The background of the cover is a detailed, aged map with a warm, sepia-toned color palette. A large, three-dimensional compass rose with eight points is centered over the map. The compass rose has a gold and white checkered pattern on its inner rings. The map features various geographical labels in Latin, including 'TERRA AUSTRALIS', 'OCEANUS', and 'HORIZON RATIO'. The entire cover is framed by a blue border with rounded corners. The bottom right corner of the cover has a silver, metallic-looking tab that appears to be peeling back.

Biblical Theology of **MISSIONS**

by Richard Rogers

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

Biblical Theology of MISSIONS

**by
Richard Rogers**



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Biblical Theology of Missions

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publisher except in the case of brief quotations within critical
articles and reviews, including translation.

This book is dedicated to

All the men and women who
were influenced to do mission
work by sitting at the feet of

Richard Rogers

both in the classes at
Sunset International Bible Institute
and in Evangelistic Seminars
all over the world.

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Introduction

Richard Rogers was not only a passionate pulpit preacher and teacher, but he was also passionate about local and world missions. He reflected in his life and activities the heart of the school in which he taught, that of taking the Gospel into the remotest parts of the world. He took no thought of hardships or dangers as he traveled throughout the world. He was indeed a world-wide Christian.

This book reveals his adherence to the simple gospel and the way he presented it here and abroad. The gospel mandate is that the gospel must be taken to all peoples in every region of the world and disciples made as a result of preaching and teaching that good news of redemption through Jesus Christ. Richard offers three theological presuppositions involved in accomplishing the mandate: 1) God is sovereign, 2) Jesus is Lord and 3) The Spirit is with us.

The Church engages in missions not because we wish to, but because we have to! This is clearly shown to be true as Richard presents the imperatives given in the New Testament. The nature of the Gospel is presented in four lessons followed by a lesson on the uniqueness of the Christian faith.

The methodology of missions in an important aspect of covering the earth with the Gospel. The book of Acts reveals to us how the early church was able to inundate the Roman world with the good news, establishing the church of Christ wherever they went. Then the Apostle Paul took up the baton and carried it even into Caesar's palace.

You will gain much knowledge concerning missions as you read and study this book, and hopefully be motivated to take the baton Paul laid down in Rome and take the Gospel and spread it wherever you go!

Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders, and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a worldwide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now, in printed form, that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff, and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project. This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a video taped course. The voice track of the video tape was first transcribed, then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of the Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, to Darlene Morris and the staff of

Sunset Translation/Editing Center who edited the manuscripts, and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

This book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible Study Library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders, and grow churches that plant other churches.

Theological Presuppositions

Introduction

Welcome to the study of the Biblical Theology of Missions. The **divine mandate** to preach the Gospel is based upon the commission of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18–20 where He said:

“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.”

The divine mandate that Jesus gave to “*preach the good news to all creation*” (Mark 16:15) has the stated intent of making disciples. It is not simply that He wants His Word known or that He wants men just to be saved. He wants men and women to be disciples. He wants them to be followers, imitators, and examples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This divine mandate, this endeavor of making disciples, has been under the scrutiny of both friends and foes of God throughout the years. Recently, it has fallen in some places into ill repute. Some have said that the age of missions has ended; it is over. Some are saying that the best Christians can do for man today is to meet his humanitarian needs. As great as those needs are, as great as the hunger of man and the poverty of man and the sickness of man and the dysfunctionality of man, as great as those needs are, they must never take our minds away

from the missionary mandate. Because of these and other factors, the number of men and women who are presently being trained to preach the Gospel of Christ in difficult areas to do what we call mission work has really been diminishing. Missionaries themselves are undergoing a real identity crisis. When they return home, they are finding fewer churches and fewer individuals who are willing to sacrifice to keep them on the field.

It is this situation that has called this study into being. For this reason Christians must study together what the Bible has to say about mission work in order to do what God wants done. This is important so that Christians can do what God wants done so that we can be who God wants us to be in this hectic world.

Christians must clearly state, and evidently believe, that we need to take the high view of both the Living Word, Christ, and the written Word, the Bible. We need to remind ourselves that only the Scriptures are the reliable, authoritative, authentic testimony of God today. Only the Scriptures, which are the Old and New Testaments, can make man wise unto salvation.

We exalt Jesus as the Son of God. We exalt Him in His unique birth and becoming flesh, and the Son of God became the son of man. We exalt Him in His death, His resurrection, His enthronement where at the Father's right hand He became the only Savior and Sovereign of the world as Paul declared in 1 Timothy 6:15–16:

... God will bring about in his own time — God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Sooner or later, all men will have to admit that **He is Lord**. Sooner or later, every person in the world will face the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what Paul said in Acts 17:30–31:

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 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 all men by raising him from the dead.

In John 12 Jesus said, “My words will judge everyone at the end of time” (cf. John 12:48). That is what Paul said in Philippians 2. Because of Jesus’ great sacrifice in becoming man:

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9–11).

Men need to have a high view of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to have a high view about the Word that is written about Jesus Christ.

Christians also need a high view of the Church. The Church is the only light this world has. That is what Jesus said in Matthew 5 when He said, “‘*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.*’”(Matthew 5:14). “*You*” is emphatic in the original language. It should be translated in the English language to read, “You, and you alone, are the light of the world!” We are the only light the world has. The New Testament Church, reflecting the glory of Jesus the Light of the World, is the only light this world will ever have. It is preeminently and uniquely the work of the Church of Jesus Christ to see that the light shines in all the dark dank hell holes of this world. We must hold a high view of the Church.

Christians must also hold a high view of the preached Word. Preaching sometimes is coming under critical

examination today. Some say there are more important things than preaching the Word of God. That may be true in some circumstances, but we need to understand that there is no substitute for the Word of God. It is “*to the law and to the testimony*” even in this age, and we must “*speak according to this word,*” the Word of God (Isaiah 8:20).

