connection between our deeds and our words.

Peter addresses this in his first epistle. "*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have...*" (1 Peter 3:15) The context for this exhortation is replete with comments about how you live. The point is this – when you are living a certain way, in accord with Scripture, when you are conducting yourself in obedience to the Word of God, then people will be lead to ask you "Why?" You will stick out like a sore thumb, people will notice and they will want to know the reason. It is precisely for that reason that Peter says you always need to be

prepared to give verbal testimony to the faith. People will see how you live and ask. You always need to be prepared to answer.

This makes for a beautiful balance between words and deeds, what you believe and how you behave. And both of them are necessary. One, people need to know it is because of Jesus and His Gospel that you behave like you do. Two, our deeds confirm our words by showing that our walk matches out talk. Talk is cheap, as the saying goes, deeds show that the talk is real. Words without corresponding behavior leads to charges of hypocrisy. Deeds without words leads to ignorance of the Gospel as our motivation.

Like the two wings of an airplane, both words and deeds provide balance in our witness. Let us commit to live according to every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God and equally commit to letting people know why we do so. May the Lord bless and use such so that people “...*may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*”

## Resources

Where should you begin to do evangelism? Well, start right where you are! Did you know that you are already in possession of a vast supply of evangelistic resources? Yes, it's true. You just never thought of them in an evangelistic manner. I suspect that most readers have been raised in the church. You have been the beneficiaries and recipients of an enormous amount of teaching, preaching, and instruction. That alone supplies you with a wealth of material with which to begin. Let me explain.

Look at Romans 1:18-21, with which I am sure you are familiar.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men *who suppress the truth* by their wickedness, *since what may be known about God is plain to them*, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although *they knew God*, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.

Paul tells you here that you know people better than they know themselves. This provides an immense advantage over the unbeliever. *You know* that they possess the truth about God but that they suppress it in their love for sin and hatred of God. *You know* that they know God. Not that they possess some idea of a supreme being, a cosmic consciousness, or unmoved mover but they know the true God. How? Because God has revealed Himself

to them in creation (natural revelation). *You know* that they know right from wrong. In Romans 2 Paul says, “the requirements of the law are written on their hearts” (v.15). This knowledge that the unbeliever possesses is what they suppress. They keep trying to push it down and deny it. But they cannot.

Do you see how this makes you know people better than they know themselves? They are in denial of what they know. But you know they know it. It is like a big game of hide and seek. Evangelism is going to the unbeliever and saying “Come out, come out wherever you’re hiding.” This knowledge is like having a thorough scouting report on an opposing team in sports. Scouting reports provide a team with intimate, inside knowledge of how a team works and reacts in varying circumstances. Romans 1 and 2 give you such a report. What an advantage!

Secondly, you should have Heidelberg 1 memorized:

*What is your only comfort in life and in death?*

*That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live unto Him.*

This has to be one of the most beautiful and beloved statements in all of confessional literature. And it can be a wonderful asset in evangelism. I have used this with family (Roman Catholic) and at the hospital where I am a volunteer chaplain. The universal response when it is read is “That is beautiful, where does it come from?” There is something about its beauty, substance, and simplicity that resonate with most people.

Most of you have heard this all your life. You’ve just never thought of it in an evangelistic way. It is a great tool for evangelism. One of the members of our church uses it in postcard format (we have had thousands printed that way). He writes his fee for service on the back and attaches his business label. Now every one of his customers knows Heidelberg 1! I give it to all the patients I visit at the hospital. With a little imagination you too can think of many ways to use this.

Or consider the Ten Commandments. Again this is something you have heard all your life. Most, if not all, of you hear them every week. But do you realize that you can use the law in an evangelistic way? The Heidelberg asks, “How do you come to know your sin and misery?” And answers with “out of the law of God.” In order to show people how great their sin and misery is (one of the three things you must know to die in the joy of the comfort of HC #1) the law of God is an invaluable tool.

The cross means nothing apart from the law. Without the knowledge of the law condemnation the cross will draw sympathy but not saving faith from sinners. It is the sharp needle of the law that makes way for the scarlet thread of the gospel. There is no winsomeness to Calvary until one first experience the terrors of Sinai.

The law shows us ourselves as God sees us, gets us to think of ourselves as God thinks of us. The law shows us our need of salvation and a Savior without which we are lost, hopeless, helpless, doomed, and in need of reconciliation.

It needs to be emphasized that the law can convict sinners but it is powerless to turn them. It is the love and grace of Christ that make the cross attractive. The law without love leads to penance with people thinking they can atone for their own sins. But love without the law leads to cheap grace where people may profess Christ but not possess Him.

Below is a questionnaire<sup>3</sup> based on the Ten Commandments? We have used something like this on the streets in conducting surveys. You might find it useful.

### **GOD’S TEST FOR EVERYONE: MEASURE YOURSELF BY GOD’S LAW**

1. I have never put anything else before God in my life. I have always given God first place in my thinking, affections and actions.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
2. I have never had any wrong conceptions about God nor worshipped Him in a way not recommended by Him. I have always rejected any wrong imaginations or images of God that I’ve seen or thought and refused to remake God according to my liking.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

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<sup>3</sup> From Will Metzger, *Tell The Truth* (IVP 2002).

3. I have never slighted or abused the character of the true God by using His holy name as a swear word or using it in a thoughtless manner, such as by calling myself a follower of God yet not obeying. I have always held the name of God, which signifies His character, in highest respect, invoking it with thoughtfulness and reverence.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
4. I have never done less than a full week's work, and never done any of my normal work on the day set aside to worship God. I have always worked hard and willingly at whatever task is set before me, seeing it as a God-given service each day, and consistently remembered to set apart one day weekly to worship God with others.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
5. I have never disobeyed nor dishonored my parents or any others in authority over me. I have always respected and been thankful for my parents and given them honor and willing obedience, as well as other authorities over me.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
6. I have never murdered anyone nor had hateful thoughts or taken the slightest pleasure in seeing harm done to another human. I have always thought of more of others than I have of myself and practiced the highest regard for human life and justice.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
7. I have never practiced any sexual impurity, either physically engaging in sex before marriage or mentally having impure thoughts about someone. I have always treated other's sexuality with respect and dignity in both my physical actions and mental attitudes.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
8. I have never taken anything that doesn't belong to me nor been deceitful in any attitudes or unwilling to work for my needs. I have always respected the belongings, rights and creations of others and been completely truthful and fair.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
9. I have never lied nor slandered another person or group of people. I have always told the truth in every situation regarding every person I have known.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_
10. I have never been greedy for something that wasn't mine, nor jealous even of the abilities, looks, or status of others. I have always shared and given of my possessions and myself to others and have been thankful in my heart for what they have and content with my possessions and situation.  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

Think of your vast knowledge of the Bible. Then consider how to use its stories in evangelism. People love stories because we are made in the image and likeness of God who gave us stories.<sup>4</sup> Think of the story of Joseph with its intrigue, plot twists, suspense. Or consider Lot and his daughters, a soap opera addict would love that! Or what about the prodigal son in Luke 15? It is one of the most well loved chapters in the entire Bible. The best part is that it is so easy to lead people to Christ as the One to whom all the stories point (Luke 24:27). It's great fun!

