

THE SAINTS PART IN DECLARING SALVATION

(What is Evangelism?)

INTRODUCTION

One of the basic reasons Christians grow cold in their spiritual lives is because of a failure to be a good witness for Christ. Stagnation (taking in and never giving out) is quite often related to not sharing the person of Christ with others. NOTE: Witnessing is one thing every Christian can do, and witnessing has a direct affect upon every other area of Christian living. Faithful witnessing gives one a hunger to pray for himself and the salvation of others, to know God's word in order not to be thrown by the opposition, and to long to be with other Christians for genuine fellowship at which time his spiritual battery is recharged to go out and face the non-Christian world again.

Perhaps the single greatest reason the Christian grows cold in his witnessing is that he fails to understand the Biblical meaning of evangelism. Confusion over the meaning of evangelism has brought great frustration to many earnest and honest saints.

SCRIPTURE

(1 Cor. 1:17-18): Paul's task was to preach the gospel (evangelize), not to baptize, for he had no desire to have a Pauline party in the local church at Corinth. The words "preach the gospel" should be translated "evangelize." This helps to define the word.

DEFINITION OF EVANGELISM

The Greek word is uangelizo and it means "the proclamation of a good message" or "the declaring of good news." The essence of this good news is found in declaring Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2 cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

There is something unique about this good news: it carries with it its own power to effect salvation (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18-21). NOTE: The good news of salvation does not need anything to make it more appealing or powerful. It carries its own power to save men.

Evangelism, then, is the proclamation of the good news that Christ died for sinners, a proclamation which itself bears the power to turn the lost to God. NOTE: Real evangelism is declaring the message of Christ and His work.

THE PROBLEM OF EVANGELISM

Confusing Evangelism and Soul Winning

The basic problem in evangelism is confusing evangelism (witnessing) and soul winning. This subtle error can be seen in the various definitions of evangelism, such as the Church of England (1918):

To evangelize is to so present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His church.

NOTE: The problem with this definition is that it says the essence of evangelism is producing converts. Yet, this is not consistent with the New Testament definition.

Evangelism and soul winning, while they are related, are not the same. It is at this point that the real problem lies. Evangelism is not producing converts but telling a message to men. Christians tell the good news and rely on that all powerful message in the hands of the Holy Spirit to do the converting. To put it more simply, it is the Christian's responsibility to tell and it is God's responsibility to produce converts.

NOTE: The Bible does talk about the importance of winning souls and relates it to man's responsibility (Prov. 11:30; 1 Cor. 9:22). However, the winning of souls is always kept in perspective of the basic meaning of the word evangelize. The part the Christian plays in winning a soul is exposing the sinner to the good news, trusting the gospel and the Holy Spirit to do the converting.

The confusion of soul winning with evangelism has led to some rather serious wrongs in Christian circles.

1. Zeal for Christ is judged on souls won and not souls to whom a person has witnessed. The Bible places emphasis upon faithfulness in witnessing (1 Cor. 4:2). NOTE: Many Christians, not seeing any souls won, give up in discouragement and feel God is not using them. Why? Because they equate witnessing and soul winning.
2. Those who see mere fruit for Christ in soul winning are thought to be more spiritual than those who may faithfully witness but see little fruit. Often there is a confusion over the spiritual gift of evangelism (Eph. 4:11) and witnessing evangelistically. Soul winning is God's job and both the gifted evangelist and the witnessing Christian are to be faithful in proclaiming the message.
3. This false idea of evangelism has driven many "evangelists" to frantic efforts to get a response to their invitation to accept Christ. Since the evangelist has the idea that successful evangelism means a visible response, he stoops to any method to make it appear that he is a successful evangelist. NOTE: If successful evangelism means getting people to the altar by any means, then perhaps we should offer green stamps.
4. Many pastors are looked upon as not being evangelistic if they do not give an altar call or invitation to come forward after preaching. Yet the Bible says that the pastor or evangelist has been faithful in proclaiming the gospel when he has declared Christ to men and invited them to receive Him by faith. Whether a person is to come forward or not has absolutely nothing to do with evangelism; in fact, it may confuse the issue.

Confusing Preaching and Sharing Christ

Most Christians think of evangelism in terms of mass evangelism with professional ministers declaring the message in so-called evangelistic meetings or revivals. Church members feel quite comfortable in this kind of evangelism for all they do is invite people to church. Since they are not preachers, they feel that they have no responsibility to evangelize and are content to let the preachers do it. Yet the Bible is filled with personal evangelism, such as when Andrew got his brother Philip and said,

“We have found Messiah” (John 1:40), or when Philip boarded a chariot to talk to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40). NOTE: Evangelism in the New Testament was done on a man-to-man basis which was sharing the person of Christ with others.

Evangelism is the declaring of a message. It is not necessarily formal preaching but a sharing of Christ with other people. Be careful about preaching at people (like a preacher) about Christ, but share with them the person and work of Jesus Christ. NOTE: One cannot share Christ until Christ is precious in his own life.

The first excuses that come forth from the Christian when personal witnessing is mentioned are: (1) I am afraid; (2) I do not know enough; (3) I will not be able to answer difficult questions; or (4) I do not speak well. The answer to this dilemma is found in 1 Cor. 1:17, for it says, “not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” The power to save is not in the witnesses’ eloquence but in the power of the gospel. Christians are not proclaiming a message which must be filled with powerful philosophical arguments to break through the unbelief of men. God has ordained that the message itself be the power to break through man’s unbelief and bring salvation. NOTE: Christians are timid about witnessing to intellectuals because they do not have all the answers to the objections raised by infidels. We do not need all the answers! We have the gospel which is God’s power unto salvation.

CONCLUSION

The task before every Christian is to evangelize by sharing Christ with all men everywhere. Andre Bustanoby says,

We the church are confronted with the task of evangelism. And what is our task? To make converts? No! It is to tell men the good news—good news that carries with it its own convicting and saving power. We need not plead; we need not argue. Tell them, just tell them that Jesus Christ died for sinners. That’s evangelism! (Andre Bustanoby, *Mr. Ambassador; Get With It!*)