Men are all grateful for the contributions that science brings to the study of missions. We are grateful for the contributions from anthropology and sociology and psychology and even from the new science called missiology. If we had to make a choice between the study of missiology and the study of the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus Christ, and God’s character and what He wants to be done in the world, we would choose to study the Word of God. Christians have been left on this earth to go everywhere to tell everyone about the Only One who can save their souls.

The Sovereignty of God

(Isaiah 66:1; Psalm 24:1; James 1:27; Psalm 145:16; Acts 17:28; Ephesians 1:9–10; Isaiah 46:10; Daniel 4:35)

In any study one either begins with a long list of presuppositions or a long list of evidences. In this study there are three things that are theological presuppositions. The first presupposition is the sovereignty of God. Many Old and New Testament passages can be cited to establish the fact that God is Sovereign. We are going to presume that God is Sovereign. We are going to presume that you already believe that Jehovah is the God of the universe. He is the sovereign Lord.

Sovereign is an interesting word. The last five letters say He “reigns.” The first three letters, “sov” say He reigns without question. God reigns above all and no one dares question Him. His sovereignty is based on three outstanding attributes:

- **His Almighty Power** — This is expressed in Genesis 1 when God said, “Light be!” and light was. The psalmist said in Psalm 33 He spoke, “*For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm*” (Psalm 33:9). Light had no choice but to come into being. God said, “Let light be” and light had to be. He said let the earth bring forth all of the plants and the trees and it had no choice. It had to do it. He said the waters would teem with all kinds of living creatures and it did. He said let the sky be filled with flying birds and it was. He said let there be a sun to rule the day and a moon to rule the night and it was that way. He formed man from the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul subject to the sovereignty of God. No one can question, that is without answering to Him, the power of God.
- **His Perfect Wisdom** — Paul wrote a beautiful book called Romans in which he discussed the fantastic grace of God that saves man’s soul, but also will come in judgment of God that will doom and damn those who do not accept His grace. As Paul concluded the first part of the book, he said in Romans 11:33–36:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

God is sovereign in His perfect wisdom.

- **His Intrinsic Goodness** — God is not simply good, He is intrinsically good. His goodness is not based on what He does. His goodness is based on “what” He is. Men judge

each other good or bad on what they do. God is good because of what He is.

This sovereignty of God's power, His wisdom, and His goodness is seen in three divine activities:

- **Creation** — The angels sang of creation in Revelation 4:11 to say, “*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*”
- **Redemption** — Paul declared in Ephesians 1:5–9 that Christians are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and by the sovereign will of God:

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ

- **Judgment** — In Romans 9:18–23 Paul declared that no one has the right to call the judgment of God into question:

Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?” But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, Why did you make me like this?” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for

noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory

Take note that from first to last the Christian's mission is God's mission and not man's mission. It originated in the heart of God, not in the heart of man. It is based on the love of God. It is determined by the will of God. Its mandate was declared by the sovereign Son of God in the Word of God. Its ultimate success depends on the power of God. Christians must believe in the sovereignty of God if we are going to be successful in our Christian mission.

God deals with a missionary by choosing the man. In John 15:16 Jesus said, “*You did not choose me, but I choose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*” In his letters, Paul declared that he was chosen by God for a particular and specific task of preaching the Gospel to all the Gentiles (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:16–17; Galatians 2:7–9; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 2:7). In Jeremiah 1 God called Jeremiah to be His prophet. In Isaiah 6 God called Isaiah to be His prophet. The calling of the man of God is the work of God to fulfill the work for God.

What kind of ministry is the man of God to fulfill? Check Ephesians 4 to see that the missionary is to fulfill the work of unity and the work of spiritual growth:

To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole

measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:12–13).

What is the **sphere** of his ministry? It is the entire world. The **duration** of that ministry is for as long as he lives, as long as mankind lives. Isaiah was called by God in Isaiah 6 and told by God that his message would not be acceptable to the people around him. Isaiah did not like that so he asked God, “*For how long, O Lord?*” (Isaiah 6:11). And God said him:

“Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”

God in His sovereignty not only deals with the missionary, He also deals with the sinner. The fate of the sinner was decided by the judicial act of God in sending His Son into the world. Those who are saved are those who are taught, drawn by the Word of God. Jesus said:

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me” (John 6:44–45).

God is in control of things. He even orders the things of time and the things of this world in order to bring about salvation. Acts 1:7–8 says:

... “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

God wants His Word preached in “. . . Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Paul declared in Acts 17 that God made “heaven and earth,” God calls men to repentance, and God changes the times and the seasons and He has appointed the boundaries that nations cannot pass beyond. He has appointed the time that they will arise and the time that they will fall. And all of that is in order that the Word of God might be preached that men might be saved (cf. Acts 17:24–31). In the Book of Revelation, God told the church in Philadelphia, “I shut doors, I open doors, “. . . ‘See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut . . . ’” (Revelation 3:8).

Christians are commanded to the task. It does not matter whether the conditions are favorable or not. We cannot wait for fair skies, calm seas, and good days. We cannot wait for those things because if we wait for those things, then we will miss the very hour that God has commanded for us to serve. We are to preach the Word. We are to do it quickly. We are to do it thoroughly. And we are to do it in total faith that God is in sovereign control of whatever happens to us, whatever response is made, and whatever happens to those to whom it is preached. It all starts with the belief in the sovereignty of God.

The Lordship of Christ

(Acts 2:36; Philipians 2:9–11 [verse 11 contains our creed, “*Jesus Christ is Lord!*”]; Ephesians 1:20–23)

The second presupposition is the belief in the Lordship of Christ. The Church has a simple creed that is “*Jesus Christ is*

Lord!” — “. . . at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). This is the Christian’s creed. We are not in control of this great endeavor of preaching the Gospel to the lost and dying world.

Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord over the individual. He has claims on our person. He has claims on our possessions. He has claims on our vocation. He has claims on our talents. He is the Lord of every single one whether they honor Him or not, He is Lord. He will rule them with the scepter of His uprightness or He will rule them with a rod of iron. One way or the other, Jesus Christ rules the world. Anyone who does not accept Him, anyone who rejects him, has One who judges him. The words that Jesus spoke, the same will judge him in the resurrection. That is Jesus’ declaration in John 12:48–50:

“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

He is the Lord over the individual.

Jesus Christ is also the Lord over the Church. He built it — “*“ . . . upon this rock I will build my church . . . ”*” (Matthew 16:18). In Ephesians 1:20–23 Paul said that God raised Jesus from the dead —

. . . which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one

to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

- It is Jesus Christ who appoints the Church's ministers. Ephesians 4:7–13 also confirms His Lordship over the Church:

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

In Acts 20:28 Paul encouraged the elders from Ephesus to "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." Jesus and the Holy Spirit had made them overseers over the flock of God. In John 21 Jesus said to Peter, "You go feed My sheep." That was Peter's commission.

- It is Jesus Christ who invests the Church with its authority. Matthew 10:1; Luke 10:17; Matthew 16:19; John 20:22–23; 16:23–24; Book of Acts (esp. 8:12; 3:6; 16:18).
- It is Jesus Christ who receives the Church's worship. “. . . *for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:23–24). (See: Revelation 4:11; 5:13–14; 22:8–9).
- It is Jesus Christ who evaluates the Church's ministry. “. . . *his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work*” (1 Corinthians 3:13). (See: 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 5:27; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 2–3).

Jesus is not simply Lord over heaven and earth. He is not simply the Lord over the individuals, He is the Lord of the Church. He is the head over everything for the Church. Christians, when missionaries come to your congregation or to your home with a need to have their support cared for or with a need to have their needs provided for so that they can preach the Gospel in places where the Gospel is not being preached, please remember that they were sent by the Lord. Remember that the Lord is the head over your decision. We need to put His commission ahead of any mission we might choose. We need to put His commission over the building of our buildings. We need to put His commission ahead of establishing our security and our pleasures in this world. We need to put His commission as number one in the Church. Most of our meetings and most of our time need to be spent in discussing His work in the Church. Jesus Christ is Lord over the Church.

When the missionary goes out into the world, it is important for him to remember that **Jesus Christ is Lord over the World**. He rules over the angels (cf. Hebrews 1:3–4, 14; 1 Timothy 6:15; Ephesians 1:21) and He controls nations (cf.

Daniel 2:24, 4:17). Jesus Christ is the head of families (cf. Psalm 68:4–6, 127:3–5). He rules the nations, the families all over the world. All the rulers of the world are under the control of our Lord Jesus Christ. We start this study with a belief in the Lordship of Christ.

The Ministry of the Spirit

The third presupposition in this study is the belief in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is mentioned more than fifty times in the Book of Acts alone. Acts is the missionary book. Acts is the book that speaks of the Word being preached “. . . in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit is behind all of that work. It is the **Holy Spirit that creates the missionary spirit**. He gives people the spirit of sacrifice that makes them leave home and family and security to go preach the Gospel in difficult areas and hard places. It is a big sacrifice today leaving the conveniences of today and going to live in places where those conveniences do not exist.

The Holy Spirit creates the spirit of love. He is the embodiment of the love of God, Jesus’ love. The Spirit of God enables Christians to become the embodiment of Jesus’ love. Missionary lives allow others to see the spirit of God that has been created in them. They fight famines and floods and pestilence and plagues. It is tremendous to see that missionaries are the first ones in any backward country to rescue unwanted babies, educate girls, and liberate women. It is fabulous to read of their encounters with indifference, suspicion, hostility, persecution, and prison. Their homes are looted, their buildings are burned, church buildings are destroyed, their lives are threatened. They often return broken in health or they die prematurely of tropical diseases.

The Holy Spirit creates the spirit of zeal and the spirit of conviction. This is all the work of the Spirit of God in the

lives of those who are going to go out to preach. Shouldn't this same spirit be in the lives of all Christians? If the Holy Spirit creates within the lives of men and women to take their babies and go out and preach where Christ has not been known, shouldn't that same spirit be in the heart of every Christian? Shouldn't the Christian who believes in the ministry of the Holy Spirit allow that same spirit to create within his own heart and life the desire to sacrifice so that the missionary might go preach?

The Spirit of God promotes missionary activity. He promotes and He causes Christians to feel the need to go to a particular place and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He did it in the life of Stephen. He did it in the life of Paul. He did it in the life of Timothy and the life of Epaphroditus. Surely he could do it in our lives, too. Then once he has created that desire to do the work and as man starts taking steps, then the Spirit of God will direct those steps as I give myself to that belief. Solomon stated it best of all when he said, "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight*" (Proverbs 3:5). The Spirit of God will direct our steps.

The Spirit of God produces missionary results. He has provided man with a convicting Word. It is not up to man to decide what to preach, it is revealed in His Word. Man needs to study and learn it, he needs to live it and imbibe it, he needs to memorize it and digest it. The Word needs to become a part of man, but it is the Spirit of God that has provided us with what to say. The Spirit of God **has**, not will, it **has** provided man with a convicting message. The Spirit of God has provided a confirming Gospel. After the Word has been preached, when the Word is preached again, it confirms what Christians believe and it confirms what we know. In Acts 9:31 when Paul had finally been converted, Luke said:

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. The New King James Bible says, . . . walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

Conclusion

There are three theological presuppositions:

- God is Sovereign!
- Jesus is Lord!
- The Spirit is with us!

The Spirit of God is with Christians today. The Spirit will help us. The Spirit will direct us. The Spirit will make us fruitful. The Spirit will comfort us. It will give us peace and comfort in believing in Jesus.