Will Metzger is helpful again with stories in the Bible:

**TELLING THE GOSPEL THROUGH STORIES.** Here is a list of passages from the four Gospels that bring out parts of the gospel. After reading the story in the Bible and understanding the main point(s), decide which of the five points of the gospel is being described: (1) the character of God, (2) the high standard of God's law, (3) the breaking of God's law – sin and its consequences of separation, enslavement, diseased heart, (4) Jesus Christ as the achiever of salvation and the focus of faith, or (5) responding to God/Christ by turning and trusting. Next, retell the story to a friend in your own words either by using the biblical characters or by substituting an imaginary (or real) contemporary person. Ask the friend to give feedback about what they understood was your point. Repeat the story to others, saying, "Here's a good story..." *The five stories from the "Come Home" gospel diagram: Acts 17:22 – 34, Mark 10:17 – 27, John 4:4 – 30, John 19:17 – 20; 31, Luke 15:11 – 32.*

Other Biblical stories include the following:

### Matthew

- 11:25 – 30 ~ Little Children and Burdened People (Matthew)
- 13:1 – 9, 19 – 23 ~ Four Kinds of Soil (Responses)
- 14:13 – 21 ~ Miracle of Multiplying Food
- 14:16 – 20 ~ Where Sin Originates
- 14:21 – 28 ~ Need for Humility
- 16:13 – 17 ~ Believing
- 20:1 – 16 ~ Grace, Not Obligation
- 21:33 – 46 ~ Murdering the King's Son

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Pratt, professor of O.T. at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, FL, has written a book entitled, *He Gave Us Stories*. I recommend it.

## **Mark**

- 2:1 – 12 ~ Forgiveness of Sins
- 2:13 – 17 ~ We All Need a Doctor
- 5:1 – 20 ~ Evil Power Is Overcome
- 6:1 – 6 ~ Familiarity Breeds Contempt
- 8:31 – 38 ~ Christ Calls Us to Come and Die
- 12:28 – 34 ~ What Does God Require?
- 12:32 – 37 ~ Warning: Christ Will Return

## **Luke**

- 5:1 – 11 ~ In the Presence of God, I Realize My Sin
- 7:36 – 50 ~ The Result of Being Forgiven Is Great Love for Jesus
- 12:13 – 21 ~ Our Possessions Can Be a Dangerous Distraction
- 12:32 – 34 ~ God's Awesome Love
- 12:49 – 53 ~ The Cost of Following Jesus
- 13:22 – 30 Salvation Is a Time-Limited Offer
- 15:1 – 7 ~ God Is Seeking the Lost
- 16:19 – 31 ~ Not a Miracle but the Bible Will Convict People
- 18:9 – 14 ~ Pride Versus Humility
- 19:1 – 10 ~ A Changed Life Is Evidence of a Changed Heart
- 24:13 – 49 ~ A Dead Man Comes to Life

## **John**

- 1:10 – 14 ~ Reject or Receive?
- 3:1 – 21 ~ Spiritual Rebirth Is Necessary
- 5:24 – 30 ~ Crossing Over from Death to Life
- 8:31 – 36 ~ Truth Sets You Free
- 9:1 – 34 ~ Spiritual Blindness Is Worse Than Physical Blindness
- 20:24 – 31 ~ A Doubter Believes

Think about using Proverbs in evangelism. They are easy to memorize, capture life in a concise way, and reflect common experiences. I remember, for example, when I was working construction for a contractor who was brash and proud. We were in the shop one day when he ordered his secretary to climb a ladder and change a light fixture (something she was ill prepared and even more ill equipped to do). When she experienced difficulties the boss' anger began to rise, he then vented saying "If you want anything done right, you

have to do it yourself. Get down and I will take care of it.” Once on the ladder he found the task more difficult than he thought. As he fiddled with the fixture the ladder began to sway and yes, down it came. As he lay sprawled on the floor I looked at him and said, “The bible says ‘pride goes before a fall’” BINGO! POINT, MATCH, AND SET!

Or another time I met a motorcycle gang member who had been referred to me because I used to ride a Harley. He began to relate to me how his life was a mess, his girlfriend was in a bad way, and he was struggling with addictions. I listened, then said to him “The bible says ‘the way of the transgressor is hard’” He immediately replied “Ain’t that the truth” You see, Proverbs has a way of pinpointing just where a person is in life. They are great lead-ins for evangelism.

If nothing else, please simply invite someone to church. As we have noted in previous articles, worship is a meeting with God where the Lord speaks to His people through the preached Word.<sup>5</sup> That can make a huge impact on a visitor. Don’t worry if he feels a little strange, he should. After all, this is not the local tavern or social club. He is in the presence of the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ! Paul says that such an experience can cause a person to fall down and exclaim, “God is really among you!” (1 Corinthians 14:25) That is one reason why we want our worship to be radically God-centered. We want people to realize they are experiencing something divine.

Please do not be ashamed or embarrassed by your worship services. I have found that many of you think that outsiders will not like it or understand it. That is OK. Make sure you invite them over for lunch or dinner afterwards so you can explain it to them in detail, talk about the sermon, and show them Jesus in all His glory as Savior and Lord.

You see, you already have many tools to use to evangelize. Time to get to work!

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<sup>5</sup> The Second Helvetic Confession (Ch. 1) teaches, “The preached Word of God is the Word of God”. “Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good.”

## **Sound Literature**

In order to do evangelism you should be properly prepared. You need to have decent, sound literature, you need to prepare your heart, and you need to pray.

### **SOUND LITERATURE**

Every church should have a literature ministry. This serves at least two purposes. First of all, it edifies the saints. Sound Reformed literature should be available for the members to examine and purchase. This encourages reading, which is a means of renewing the mind (Romans 12:2). And it serves to present to the members reading which has been reviewed and recommended by someone in the church.

Most Christian bookstores are regrettably filled with books that are unsound at best and heretical at worst. Typically, Reformed reading (if present at all) is in a corner and usually slim pickings. Remember that bookstores are in business to make money. They sell what is popular and the Reformed faith is not that popular.

When Christians are reading good books they are learning and growing in the faith. Knowing God and their Bibles better will condition their hearts to be like Gods. Studying theology will better prepare them for life in general and evangelistic work specifically. This will have an overall beneficial effect in the congregation apart from and evangelistic endeavors.

Secondly, a literature ministry will better equip the saints to do evangelism. If good Reformed literature is scarce in the bookstore market then Reformed *evangelistic* literature is even more rare. Most of what is out there is not worth reading.

The local church should, through its literature ministry provide material that will instruct, motivate, and encourage evangelism. Additionally it should provide members with literature that is explicitly evangelistic that can be given to non-Christians. Following are some suggestions to get you started:

## BOOKS

*How Shall They Hear: Church-Based Evangelism*, Peter Jeffery, Evangelical Press. It is no use mourning over the way the world thinks of God if we do nothing to make him real to men and women who are dead in their sin. The purpose of this book is to help believers see their God-given responsibility to evangelize a lost world and at the same time to see evangelism as both a privilege and a joy.

*God Centered Evangelism*, R.B. Kuiper, Banner of Truth. The great focus of much evangelistic outreach, sad to say, is on man. The focus is often on “the charismatic personality of the evangelist, or the great numbers of people who profess faith, or attention to the benefits man may derive from an encounter with God.” Kuiper presents the biblical view of God-centered evangelism, showing from first to last that God is the great initiator, God is the effective agent, and God is the great end for all our gospel-bringing efforts. Here is the biblical framework within which all God glorifying efforts to evangelize must be conducted.

*Tell the Truth*, Will Metzger, InterVarsity Press. Highly recommended, the best there is. A training manual on the message and methods of God-centered witnessing.

*Evangelism and Your Church; A Faith Worth Sharing; Outgrowing the Ingrown Church; Powerful Evangelism for the Powerless*; C. John Miller. Rev. Miller was a Pastor and Professor at Westminster Seminary. You may not agree with everything here but these books will challenge, motivate, and inspire you as well as equip you for the task.