Theological Imperatives

The Church engages in missions, not because we wish to, but because we have to. The apostles were preaching in the city of Jerusalem in the midst of persecution. They were arrested for preaching. They were carried before the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of the land. There, they were tried and found guilty of preaching a heretical message. In Acts 4:19 they were charged and commanded to cease preaching in the name of Jesus. The apostles said, “. . . *‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’*” The original language of this passage is even stronger. They had been commanded not to preach any more. They literally said, “We cannot not preach.” They wanted to obey the laws of the land, but in this instance they could not. Jesus commanded them to preach. Christians today do not seem to have a problem not speaking, but the apostles could not not speak. They were on their mission not because they desired to, but because they had to. Jesus had said, “Go Preach!” They had no choice but to go preach. The apostle Paul expressed the missionary spirit in 1 Corinthians 9:16: “*Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*” That is the missionary spirit and conviction. Missionaries do not need a pat on the back or credit for preaching and teaching the Gospel of Christ, they cannot help but do what they do.

The Missionary Mandate

God's missionary mandate is based on several things. The mandate is based on the character of God. Scripture is not concerned with proving the existence of God. That is taken for granted. What the Bible reveals and argues for is the character of God:

- **God Is Love!** (cf. 1 John 4:16).
- **God Is Light!** (cf. 1 John 1:5).

The missionary is to bring love and light to people who are in darkness and those who feel so insignificant. There is nothing in the world that is so crushing to one's spirit than the feeling of not being needed, of not being wanted, of having no significance. The Gospel preacher says, "God is love. God is light. And He loves you even though you are unlovable. He brings light even though you deserve to live in darkness." Physically, God brings the light of His splendor and His glory (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6; Revelation 21:23). Intellectually, He brings the light of His truth (cf. Psalm 43:3). Morally, He brings the light of His holiness (cf. Romans 13:11–14). Salvation brings the light of His grace. What a beautiful God He is! That is the reason the missionary feels the way he does. It is imperative! We must preach the Gospel because it brings light and love to people in darkness.

The missionary mandate is based on the command of Christ. Men are invited to come. Jesus said:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30).

Men have been invited to come to Jesus. We are commanded to follow Jesus. In Luke 14 Jesus said that if men do not count the cost and follow Him, they will end up lost and damned:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26–27; cf. Matthew 16:24–25).

It is clear that there is a difference between the eastern concept of discipleship and the western concept of discipleship. The western concept of a disciple is primarily to be instructed in a class or a seminar. The emphasis is on agreement with a particular teaching of principles and certain facts. This is not what discipleship really is. The eastern concept, on the other hand, emphasizes the relationship of the disciple with the teacher. The disciple lives with his teacher and he serves his teacher in a physical way. He listens to his teacher, but he also watches as the teacher lives what he is teaching. Day by day the teacher lives his lesson as he is teaching. In Mark 3:14 Jesus came and chose twelve out of the multitude of disciples. He chose those twelve — *“that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.”* He trained them and called them that they might become fishers of men. The disciple is commanded to follow the Teacher, Jesus; they follow no other human. They follow Jesus. We are commanded to follow Him.

In the Bible men are invited to come, we are commanded to follow, and it is assumed that we will be going. Literally, when the Book says in Mark 16:15, “. . . **‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation’**” and in Matthew 28:19 when it says, *“Therefore **go** and make disciples of all nations . . . ”* — “Go” is not a verb! It is a participle. It ought to be translated “As you are **going**, make disciples!” and “As you are **going**, preach the Gospel!” Who would not go with the

message we have, with the Good News that we have? God is light. God is love. God sacrificed His son that fallen man could become a recipient of God's love and a reflection of God's light. With that kind of message, of course, Christians are going to be "going." That is assumed.

The missionary mandate of going, the missionary mandate of making disciples, is based on four ideas:

- The one who sends — that is **God**.
- The one who is sent — that is the **missionary**.
- Those to whom he is sent — that is the **lost**.
- The message he is commanded to proclaim — **God's saving grace**.

These four things are involved in the imperative. Not simply the imperative in the sense of the command, but the imperative in the sense that I must do this! The necessity is laid upon man because Christians hold in their hands that which all the world needs and without which man cannot live. What would the world think if some laboratory expert was to discover the cure for cancer or the cure for AIDS and put it into a simple capsule, one person takes one capsule and he is forever cured of the cancer he has and he will never have cancer again. What would we think of that person if he said, "That is interesting, but I think I will put this in a drawer and look for something else." And he never told anyone about the cure? Would we think that he was being faithful to his commission? Would we believe that he was a faithful laboratory scientist? No, this man is unfaithful to all of his training. He owed the people with cancer the cure that he found. Christians have a cure for something worse than cancer. We have the cure for sin. The necessity must be laid upon Christians to take the Message to lost mankind.

The missionary mandate is based upon the condition of mankind. Man's spiritual condition is simple. He is lost. Romans 3:23 says, "*for **all** have sinned and fall short of the*

glory of God.” In Ephesians 2:3 Paul said, “*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*” The New Kings James version says, “. . . we **all** once conducted ourselves . . . were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” Romans 3:19–20 says that “*all the world*” is under condemnation and will be found guilty and “*held accountable to God.*” The writer of Hebrews said, “*Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*” **All** men have a rendezvous with death and judgment. In John 3:3 Jesus said, “*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*” **All** are lost and need to be saved.

Lost! That is what the world is. The lost are:

- “. . . you were **dead** in your transgressions and sins . . . But because of his great love for us, God . . . made us alive with Christ even when **we were dead** in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:1–5). “. . . that ye were at that time separate from Christ, **alienated from** the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and **without God in the world**” (Ephesians 2:12, ASV).
- Ignorant of the truth of God — “*They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised . . .*” (Romans 1:25)
- “*the sinful mind is **hostile to God**. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so*” (Romans 8:7).
- “*At one time we too were foolish, **disobedient**, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another*” (Titus 3:3).
- “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for **God’s wrath remains on him***” (John 3:36).

- *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but **men loved darkness** instead of light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).*

This is the condition of man. We know that man is lost. No matter how fine he may dress, no matter what kind of car he drives, no matter what kind of home people live in, no matter what their reputation is — **all** men have sinned. **All** men have fallen short of the love of God, of the character of God, of the will of God. That is the condition of man.

Jesus pictured the condition of man in Luke 15 using three different parables. He talked about a coin. A woman had ten coins and she lost one of them. She took a broom and she swept her house over and over again until she finally found the coin that was lost. The coin was not lost by its own will, it was lost by the neglect of another, but lost it still was. That coin was helplessly lost.

Jesus talked about the sheep that was lost. A man had one hundred sheep, ninety-nine sheep were safe in the fold, but one sheep was lost out in the forest. This man searched until he finally found that one sheep. He brought it back and had everyone rejoice. That sheep was lost of his own doing, he was heedlessly lost. That sheep did not follow the shepherd. That sheep decided to wander away. That sheep decided to become a stray, but the shepherd still loved the sheep just as God still loves the lost. It doesn't matter whether one is lost of his own will or if one is lost by the neglect of another. The condition is the same, and the person is lost.

Finally, Jesus told the parable of two boys. One boy asked for his goods that he might go into a foreign land and waste them there. He became so lost that he was feeding hogs and would have even eaten the slop the hogs were eating if someone would let him, but no one would. He came back home and was received and honored by the father. There had been a boy at home all the time and he was lost. He was lost because he was serving his father out of legal ties, not out of a deep

relationship. They both were willfully lost. They both decided that they would be the way they were. It does not matter whether the person is lost by his own will, lost because of the neglect of another, or lost because he wants to go to the far country, or lost because he does not love the Father. The condition is the same and that person is lost. Man is lost!

Is man eternally lost? The Bible clearly teaches that there are two eternal destinies open to man: everlasting happiness in the presence of God, Jesus, and the angels as it is declared in Matthew 25:34 or everlasting misery in the company of the devil and his angels as Jesus declared in Matthew 25:41. There are only two ways, two gates, two lives, two destinies, two symbols — sheep and goats. The Bible always makes it black and white when it comes to salvation and damnation. Man is lost and in need of a Savior.

At the resurrection, when Jesus comes and heaven is finally the destiny of the righteous, there will be two destinies for man, the destiny of salvation or the destiny of damnation. The word hell is a biblical word. It appears twelve times in the New Testament, and eleven times it comes from the lips of Jesus. Jesus taught about hell (*gehenna*). Jesus taught the love of God as no one else had ever done. He also taught of sin, wrath, death, and judgment as no one else had ever done (cf. John 3).

Christianity has two symbols: the cross and the throne. The cross speaks of love; the throne speaks of judgment. God does not force His love on anyone! The man who rejects God's love will meet the God of love. It is interesting that judgment itself is built upon the love of God. The man who rejects God's love exposes himself to His wrath (cf. Acts 17:30–31; Romans 2:3–5; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). Many may ask do you really believe that hell is literal? Is not hell symbolic? Is not the fire symbolic fire? Maybe it is. Even if Christ's words about hell are symbolic, they are symbolic of something. Whatever it is, it must be unspeakably awful to require such symbols to express it. If it is not literal fire, whatever literal fire does to a

literal body, this is what is going to be done to the eternal body of those who reject the Gospel of Christ.

Is there a second chance after death? In Luke 16:19–31 Jesus told the rich man, “NO!”. Jesus told the rich man, “. . . *‘between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us’*” (Luke 16:26). The rich man wanted Lazarus to go tell his brothers, but Abraham said they have the Word of God, they have Moses and the prophets, if they hear them then they won’t come where you are. Jesus says there is no second chance after death.

The Hebrew writer also says, “NO!” He wrote,

“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” (Hebrews 9:27–28).

That is the divine ordinance. Once dead, once died, then comes the judgment.

What about those who have never heard the Gospel? Surely God cannot judge people as sinners who have never heard the Gospel of Christ. Are the heathen who have never heard the Gospel lost? Paul talked about that in Romans 1. They were not heathens in the beginning:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen (Romans 1:21–25).

They knew God, but they did not glorify Him as God, therefore, God gave them over to the things they had chosen. They were not heathens to begin with. God has in the natural revelation of creation enough of His name and His character to cause men to seek Him. Paul wrote:

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 (cf. Romans 1:18–20).

Man looks at the universe. He looks at what happens in the world and He knows there is a God. He knows there is a God of power. He knows that righteousness pleases God and unrighteousness does not. If man will seek God, he will find Him. Inside of man, the thing that is called conscience as it looks at the creation of God and looks at what exists, knows that there is something other than itself. The conscience knows there is something more powerful than itself. I have not been everywhere in the world, but I have been to approximately thirty countries. I have been to pagan lands, I have been to heathen areas where Christ is not known and the Bible is not found. Even in those lands when man does wrong, man looks up. He does not look around, he looks up because he knows there is a being who stands in judgment of him the created. Man will be judged not because he has not heard the Gospel,

but he will be judged because he has ignored and rejected the knowledge of God that he possesses. A drowning man is not drowning because he does not have a life preserver, he is drowning because he is in the water. If someone will throw him a life preserver, he can be saved from the water he is in. Man is not lost because he has not heard the Gospel, he is lost because he is in sin. Christians need to throw mankind the Gospel. We need to present the saving Message. Yes, man is lost. Yes, man is eternally lost. Yes, the man who has not heard the Gospel is lost because he has sinned and violated the law that he has admitted is in his heart.