*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J.I. Packer, InterVarsity Press. If God is in control of everything, does that mean the Christian can sit back and not bother to evangelize? Or does active evangelism imply that God is not really sovereign at all? J.I.

Packer shows in this classic study how false both these attitudes are. In a careful review of the biblical evidence, he shows how a right understanding of God's sovereignty is not so much a barrier to evangelism as an incentive and powerful support for it.

*A Vision for Missions*, Tom Wells, Banner of Truth. Wells shows that a vision for missions must begin with a biblical vision of God. Missionary endeavors must not arise solely from human need and suffering but from the conviction that God is worthy to be known.

## TRACTS

*Coming to Faith in Christ*, John Benton, Banner of Truth. This booklet presents a straightforward summary of the gospel for those who may be considering the Christian faith for the first time. Bible references are given throughout to encourage the reader to search the pages of Scripture and see for himself the message of Jesus Christ.

*What's Going on Out There?* John Benton, Evangelical Press. The 20th century saw tremendous advances. Yet, as one looks at the world, he might well ask, "What's going on out there? Why is the world still in such a mess?" In this up-to-date evangelistic booklet that addresses our sin-sick 21st century society, John Benton shows us that God himself has provided the answer – the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven throughout the world. But the good news is that the love of God has been revealed through his Son.

*Ultimate Questions*, John Blanchard, Evangelical Press. This proven evangelistic tool meets the modern unbeliever with solidly biblical answers to life's most important questions with a message as winsome as it is accurate.

*Which Way To God?* Peter Jeffery, Evangelical Press. With eye-catching illustrations printed on glossy paper, Evangelical Press has produced an evangelistic tool that targets our increasingly "spiritual" and pluralistic society. *Which Way to God?* will help you present the gospel of Jesus Christ, who alone is "The Way, The Truth, and The Life."

*A Bad Record and A Bad Heart*, Albert N. Martin, Simpson Publishing. This popular booklet is a valuable resource for sharing the gospel with others.

## OTHER RESOURCES

From Desiring God Ministries, [www.desiringgod.org/Store/OutreachMaterials/](http://www.desiringgod.org/Store/OutreachMaterials/). *Don't*

*Waste Your Life* tract. In this short gospel-tract, John Piper argues that it is more essential than ever to make Jesus Christ the central issue. In other words, our “God-talk” must be “Christ-talk.” Pastor John walks us through the good news of the glory of Christ—pointing us to the cross so that we don’t waste our lives.

*For Your Joy*. The Almighty wants you to be happy! This evangelistic book addresses several key questions about God and us that everyone needs answers to. Use it to share with unbelievers that Jesus, the greatest being in the universe, is not just calling them to come, but calling them to come *for their joy!*

*History’s Most Spectacular Sin*. The most spectacular sin in the history of the world is the murder of the innocent, pure, perfect, and infinitely worthy Son of God. And at the center of that evil is the Satan-empowered betrayal of Jesus by his friend, Judas. What was Judas’ role in relation to Satan’s power in this betrayal? Why would Satan assist in bringing Jesus to death, when it would ultimately result in his own destruction? And, most importantly, where was God in all this? In this 16-page outreach booklet John Piper considers these important questions, and arrives at the stunning conclusion that the invisible hand and plan of God are behind the most spectacular sins in the entire universe.

From New Growth Press [www.stores.newgrowthpress.com/-strse-MINI-BOOKS/Categories.bok](http://www.stores.newgrowthpress.com/-strse-MINI-BOOKS/Categories.bok) This is the publisher for the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF). They are connected to Westminster Theological Seminary. They offer 74 small booklets on a variety of topics and a display stand for promotion. What I love about these is that they demonstrate that the Bible applies to all of life. They are very helpful in connecting with people because they address problems that are common in the population. And yet they do so from a Biblical perspective. They are brilliant introductions, conversation starters, and provide an inroad to Biblical teaching.

## Prayerful Preparation

We have most recently been considering proper preparation for the evangelistic enterprise. Last time I suggested the need for sound literature. This time around I suggest the need for prayer to be properly prepared.

### SCRIPTURE

Even a cursory scan of Scripture shows the importance of prayer in evangelism. Psalm 2:8 we see “**Ask of me** and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.” The great commission reflects this goal when Jesus instructs His Church to make disciples of all nations. How can such a weak group accomplish that monumental task? By prayer!

And that is what we see in the New Testament. In Acts, Peter and John are arrested for preaching the Gospel. They were commanded not to preach in the Name of Jesus anymore. What to do? Pray this very Psalm back to God!

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. *When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.* "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

" 'Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather together  
against the Lord  
and against his Anointed One.

...Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak  
your word with great boldness. After they prayed... they were all  
filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Paul writes, “ Brothers, my heart’s desire and **prayer** to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.” (Romans 10:1) Notice that this is in the midst of the most explicit teaching on election. As Paul speaks of that doctrine it gives him reason to pray. It moves him to pray because he knows that the One who alone can save is the One to Whom prayer needs to be made. Paul knew that his preaching could save nobody unless God in sovereign mercy is pleased to bless it to that end.

In Ephesians 6 when Paul sets forth teaching on the armor of God he details each piece. It is all defensive. But then he adds offensive components-the Sword of the Spirit & **prayer**. “*Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 2for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*”

Do you need boldness (not brashness!)? Then **pray!**

In Colossians we see the same “*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And **pray** for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. **Pray** that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.*”

I think the point is made. We must pray for efforts to be blessed and for fruit to come from our labors.

#### FROM ESTEEMED AUTHORS

J.I. Packer correctly observes, “A hidden and deeply spiritual ministry of prayer is needed to back our evangelistic activity. God will make us pray before He blesses our labors in order that we may constantly learn afresh that we depend on God for everything...

Evangelistic fruitfulness will not come unless God also reforms our praying, and pours out in us a new spirit of supplication for evangelistic work.”

E. M. Bounds, in his nineteenth century book *Power Through Prayer*, states “What the Church needs to day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more novel methods, but when men whom the Holy Spirit can use-men of prayer...The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through men...and does not come on machinery, but on men...and does not anoint plans, but men-men of prayer.”

John Piper: “God has made the spread of His fame hang on the preaching of His Word; and He has made the preaching of His Word hang on the prayers of His saints.”

Jonathan Edwards, America’s best known theologian and preacher of Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God wrote an essay entitled *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement in Prayer*. In it Edwards taught that a concert of prayer to claim the Biblical promises resulted in the fulfillment of passages such as Zechariah 8. It is a good practice to pray the promises of God. Hold them before His face and plead with Him to hear and heed His own Word.

#### FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Prayer was instrumental in my own conversion. I used to work in construction before attending seminary and entering the ministry. In that job there were many periods of unemployment. During one of them I frequented a local diner. After attempts to find work for the day proved fruitless I would go there often to eat. It was there that I was first told the gospel. I recall thinking how pitiful it was that somebody would think Jesus was the ONLY way to Heaven. And, of course, I mouthed my objections. After all, I had a bachelor’s degree in philosophy, minored in comparative religions, and had been trained by the intellectual elite of the Catholic church. I knew better than anyone else!

But, unknown to me, the person who witnessed to me began to pray and enlisted others also. Many months later, after my conversion, I returned to that same diner. In conversation I mentioned my name to the cashier. From behind me came a voice, “Hey, I know you, how are you?” I turned to see someone I did not know nor recognize. “Hello” I said somewhat tentatively (you can’t be too safe in NYC, you know). “My name is Sean,” he said holding out his hand for a shake. “Paul Murphy” I introduced myself in reply. “I have been praying for you for months that the Lord would convert you, and now

I hear we are brothers in Christ.” God had used the witness of a weak Christian and the prayers of His people to bring me into His Kingdom!

Needless to say, Sean and I became very close friends. We were about the same age, had very similar backgrounds before coming to Christ, and we both had a keen interest in theology. Both of us went on to study in seminary and today both of us minister here in NYC. We are still close friends and remember fondly our early Christian years together in that neighborhood (and that diner too!).

Let me tell you another story about the power of prayer. In my first church there was a senior saint who was the matriarch of the congregation, Mama Betty. She was a Jewish Christian who loved the Lord and told everyone she met about Him. She was raised in a religious Jewish home. In her young adult years she fell in love with an Italian Catholic, Frank Catanzaro. They eloped and got married, much to the disapproval of her family.

They had two boys who, when older, Betty wanted to be Bar-mitzvah’ed (a Jewish rite of passage). But Betty and Frank were not religious at all. But Frank dutifully went to the local synagogue to inquire about this for Betty. The rabbi told Frank he would have to convert. Frank loved Betty so he said he would convert. The rabbi informed him that it would be necessary for him, in order to convert, to be circumcised! But Frank loved Betty and agreed to be circumcised as an adult.

Some time later Betty started attending a mission of the American Board of Mission to the Jews. And don’t you know, she believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, and converted to Christianity! Frank, though he loved Betty, was not amused. Betty attended worship with God’s people, went to weekly Bible study and prayer meetings. But Frank would have nothing to do with it. For ten years Betty prayed morning and night “Lord, give me Frankie.” Frank was eventually converted. When I met him he was very sick, and died not much later. He was buried in a Jewish cemetery with a Christian ceremony on Long Island!

I think that is a perfect illustration of Jesus words “Pray and don’t give up”

#### SOME SUGGESTIONS

I would encourage you to pray specifically for your evangelistic efforts.

First, you should pray for yourself. Pray to overcome the fear of man, for boldness, for wisdom on when to speak, when to be silent, and for what to say.

Second, you should pray for opportunities and open doors. Pray that God would provide occasions to tell others about Jesus and the Gospel. Pray for eyes of faith that are sensitive to the Lord's leading in this area.

Third, pray for the lost. Pray for them in general, that God would save many and grow His Church. But pray specifically also. Pray for one or two or three people in your circle of influence (e.g. work, community, family). Ask the Lord to give you a burden for these individuals. It is a lot harder to remain silent when you have been praying for them each and every day! *Ora et labora!* That is, pray and work. That will result in fruitful evangelism.

## Hospitality Evangelism

One of the most overlooked and neglected areas of evangelism is hospitality. Your home can naturally and easily be a lighthouse for the gospel. I was reminded of this by a recent *Christian Renewal* article about a conference on this theme in Alberta (May 12, 2010). Rev. Ralph Pontier was the speaker along with Arley-Anne Zekveld. Mrs. Zekveld is the wife of URC missionary Rev. Tony Zekveld. The Zekvels have made hospitality the cornerstone of their mission to the South Asian immigrants of Toronto. It has been a fruitful means of reaching people to convey the gospel.

Michael Green, in his book *Evangelism in the Early Church*, says, “One of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was by the use of homes. Home like this (Aquila & Priscilla) must have been exceedingly effective in the evangelistic outreach of the church.”<sup>6</sup> One commentator notes “Christianity was, and still should be, the religion of the open door.”

This is entirely consistent with what I have been writing about here in these articles. It is a means of evangelizing that draws on the laity instead of relying on the clergy. It is a natural, personal, and organic method of evangelism rather than a programmatic approach. It takes no extra time away from ones home rather it uses ones home as a means to reach others. And remember that 75-90% of people come to faith and become members of churches through *relationships*. What better way to foster relationships than hospitality? It is perfectly suited for you to reach others.

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<sup>6</sup> *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Eerdmans, 1970).

## BIBLICAL BASIS

Hospitality is something that is commanded in the New Testament. Paul, Peter, John, and the author of Hebrews all insist on it (Rom. 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9, 3; John 1:8; Heb. 13:2). In the New Testament, the home was a common place for evangelism and teaching “every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42) and “...teaching you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20 & 28:23). In Acts 10:24, the first Gentile convert heard Peter explain the gospel in his home. In Luke 5:29, Matthew gathered fellow tax collectors to hear Jesus and dine with Him.

Jesus is the best example of hospitality evangelism. While the ‘religious’ leaders and people had closed their doors to ‘sinners’ Jesus dined with them often. He engaged people in discussions using hospitality as an occasion for table talk about spiritual things (Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24). In fact the gospel itself is presented as an invitation to come to God’s home and enjoy a lavish banquet for all eternity (Luke 14:16-24). You and I are the beneficiaries of Jesus’ hospitality every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. He is the Host of a meal at that time, after all. We often forget that the supper was a Passover meal in a home before it was undomesticated as a ritual in our churches.

To cite Rev. Pontier from a previously mentioned *Christian Renewal* article: The work of Jesus Christ is the motive for hospitality. When we were aliens and strangers, God showed kindness to us and brought us into His house and family. Because Christ lives in us we can do all things through Him including hospitality. And the goal of hospitality is to show God’s love by our care and concern for others. What a marvelously gospel centered way to share the gospel!

## EXAMPLES

There have been many people converted to Christ through hospitality. I am one of them.

I had been witnessed to by somebody who subsequently enlisted many others in leading me to Christ. One of those enlisted was a couple in Baltimore, MD (though I was living in New York City). They thought they could answer many of my objections and deal with my obstinacy and thus lead me to Christ as Lord and Savior. They invited me to spend a weekend at their home to deal with these matters. I reluctantly and hesitantly accepted their invitation.

Now, if you've ever met me, you have seen me dressed and in my right mind. But it was not always so. I was the kind of person, who if you had seen me coming down the street, you'd move to the other side. For all this couple knew I could have come to their house to rob and kill them. But what became quickly apparent was that this couple loved Jesus and loved me. They were kind and gracious yet firm and unrelenting. They told me of their love for me and their desire for me to become a Christian. They hosted me, fed me generously, related to me as a construction worker (the husband was a carpenter), introduced me to others with similar backgrounds as mine who had come to Christ. I had never met anybody like them. They were selfless, genuinely loving, with nothing to gain but my eternal welfare. I mark the start of my Christian life to that weekend spent in the home of this Christian couple. I will forever be grateful for their hospitality. I remain in contact with them to this day.

We had a young woman move to New York City from California some years ago (she has since moved back there). A mutual friend referred her to our church. My wife, Julie, and I have a special burden for singles in the city because we were both single Christians here for a long time before marriage. We took this lady under our wing and often had her into our home on Sundays after worship. She later informed us that she was converted as a result of those times in our home. Spending time around our table she not only heard the gospel as family discussions ensued but she saw it put into practice in the relationships of our family. It made a powerful impact on her and demonstrated the transforming power of the gospel first hand.

Those Christians who open their homes and hearts to others have reproduced that story many times in many places. For example, Martin Luther, famous Reformer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is well known for his 'table talks' when he would address subjects of Biblical and spiritual import around the dinner table.

## BLESSINGS

Allow me to encourage you to the practice of hospitality evangelism by telling you of just some benefits that attend this Biblical ministry.