The Missionary Task

The reason there is a missionary task is because man is lost — “. . . *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). The missionary task in relation to that has several very interesting aspects:

- The missionary task is a **spiritual task**. In presupposing the Spirit of God, the missionary task is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. Understand that it is a human task as far as the instrument is concerned, but these are men and women in the Spirit, with the Word of the Spirit, proclaiming the love of the Spirit, by the power of the Spirit, into the spirit of men. It is a spiritual task rather than a physical task. That is a comfort in that it means that man has help in the task. It is also a challenge because of the fact that man is the one the Spirit of God has chosen to work through.
- The missionary task is a **biblical task**. A sound Bible teacher will be a sound mission teacher for missions are based on the Word of God. Paul said, “. . . *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Romans 10:17, NKJV). Any mission message that is not founded on sound biblical interpretation will be sporadic and erratic

and it will ultimately fail. What is true of the task is true of the teacher. The teacher who does not have the Word of God deep within his heart and the missionary who is not in the field because the Word of God impels him and compels him to be out there will not last. They will not stay. Missionaries receive their assignment from Christ, but we also receive our assignment from the Word of Christ. It is Christ's Word that builds in us not only the Message but also the motivation to carry out the Message. It is a biblical task.

- The missionary task is also a **task of faith**. Faith, not opinion, is based on evidences. That is what the writer of Hebrews said in Hebrews 11:1, "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (KJV). Faith based on evidences is the spiritual eye of man that beholds God and perceives in Christ the Savior and the Lord. Faith is the spiritual eye that understands the Bible to be the Word of God and accepts the missionary task as the purposed will of God and discovers missions as the call unto salvation and obedience to the Gospel of Christ. Faith, "... *'be it unto you according to your faith . . .* '" (Matthew 9:29, NAS), what you deeply believe is what will guide and drive you, and what will motivate you in life. Men and women of faith are not grown in some theological hotbed or an ecclesiastical organization, but neither are they grown in a vacuum. They prosper only in the presence of God, in a walk with God, and in the battles of life being helped by God not only to win their victory, but also to win the victory of the men who are going into hell as fast as they can. Men of this quality are rare, yet they are desperately needed. Only men and women of genuine faith can do real faith work and will leave their mark in a world of unbelief. Faith, world over-coming faith, is a quality demanded of the modern missionary. It is truly demanded of all people of God.

- The missionary task is a **human task**. It is a spiritual task, a divine task by the divine Spirit of God, but the bottom line is, it is a human task. God has chosen human instruments to accomplish His task in the human heart within the human society surrounded by a human environment. Jesus said, “. . . ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’” (Mark 16:15, NKJV). What a beautiful privilege God has given man to interact with Him and then to interact with others. Man is by nature an interacting being. He will most readily follow the leader of an in-group and submit to the authority of his own group. He will not be reached too far from the outside. That is why the missionary has to come and sit where men sit, he has to eat what men eat. The missionary has to become what the other person is. As Paul said:

Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:16–23).

Mission work is a human task. Cultural adaptation is a part of mission. Christians must allow people to be what they are within their own culture. We cannot try to make them to be like us. We need to allow them to be what they need to be. That is American, French, English, African Christians. The key word that binds Christians together is not some cultural identity. It is a spiritual identity of being one in Jesus joined in a great unified task of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The human aspect of the missionary task is best demonstrated by our Lord and Savior Himself. In Philippians 2 Paul said it very simply — though He was God yet He became man. Though He was the Commander, He became the Servant that He might enable man to have the example to follow and to be like Him (cf. Philippians 2:5–11).

Conclusion

My prayer is “Lord, make us intensely human that we might be used greatly to reach human kind!” Preach the Gospel to someone today.

The Great Commission

The Great Commission is at the heart of any mission theology. The goal of this chapter is to discover what is the real significance of Jesus' teaching and the teachings of the apostles in the Christian's task of taking the Gospel to all the world. We will examine the relationship of the Great Commission to the Church and her missions.

The Relationship to Missionary Christianity

The Great Commission is not an isolated command arbitrarily imposed upon Christianity. It is a logical summation and natural outflow of the character of God as He is revealed in the Scriptures. It is an outflow of the missionary purpose and the thrust of God as unfolded in the Old Testament. It is a natural outflow in the historically incarnated person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fulfilling of this commission is the work of the Holy Spirit from the day of Pentecost onward. It is the work of God through the Church of Jesus Christ as made known in the Book of Acts and the epistles.

The Great Commission does not make Christianity a missionary religion. It was already a missionary religion. The apostles became missionaries not because of a commission but because Christianity is what it is and because of the indwelling Holy Spirit who is an outgoing and witnessing Spirit (cf. John 15:26, 16:8–15). The Commission, and the work it urges, prospers wherever Christianity is truly **known**, thoroughly **believed**, genuinely **experienced**, and implicitly **obeyed**. The Commission of Jesus Christ will be fulfilled. Christianity is

missionary because Jesus is. He was sent from heaven, He came to man, and therefore, Christianity is missionary.

The Significance of Great Commission Teachings

Take note of the value of the Great Commission. While it does not create new duties for Christianity, it sharply focuses the missionary thrust and shows the responsibility of Christianity beyond reasonable doubt to be missionary. The Great Commission defines, focuses, and shows that becoming missionary is the responsibility of every single child of God. Its singularity as a command of the risen Lord marks it as unique among His words. This makes it more than just another assignment among many. Its restatement in some form by all the Gospel writers and in the Book of Acts also makes it unique. Consider the following Scriptures:

- **Matthew 28:18–20:** *Then Jesus came to them and said, “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.”*
- **Mark 16:15–16:** *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*
- **Luke 24:44–29:** *He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could*

understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

- **John 20:20–23:** *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 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. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”*
- **Acts 1:6–8:** *So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Each one of these passages is a little different from the other one, but they are basically the same. The mission command of the Great Commission is composite in its nature. Notice the emphasis of each Gospel writer:

- Matthew stresses the authority of Jesus. He stresses the all-inclusive goal of the work and the time-extension of the work. He records Jesus saying, “‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . . I am with you always.’”