You will be a blessing to others by showing them the difference that Christ makes in a family. People will get to see a wife that submits to her husband out of love for Christ, a husband that loves his wife more than he loves himself. They will see children that sit

still, are well mannered, respectful, and obedient. While for most, if not all, of us this is taken for granted it is abnormal in our contemporary society. Selfishness reigns in North America and it affects relationships so that the “normal” family today is dysfunctional. Many are broken homes with hurting, broken spirits. For them to see a family function as the Bible prescribes is a miracle! But what a powerful witness it is to the truth of the Scripture.

You yourselves will be blessed as you entertain others. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35) the blessing comes as you enter into others lives, share their hurts and hopes, and realize that they too are image-bearers of God like you. Your heart will be blessed as you extend the love of Christ in word and deed.

### BEGIN!

Where to start? Start in the narthex this Sunday. Look for visitors and guests. Reach out to them with a smile, and greetings, and a warm welcome. It is an all too common tragedy that I hear about often (and occasionally experience) that visitors to churches are not warmly welcomed but routinely ignored. How can this be when Jesus has so graciously welcomed us?! This should not be. Never let it be seen in our churches that a visitor is ‘unseen’ or unknown.

But let me urge you to go beyond even this. A smile and a greeting are good but does not compare to inviting someone to your home for a Sunday meal. That is tangible love. Leave your comfort zone, reach out to others, put yourself at the Lord’s disposal, and watch what He will do with you.

*For not with swords’ loud clashing, or roll of stirring drums,  
with deeds of love and mercy the heavenly kingdom comes.*

## SEMPER REFORMANDA

In my last article I stated the following:

*We need a reformation, not only in opinion about us, but among us today. While the missionary impulse is strong in many of our people (evidenced by giving and praying for various URC mission fields), the activity on a local level is often lacking. The sad fact is that the caricature of Reformed theology exists because WE often show it to be true. We don't do evangelism, we don't see outsiders converted into our churches, and some (N.B. not all or even most) don't even seem to care about the lost. I have plenty of contact with evangelicals to know this is how they think. I have plenty of contact within our own circles to know this to be true. In my next articles I will examine why we do not evangelize.*

So we begin to examine the reasons why we do not engage in the evangelistic enterprise. My goal is to suggest how we can have reformation in local missions efforts and reach our neighbors for Christ.

### ISOLATION & INSULATION

As institution and as individuals we have too often withdrawn from those we should be reaching out to. We have made the antithesis metaphysical instead of ethical I.E. it is not where you live but how you live that is important. We have created Christian sub-cultures that are isolated from the world. There are Christian this and Christian that are wholly separated from the world around us. We retreat from the world when Jesus calls us to “occupy until I come” (Luke 19:13 KJV).

Our institutions should serve our people by preparing them to live holily *in the world*. Jesus calls us to be in the world but not of it (John 17:15-18). We *are* the salt of the earth and we *are* the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14). We cannot let our light shine if it is hidden in a cave. And if we do not let our salt savor our world then what good is it? Only to be thrown out and trampled by men! As Becky Pippert puts it in the title of her helpful book we must get, *Out of the saltshaker and into the world*.

The idea of world flight has been operative in the history of the Church. But it has always had injurious results. This magazine is committed to the exact opposite as Father Abraham (Kuyper) taught us. The Reformed faith is a robust expression of Christianity that cannot only withstand the effects of the world but is capable of transforming it for the glory of God.

Perhaps we have reinforced the idea prominent among unbelievers that Christianity is only a matter of pie in the sky when you die instead of steak on the plate while you wait, that Christianity is irrelevant to life in the world. How? Because we have neither demonstrated it nor explained how it relates to everyday life.<sup>7</sup>

Nor should we, as individuals be content to isolate ourselves from the world. In our (correct) desire to be pure, holy, and separate from sinners we think we must have little or no personal relationships with them. Paul addressed such thinking in 1 Cor. 5:9-10 “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people *not at all meaning the people of this world* who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. *In that case you would have to leave this world*” (emphasis added). You have to be in it to win it!

No, we must follow the example of our Master who came into the world to seek and to save the lost. Recall how often Jesus was rebuked in His day for associating with ‘sinners’. Read Matthew 9:10-13, 11:19, and Luke 15. Jesus was inclined towards the outsider, the outcast, and sinners, in order to reach them. He associated with them contrary to the norms and expectations of His era. Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Rather He humbled Himself and the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. The gospel is a message of love for sinners. It is a

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<sup>7</sup> Some have criticized Christian schools for just this reason, opting for state schools instead so their child can be a ‘witness’. This is wrongheaded. We do not send children to be missionaries to foreign fields and we should also not send them to ‘foreign’ schools to ‘witness’. Parents are called to *nurture* children. Such Christian nurture in Christian schools protects them *from* the world while preparing them *for* the world in their adult years.

message of self-giving for others. Jesus shows us the way, not only to the Father (John 14) but how to reach out to those around us.

If we are to win the world, be used of the Lord to convert the lost, and bring them into the Church then we must renounce isolation and insulation. Institutionally and individually we must be among those whom we seek to save.

Who are your unbelieving friends? Maybe they are on the job or in your community; maybe they're even next door? May I suggest you start by simply loving your neighbor? How can you serve them? How can you love them? How can you give of yourself to them? Invite them to worship and then have them to lunch at your house. Talk to them, show an interest in them, and pray how you can be a blessing to them.

*Lead on O King eternal...  
For not with swords loud clashing,  
Nor roll of stirring drums,  
With deeds of love and mercy,  
The Heavenly Kingdom comes.*

## Why Are We Reluctant Disciples?

We have begun to explore the reasons why we do not do evangelism in our local church communities. I offered that one reason is that we are isolated and insulated from the ‘world’ even though we are to be its salt and light. Yet there are many other reasons why we omit evangelism in our churches and I plan to address this now as we shift focus to our reluctance.<sup>8</sup>

In all my years of teaching and promoting the work of evangelism I have encountered many reasons offered for not witnessing and evangelizing. But I think the number one reason why people fail to evangelize is fear. Now I am not talking about the kind of fear that is the result of lacking confidence (though I plan to deal with that in a later article). Rather I am speaking of a specific type of fear, what the Bible refers to as the fear of man.

What is the fear of man? The fear of man can either be a fear of what others think of us or will do to us, or a craving for approval and a fear of rejection.<sup>9</sup> Ed Welch elaborates:

*What is it that shame-fear and rejection-fear have in common? To use a biblical image, they both indicate that people are our favorite idol. We exalt them and their perceived power above God. We worship them as ones who have God-like*

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<sup>8</sup> This title was suggested to me for a lecture I recently gave at a Reformed church. This part of the series is an expansion on that lecture.

<sup>9</sup> I have been greatly helped in understanding this by Ed Welch of CCEF at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. His book *When People Are Big And God Is Small* is an excellent treatment of this subject in general. I am applying it to the area of evangelism.

*exposing gazes (shame-fear) or God-like ability to "fill" us with esteem, love, admiration, acceptance, respect, and other psychological desires (rejection-fear).... Like all idols, people are created things, not the Creator (Rom. 1:25), and they do not deserve our worship. They are worshipped because we perceive that they have power to give us something. We think they can bless us.*

In this area of evangelism we can easily be held captive to what people think of us. For many it is the dominating concern of life – what will people think? “They will think I’m one of those fundamentalists.” “They will think I am a religious fanatic.” “They will think I am some sort of kook.” “They won’t like me.” “They won’t include or accept me” (at work, at the coffee shop, in the social setting you move in).