- Mark emphasizes the urgency of the work, the method of fulfilling it, and the geographical scope of the work. He records Jesus saying, “*Go . . . preach the good news to all creation*” — that is the urgency of the Commission. The method of carrying out the Commission is “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved . . .*” What must they believe? The Word that is preached! The scope of the Commission is “*to all creation.*” This is not just every nation, it is every creature — “*Go . . . preach . . . to all creation.*”
- Luke stresses the Christo-centric message and universality of the work. He records Jesus saying, “*This is what is written . . . repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all the nations.*” The whole Gospel according to Luke is to be centered in Jesus. The entire message is Christo-centric and it is for “*all nations.*”
- John, as he records the same incident, emphasizes the spiritual equipment and the spiritual nature of the work. He records Jesus breathing on them and saying, “*Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you . . . Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*” Jesus breathed on them and gave them the spiritual equipment they needed for their work. He was telling them that they were to “Go” under the same authority that He went and to forgive the sins by preaching the Gospel and to retain the sins of those who did not obey the Gospel.

Putting these verses all together paints one beautiful picture. Jesus has all authority. He commands Christians to go preach the Gospel to every creature. He commands us to make disciples of everybody who believes and is baptized. He commands that we do this unto the end of the age by the power of the Spirit of God and by the Spirit of Jesus, who was sent by

God to do the same. The Great Commission is fabulous when it is put together in its composite nature.

Notice the scope and the pattern of the Great Commission is easily seen. An analysis of the Great Commission will reveal two imperatives that give it direction. They can be found in Matthew and Mark. Luke and John do not have stated imperatives, but there is an imperative mission inferred. Both Matthew and Mark have a command recorded. In Matthew the imperative is “*Make disciples!*” (Matthew 28:18). In Mark the imperative is “*Preach the good news*” — the Gospel (Mark 16:15). One is the result, and the other is the cause. The result is “*disciples*.” The cause is “Preach the Gospel.” When the Gospel is preached, some believe and some do not. Those who do believe and are baptized are “*disciples*.” Those who do not believe are not “*disciples*” and they are lost.

There are no imperative forms of the verbs in Luke and John, however, there is a scriptural and spiritual imperative involved. Luke says, “*This is what is written . . .*” and John says, “*Receive the Holy Spirit.*” There is an imperative force behind the words. The impelling and strengthening power behind these words takes the place of an imperative command. The dynamic of the Word and the Spirit takes the place of the imperative. The important thing to see is that the all-inclusive goal of the commission is to “*make disciples of all nations!*”

The Great Commission is not “just about being saved” although it is being saved, but the Gospel is to be preached, it is to be believed, people are to be baptized in order that they might be saved. Why are people being saved? Why are we brought out of darkness into light? Why go from sin into salvation? Why does God save man’s soul? God saves man’s soul so that he can be a disciple! Being a disciple is very important. A disciple is a “sold out” person. Jesus is supreme to him. Jesus is supreme over man’s life, his possessions, over his family. Jesus is not just number one, He is everything. Everything in life is centered in Jesus. The Christian’s job as a disciple is to reproduce. We are to make other disciples. We are

to go preach the Word, teach the Word, baptize people into Jesus that they might become disciples.

In order to accomplish this purpose of making disciples, we must do several things:

- Christians must engage in an intensive and extensive **proclamation of the Gospel**. We must communicate meaningfully and persuasively the good news of salvation. This is not just preaching. It is proclaiming. Not everyone is going to be a preacher, but everyone is to communicate and tell the Message. Everyone is to speak to others, convincingly and persuasively, of their faith, of their belief, of their own acceptance of the New Testament, Gospel of Christ, the Good News. Christians must engage in an intensive and a thorough proclamation of the Gospel.
- Christians must lead people into an **experience of the grace of God** made available through the finished work of Christ upon the cross. Proclamation of the Good News is not enough. We must show it. Christianity is all about showing and telling the Gospel. We need to show the grace of God in our lives. We need to lead others to be able to experience God's grace in their life because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. When Jesus said, "*It is finished!*" at Calvary, it was. The whole purpose of God was finished. The devil's power over mankind was finished. Now man must voluntarily submit himself to the devil because Jesus has brought the devil to naught. Christians need to lead people to be able to experience the grace of God.
- Christians must **separate people from their old attachments** to this sinful world and build them into the new family of God on earth, the Church, through the practice of baptism preceded by and followed by teaching: "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations [we do that by **teaching**], 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'' (Matthew 28:19–20). We must teach and baptize and teach some more to separate people from their old world of sin into the righteousness of God.

- Christians must teach the people who have been separated from the world of sin, *“the disciples,”* the value and greatness of **the gift and the gifts of the Holy Spirit** and lead them out in a walk and ministry in obedience to and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. This means that Christians must do what was done in Acts 2. We must proclaim the Gospel, lead new disciples to experience the Gospel of Christ, and tell them that since they have been immersed they have received the Holy Spirit of God to indwell their bodies as a gift from God to seal them, as a mark of their sonship and their salvation before God. Because they are His sons, God has given them not just the Holy Spirit as a seal, but this Holy Spirit has gifted them in many ways to give them a ministry in Christ. They may have the gift of giving, and they may have the gift of teaching or exhortation, or the gift of administration (cf. 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; 1 Peter 4). Spiritual gifts are all given to benefit the Body of Christ.

I have a ministry. I think I know what it is. I have prayed to God. I have seen success with several things I do. I have heard the Brothers tell me that this is good for them and this benefits them. I have tried to find out the gifts God has given me. I know the great gift of His Son He gave on the cross for me as a sinner. I know the great gift He gave to me when I was immersed into Jesus as His Son, the Holy Spirit. And I think I know the gifts that Spirit has given me. I believe I am a teacher and an exhorter. I believe I have the gifts of publically proclaiming the Word of God. That is why I have given myself to it. My grammar is not

too good, my hair is going away, the voice and the body are not as strong as they used to be, but the gifts are still there. I must, and all Christians must, lead people with our giftedness into belief and a dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God.