Proverbs 29:25 states, "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe." We see this illustrated in John 12 "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for *fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it*, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God"

The fear of man cripples our witness because we are more concerned with what people think of us than we are with what God thinks of us. Much more could, and needs to, be said about this.<sup>10</sup> But I hasten on to a cure for the fear of man.

Again Ed Welch is helpful:

*The most radical treatment for the fear of man is the fear of the Lord. God must be bigger to you than people are.... Regarding other people, our problem is that we need them (for ourselves) more than we love them (for the glory of God). The task God sets for us is to need them less and love them more.*

When we fear God more than people then we are actually liberated to do what the Lord calls us to do – love Him and love our neighbor (especially by telling them about the gospel).

How do you develop or cultivate the fear of God? Here are some quick pointers. First, pray. That puts you in the position of dependence and realizing who and what you are as

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<sup>10</sup> It used to be common to hear people say “he is a God-fearing man” but today most do not even comprehend what that phrase means!

a creature. John Knox is a great example of a man free from the fear of man. He lived under threats to his life from the powers that be. One day he was summoned to meet with the Queen. He was asked if he was scared. He replied “I have just spent three hours on my knees before the King of the universe, do you think I am afraid of the Queen of Scotland?”

Two, read Scripture to know God as He reveals Himself to really be. Meditate on His character and attributes. Look for example at Isaiah 6 or 66:2 & 5 (when was the last time you trembled at His Word?)

My prayer is that you find true freedom in fearing God so that he can use you for His glory and the reclamation of sinners.

## Why Are We Reluctant Disciples? (Part Two)

I have asked, *Why Are We Reluctant Disciples?* So far the answer to this question by stating we are often isolated and insulated from those we are trying to reach. Further we considered that the fear of man rather than the fear of God dominates our lives and hinders us from talking to others. As I continue this part of the series I want to present what I have observed as supposed theological reasons for reluctance in our witness.

*Reason # 1: Misunderstanding of election.* The doctrine of election is often ventured as a reason for failing to evangelize. The reasoning goes like this “If salvation is dependent on the sovereign grace of God, if it is all at His initiative, and only because He saves, then I don’t have to do anything.” This was wonderfully illustrated in the case of William Carey. Carey (August 17, 1761 - June 9, 1834) was an English missionary and Baptist minister, and known as the "father of modern missions." He fought against prevailing sentiments in his day that missions were unnecessary.<sup>11</sup> The story is told of his attending a meeting of the missionary society at which he was pleading for missions to the nations that had not yet heard the gospel. At a ministers' meeting in 1786, Carey raised the question of whether it was the duty of all Christians to spread the Gospel throughout the world. J. R. Ryland, the father of John Ryland, is said to have retorted: "Young man, sit down; when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The thinking was that the great commission of Matthew 28 applied only to the apostles and their era.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.theopedia.com/William\\_Carey](http://www.theopedia.com/William_Carey)

This is one of two errors. Either it is the language of theological ignorance or it is a sad excuse for failure to evangelize. Yet I have heard this in our circles. Why is it in error? Simply put, because God, in addition to appointing the ends (someone’s salvation), also appoints the means to those ends.<sup>13</sup> This can be clearly seen in Ephesians 1. This is a locus classicus for the Reformed doctrine of election. It is replete with references to our election in Christ:

*3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

*11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.*

But notice what Paul says in verse 13, “And you also were included in Christ *when you heard* the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” The Ephesians were elect from all eternity *but* they did not believe until they heard the gospel when someone conveyed it to them. God uses means to accomplish His ends. And faith comes from hearing. So there need to be messengers both official and unofficial (more on that next).

Certainly the Apostle Paul believed in election. Yet, in another locus classicus on election, Romans 9 – 11 we find Paul praying for the salvation of Israel. *Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.*

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Carey in 1791 published his manifesto on missions entitled, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* [emphasis added].

*(Romans 10:1)* Paul saw no conflict between the teaching of election and evangelistic fervor.

There was a time, the golden age of missions, when Reformed truth including election, served to fuel evangelism and missions. Many of our missionary heroes, Carey, Judson, Whitefield, Edwards, etc. were gripped by Reformed truth and it compelled them and their churches with evangelistic zeal. My prayer is that it will once again ignite a passion in us not only for the glory of God but specifically that He be glorified in the salvation of sinners by using us as His instruments.

### **Why Are We Reluctant Disciples? Are We Asleep In The Light? (Part Three)**

*Reason number 2: Indifference.* In general I have found most people in our churches to have missionary sentiments. This is reflected in their prayers, their giving, and their interest in missionary endeavors. In fact the heart for missions is exemplary in most of the saints. It has been a blessing for me to observe and be a part of. But I have recently encountered a segment of people in our churches that deeply disturbs me – the indifferent. These are those people who seem to be uncaring and unfeeling regarding the eternal destiny of their neighbors.

I have to admit I am shocked to find this in our churches. At first I could not believe what I was hearing. But sadly it is true, there are those who have no interest in reaching the lost with the message of salvation. They are indifferent.

One of my favorite Christian musicians (I don't have many) is Keith Green. While I do not share much of his theology I find him inspirational for my spirit. Whenever I get down or if I just need a spiritual boost I play some of his music and I am revived. He has such passion for Christ, for the Gospel, and for reaching a lost world with the Gospel. Although he has now gone to be with the Lord (dying young in a tragic plane crash) his music continues to impact many. One of his songs that I listen to often is "Asleep in the Light," some of the lyrics of which are below. They capture this 'spirit' of indifference well.

*Do you see, do you see, all the people sinking down,  
Don't you care, don't you care, are you gonna let them drown,*

*How can you be so numb, not to care if they come,  
You close your eyes and pretend the job's done.*

*Oh Bless me Lord, bless me Lord, you know it's all I ever hear,  
No one aches, no one hurts, no one even sheds one tear,  
But He cries, He weeps, He bleeds, and He cares for your needs,  
And you just lay back and keep soaking it in, oh, can't you see it's such sin?*

*Open up, open up, and give yourself away,  
You've seen the need, you hear the cry, so how can you delay,  
God's calling and you're the one, but like Jonah you run,  
He's told you to speak, but you keep holding it in, Oh, can't you see it's such sin?*

*The world is sleeping in the dark,  
That the church can't fight, cause it's asleep in the light,  
How can you be so dead, when you've been so well fed,  
Jesus rose from the grave, and you, you can't even get out of bed,  
Oh, Jesus rose from the dead, come on, get out of your bed.*

*How can you be so numb, not to care if they come,  
You close your eyes and pretend the job's done,  
You close your eyes and pretend the job's done,  
Don't close your eyes, don't pretend the job's done<sup>14</sup>*

I may be preaching to the choir here. If your heart is already sensitive to the lost and desirous of reaching them then read no further, this is not intended for you. The grace and love of Christ, not guilt, must move us to reach the lost (2 Cor. 5:11, 14).

I am speaking here to those described in this song, those who are indifferent, who are cold in your heart, which lack love for the lost. WAKE UP! There is something terribly wrong with you. You are in desperate need of heart surgery.

What is the ‘cure’? What procedure is required to remedy your condition? What can make your cold, calloused heart beat with the warmth and compassion of Christ for a sin sick world? The prescription is the Gospel! You need to realize, appropriate, and

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<sup>14</sup> “Asleep In The Light,” Keith Green, THE MINISTRY YEARS Vol.1, © The Sparrow Corp.

appreciate the Gospel for yourself. Am I saying you are a non-Christian? No, I cannot read your heart nor do I know God's eternal decree. But as a Pastor of souls I know your condition is a serious spiritual malady that is in need of treatment.

Take one strong dose of Hell and two doses of grace and love. Let me explain. Examine what the Scripture teaches about Hell, the place of unending torment, sorrow, and woe. Read and meditate long and hard on that place of the damned. It is frightening. It is horrific. It is dreadful and gruesome, is it not? Right about now you may be saying to yourself "That's right, and all who are there are getting what they deserve. They belong in Hell."

My friend, you belong in hell. I belong in hell. Your sins and my sins are an infinite offense against an infinitely Holy God and they deserve and infinite punishment IN HELL! When Jesus cried out in a loud voice from the cross "My God, my God – WHY have YOU forsaken ME?" The answer is found in your bosom and mine. It was your sin, my sin, our cold, callousness and indifference that caused Jesus to undergo the horrors of Hell on that cross. Jesus 'descended into Hell' (HC Q&A 44) for you and for me and for all His own so that we might be spared such horrors.

There but for the *grace of God* go you and me. For not other reason than His own good pleasure, God does not give us what we deserve but freely grants the righteousness of Christ to us instead. *Christ loved us* when we were unlovely. While we were yet sinners, He died to save us. Nothing we are, nothing we've done commends us to Him. Only the blood and righteousness of Jesus prevails.

Do not let these be mere theological factoids that reside in your grey matter. Let them massage your heart, soothe your soul, and warm your heart to be like Christ's who love sinners and came to bring them salvation. May such 'surgery' enable you to love the unlovely, and care for sinners. Don't be ASLEEP IN THE LIGHT!

## Easter And Evangelism

Easter is the day on the calendar when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The resurrection is the event that is central to the message of the New Testament, the Gospel, and the mission of the church. In fact, it is the resurrection that serves as both the content and the motivation for evangelism.

The centrality of the resurrection in the New Testament has only recently been given attention.<sup>15</sup> However, for Paul, he could speak of the resurrection as his Gospel: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. *This is my gospel...*” (2 Timothy 2:8. Emphasis added). And this was crucial for the mission of the Church. Peter preaches a risen Christ on Pentecost Acts 2:32 “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.” Paul preaches the resurrection on Mars Hill in Acts 17:31 “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

It is interesting to note that the resurrection accounts in the gospels are all accompanied by imperatives to go and tell.<sup>16</sup> Matthew records the words of the angel at the empty tomb “The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for

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<sup>15</sup> See *The Centrality of the Resurrection* by Richard Gaffin, Baker 1978. E.g. "Not justification by faith but union with the resurrected Christ by faith (of which union, to be sure, the justifying aspect stands out perhaps most prominently) is the central motif of Paul's applied soteriology."

<sup>16</sup> This first came to my attention many years ago reading the sermons of James Boice in *The Christ of the Empty Tomb* to whom I am indebted for this insight.

Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then *go* quickly *and tell* his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you” (emphasis added). This is similarly recorded in Mark 16:7, Luke 24:9 and in a slightly different form in John 20:17-18.

The resurrection is central to the content of the Gospel. We are told that by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. It is the good news that needs to be spread abroad: *EXTRA! EXTRA! HEAR ALL ABOUT IT!* What makes it such good news? The death of Jesus paid the penalty for sin. But the resurrection of Jesus broke the power of sin and enables one to have new life. When Paul speaks of the resurrection in his letters he speaks of it not as an entirely future reality but one that is present now. He says that we are *now* raised with Christ (Col. 3:1 N.B. the past tense), that we *now* have eternal life (Romans 6:22), that we *now* have that same power which raised Christ from the dead living in us (Eph. 1:19-20). This is the greatest news fallen, dead sinners can receive.

The resurrection is furthermore the motivation for the church’s evangelistic mandate. When the women at the tomb and the disciples realized that Jesus was risen they all were compelled to go and tell others this great news. We are to *go*. The familiarity of this good news should not keep us from going out with such an amazing message. We are to be a going people, bringing a message of new life to a needy world. Easter should be a time to rejoice but also to reflect if we, as individuals and congregations, are doing what we can to make known that Jesus is risen from the dead. There is no excuse for simply maintaining the status quo. There is no excuse for being content as a maintenance church. There is no excuse for keeping the good news to ourselves while the world, filled with perishing souls, is left to slide into everlasting punishment. *He is risen!* Is a message that compels us to go.<sup>17</sup>

The angel also commands us to *tell*. What is the message of Easter? First, Jesus is risen. This is a matter of historical record attested to by many witnesses. That is important because we are not telling people our opinion or conveying clever religious tales. The resurrection is an undeniable (though often disputed) fact. Second, tell people that

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<sup>17</sup> See Luke 14:15-24 especially note the excuses that are given for not doing what Jesus instructs. It is in response to such excuses that he states the following “*Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.’*” Verse 23

because of Jesus' resurrection death is conquered. Death is man's greatest fear<sup>18</sup> and we have the liberating message to address and dispel such fear. Third, God has made this Jesus, whom men crucified and killed, both Lord and Christ. "Now He commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). The message of the resurrection comes as an imperative and it demands a response. Let us not be shy or cowardly. While being winsome not belligerent, let us communicate clearly that the risen Lord requires a response.

Did you notice that the angel also provides a word of encouragement to potentially fearful disciples? "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you..." Never forget that evangelism and missions is the work of Jesus Christ. It is He who by His Spirit is at work in and through His Church to accomplish that which He commands. You and I are simply His instruments. He has gone ahead... will you follow?

The first day of resurrection was a revolutionary event for the disciples. Let this Easter be a similarly revolutionary event for you and your church— *Go & Tell!*

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<sup>18</sup> "...so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their **fear of death**." Hebrews 2:14-15

### The Office Of Believer

We have been discussing the reasons why we are reluctant to evangelize. I believe that one of the main reasons is that we have been taught to do missions by proxy. What I mean is this. We have been taught that the responsibility of the person in the pew is to pray and pay for others to do evangelism and missions.

The first complication is neglecting the office of believer. R.B. Kuiper, in his book *The Glorious Body of Christ* speaks of this as *the universal office* as opposed to the *special offices* of minister, elder, and deacon. The office of believer is an important component of any church's local evangelism. I think we have hindered our efforts in local evangelism by not emphasizing this. Let me put it this way – it is the responsibility of every Christian, as a Christian, to be a witness for the Gospel. Yet we have left this task largely to the 'professionals' i.e. the ministers and the missionaries. This is wrong and in need of correction. We cannot and must not neglect the office of believer if we are to conduct local evangelism in our communities.

As those raised on the Heidelberg we ought to know this responsibility very well. Answer 86 states "by our godly walk win also others to Christ." Answer 32 states I am called a Christian "Because by faith I am a member of Christ and thus a partaker of His anointing, in order that I also may confess His Name..." Notice that therefore by word and by deed, with speech and with conduct we are responsible to let others know about Christ, the faith, and the message of salvation. Failure to do so means we are less than Christian! By definition the Catechism teaches that this is part and parcel of what it means to be a believer. This is your responsibility, your duty, part of your thankfulness to the Lord for

His mercy and grace to you in Christ. Why then are so many silent? Can you see why this is a huge complication?

The personal character of evangelism is important. Carl Henry affirms this “*A one to one approach, initiated by every believer*, still holds the best promise of evangelizing the earth” (emphasis added). Kenneth Scott Latourette, a Yale historian adds historical perspective, “*The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession*, but men and women who carried on their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those they met in this natural fashion” (emphasis added). Peter DeJong, my predecessor at Dutton Church and a veteran missionary of foreign and home missions efforts said “*One of the biggest handicaps to our local evangelism programs is often the indifference of our members to their missionary calling and their failure to welcome those who do come into our worship from outside. On the other hand, one of the biggest factors in the success of winning people has often been either interest of a Christian neighbor who tried to reach them, rather than the efforts of a busy minister*” (emphasis added). Amen, sir!

This is confirmed by statistical evidence that has been mentioned above (see article 9) but is worth repeating below. The influences that lead people to eventually become members of churches are as follows:

Pastor influence: 3-6%  
Sunday School programs: 4-5%  
Diaconal ministries: 3-4%  
Visitation programs: 3-6%  
Crusades & revivals: .001%  
Family and friends: 75%

Isn't that astounding? The majority of people who come to faith and church membership have that happen through already established relationships! That sounds very covenantal and ought to be right up our alley as Reformed believers.

All of this is to stress the need for us to overcome this complication, correct it, and utilize the vast army of evangelists already positioned in our congregations.

## Lack of Confidence

One of the main reasons why we do not speak up and tell others about the Gospel is that we lack confidence in ourselves. Some of this is basic insecurity. Some of it is misplaced confidence. In either case one needs to look to the Lord and not oneself to overcome this and be useful in evangelism.

In dealing with personal insecurity or inadequacy one needs to take stock of themselves. In and of ourselves we *are* inadequate. It actually helps to admit it. It may surprise you to know that the greatest missionary ever was filled with a sense of his inadequacy. The apostle Paul, as he spoke about preaching the Gospel, stated, “Who is *sufficient* for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16). The footnote reference in the ESV says “competent.”

Do you see that you are in good company? You are not alone in sensing inadequacy or incompetence for the task. Paul found his confidence and competence in the Lord as he states in the very next chapter. In 2 Cor. 3:4-6 we read “Such *confidence* as this is ours *through Christ* before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but *our competence comes from God. He has made us competent ...*” (emphasis added).

The same solution applies regarding misplaced confidence. Too many of you are looking to yourselves for confidence. “I do not have the *ability* to speak to others.” “I lack the *Biblical knowledge* to speak to others” “I don’t have the *gift of gab*, the *social skills*, and *people personality* that you preachers have” “I never *studied at seminary* or went to an *evangelism seminar*, or know my *apologetics* like others. Let them do it.”

Do you note a recurring pronoun in these responses? “I” Don’t you see that the real problem is that you are looking to yourself?! Now, none of those aforementioned things is bad. They are all good enough in themselves. But they cannot alone provide confidence and sufficiency. THAT must come from the Lord. And thankfully He has provided that which we need.

In the great commission Jesus supplied us with what we need to faithfully carry out His calling. First of all He promised us power in verse 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Here is the Jesus who just conquered sin, satan, and death. He declares that He has the authority to accomplish what He wills. And He has enlisted you and equipped you for the task.

Furthermore Jesus in verse 20 promises His presence “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Literally He says “I myself am with you” What is there to be afraid of? Whatever is lacking in you and me is more than compensated for by the presence of our Lord as the commission is carried out.

Can you now see that ones confidence, sufficiency, and competence have to come from Christ and not from us? The real problem, as I alluded to earlier, is that you and I often are our own worst enemies. That is, you and I are the ones that are in the way. I, I, I, I, I, I needs to get out of the way. In the area of evangelism, as in so many other areas of the Christian life, we need a strong dose of self-denial. “If anyone would come after me he must deny himself...” Jesus taught. And it is no less true here.

We are all too often insecure because we are not looking to Christ for our identity and security. It is on Christ the solid Rock I must stand. All other ground is sinking sand. Our confidence is all too often in ourselves rather than in the Christ who commissioned His Church, the Christ who promises them His power and His presence. You and I fail and fall. But He cannot fail. He has promised that He will build His Church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I don’t know about you but I find that encouraging, empowering, and enabling. He *does* provide that which He requires.

But allow me to assist you in some very concrete and specific ways. How do you connect with Christ? How does He supply the confidence and security you need? The answer is to pray. You can see this in Paul and his reliance upon prayer in this regard:

*pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Colossians 4:3-4*

*making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. Ephesians 6:18-20*

In addition to prayer in general I would encourage you to pray for the Holy Spirit in particular. In Luke 11:13 Jesus, in teaching about prayer, instructs us to petition our heavenly Father to grant us the Holy Spirit. So let us pray that God might give us the Spirit so that we can discharge our responsibilities. May God the Holy Spirit help us to overcome our reluctance and instead grant confidence and competence.

## Evangelistic Living

In Matthew 5 Jesus teaches that you are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Since that is true Jesus says you are to let your light shine. Now maybe as you were growing up you sang that little ditty “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine”? and thought it was referring to verbal communication of the gospel? Wrong. Note well what Jesus actually says “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your *good works* and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, emphasis added).

Letting your light shine is a matter of how you live. How you live before a watching world is important when it comes to evangelism. I call it evangelistic living.

Yes, yes, I know that I’ve defined evangelism as *verbal* communication of the gospel. But when it comes to being evangelistic the bible seems to place works before Word. Let me explain.

Recall our consideration of 1 Peter 3:15 in my last two articles. “...*in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*” Remember that Peter expects you to be asked. Why? Because of how people have seen you live. The unbelieving spouse is won over by seeing the conduct of his wife (verses 1-2), the people around you see holy, godly lifestyles characterized by grateful, loving obedience to God’s Word (verses 8-17). That sort of life has a magnetic quality to it. People will be led to ask for the reason why you’re like that and not like everybody else.

That is when verbal communication enters the picture. By telling others that you live like that because “Christ loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20) you let others know the reason for the hope that you have.

This lifestyle, a life of consistent, practical holiness is what Scripture indicates as all-important for our witness. Consider just a sampling of passages (emphasis added):

Ephesians 4:1-3: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you *to walk in a manner worthy* of the calling to which you have been called...” How? “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Philippians 1:27: “Only let *your manner of life be worthy* of the gospel of Christ...”

Colossians 4:5-6: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Here Paul makes explicit what I have been saying. Be mindful of your conduct around outsiders. Notice also how we need to be careful how we speak. How we use our tongues reveals our hearts (Matthew 15:18, “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.” But it also displays the heart for all around us to see.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12: “...to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you *may walk properly before outsiders* and be dependent on no one.” Here Paul indicates that how we conduct ourselves in the workplace is important because people are watching. We see this again in the next passage.

Titus 2:7-12: “Show yourself in all respects to be *a model of good works*, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. Slaves [this corresponds to present-day employees] are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, *so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.*”

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training *us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives* in the present age...” Notice especially that how you work adorns the teaching? Your behavior in the workplace is evangelistic. It ‘speaks’ volumes to those around you. Christians should be the best, hardest working, and most desirable workers.

The same is seen in 1 Timothy 6:1: “Let all who are under a yoke as slaves [read: employees] regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, *so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.*”

Peter brings us back to where we began. “Keep *your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation*” (1 Peter 2:12)

God will be glorified because they will not only see your conduct but will hear why it is that way when you respond to their inquiries with the gospel. Yes, you witness by your life but deeds alone are insufficient. They are not the end of your witness, as crucially important as they are. God intends that they be but a means to an even greater end—the conveying of the gospel.

Note well then that both word and deed are necessary. The words tell why you live like you do, they explain the work of Christ for you and in you moves you to live a certain way. But your deeds show that the Word is real, a vibrant, living part of who you are. Like two wings on an airplane are necessary to make it fly so also both word and deed are necessary to be thoroughly evangelistic.

Let us be sure that we are engaged in evangelistic living in the coming year. May the Lord bless our witness so that He is glorified in and by us.