Christians must quit saying I cannot do this or that. Of course, they cannot do it, that is why God gave each Christian this power from His Spirit in order to be able to do His work. We must teach the value and the greatness of the gift and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- Christians must **indoctrinate disciples in the precepts of the Master** and by the “*renewing of your minds*” (Romans 12:2) mold them into true and mature Christian disciples. That is where the long term teaching is. That is why God has given the Church the gift of teachers so that the Church can become strong and so that the world may know. Why does God want the Church to be mature? He wants the Church to become mature so that we can fulfill the Commission. He wants us to understand and to teach these relational concepts of the Spirit of God and Jesus and the Father to the Commission and to the Church.

These points have looked at the practical significance of the Great Commission. There is also the theological significance of the Commission. Christians need to look at the God-ward significance of the Commission. Our main interest should be how does this relate me to God. Notice the following emphases in the four Gospel accounts of the Commission:

- The sovereignty of the Lord — “*‘All authority . . . has been given to Me.’*” (Matthew. 28:18; cf. Philippians 2:9–11; Revelation 3:7).
- The imperative of the Gospel — “*‘. . . Go and make disciples! . . . Go . . . preach’*” (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:44–47).

- The universality of the Gospel — “*... of all nations . . . to all creation . . . to all nations . . . to the ends of the earth.*” (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:44–47; Acts 1:8). God wants every ethnic group told the Good News. What a challenge — tell every creature this Message. There are more than six billion people alive in this world today. God wants every one of them told and He will empower His Church to do so if we will in faith turn to Him.
- The nature of the Gospel — Jesus said it is “*‘repentance and forgiveness of sins . . . will be saved . . . make disciples . . . repentance and forgiveness of sins . . . ’*” (Luke 24:46–47; John 20:22; Acts 26:15–23; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1–3). The nature of the Gospel brings salvation and judgment to mankind.
- The human instrumentality in the proclamation of the Gospel — Jesus spoke to eleven quaking brethren, eleven fearful apostles (this was after Judas had killed himself and before Matthais was chosen), and told them they were the ones that He would hold responsible to see that the whole world knows the Gospel of Christ:

“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well”
(Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8; 26:16).

I do not understand why God loves man so much that He ennobles our lives by allowing us to be the instruments with which His Word will become known.

- The need of spiritual equipment to minister successfully in the Gospel — man cannot do it, but God chose man to do it. Since God chose man to do it and He knew man could not, He is responsible for seeing that man gets the necessary equipment. That is why Jesus said, “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” Other versions say, “*and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*” (Matthew 28:20, ASV, KJV; Luke 24:48; John 20:22; Acts 1:8). If it were not for that “*lo*,” I do not think I would go preach — for the “*lo*” says He is going to go with me.

The Church needs to emphasize the great purpose of the Great Commission. The Commission constitutes an identification of the believer with Christ. That is the Commission’s chief significance. It says Christians are related to Jesus. It constitutes an identification of the believers with Christ in accomplishing the divine purpose as unfolded in the missionary thrust of the Old Testament incarnated in their Lord and Savior. It authoritatively states the Christian duty of world evangelization. It defines and delineates and discusses in great detail the missionary task. It is our compass, charter, and plan. It states one central concern of Christ — the salvation of lost man. It declares one central purpose of life — the purpose of gathering a people for the name of the Lord from among the nations to constitute the holy and beautiful Bride of Christ. It prescribes one central strategy — the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by Spirit-equipped witnesses making disciples among all nations.

The final outcome of the Great Commission is the bottom line. There is a work to be done, a commission to be fulfilled. At the bottom line, what does God want to happen? God wants a **fully-made disciple**, a fully believing person. God does not want just a convert. Many times preachers are interested in declaring how many people we brought to Christ, how many people came to Jesus, how many people were saved. This is

important, and it is good news. However, that is just the beginning, that is not God's goal. The goal of the Christian's mission is not to save people; that is just a step or a movement toward what is at the heart of the center of God's wishes and God's will. God wants a full-grown son. There has to be a baby to have a full-grown son. The baby grows to be an adolescent, the adolescent grows to be a teenager, the teenager grows to be a college student, a college student grows to be a young adult, a young adult grows to be middle-aged, middle-age becomes old-age, and old-age becomes real-old-age. Throughout all of that spiritual growth the intent of God is singular — He wants disciples. He wants followers. He wants people who are sold out to Him.

What does God want in a fully-made disciple? What is a disciple? There are seven phrases that are used to describe a disciple. A disciple is a person who is:

- Living a life of conscious and constant identification with Christ in life, death, and resurrection (baptism). Living a life with Christ in words, behavior, attitudes, motives, and purposes (the new walk). Christians are buried with Christ through baptism to be raised to walk in a new life (cf. Romans 6:3–4).
- Fully realizing Christ's absolute ownership of His life. Christians have been bought with a price, we are not our own, we belong to Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:20).
- Joyfully embracing the "savior-hood" of Christ. Christians are saved because of Christ and His marvelous grace (cf. 2 Timothy 1:9).
- Delighting in the Lordship of Christ. The creed of the Church is "*Jesus Christ is Lord!*" (Philippians 2:11). That solves all the problems of life if a person really believes that Jesus Christ is Lord.
- Living by the abiding, indwelling resources of Christ. The hope of the Gentiles is "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*"

(Colossians 1:27). Christ is in every Christian, He dwells within us through our faith.

- Living by the abiding, indwelling resources of Christ.
- Living according to the imprinted pattern and purpose of Christ.
- Existing for the chief end of glorifying his Lord and Savior.

Conclusion

The Great Commission, as recorded by all four evangelists, presents a comprehensive and detailed pattern of our missionary task. The Great Commission does not spell out all the duties of the Church in this world nor does it spell out the total mission of the Church. It concerns itself primarily with the outreach of the Church into the world of the unchurched people, whoever and wherever they may be. That is at the heart of life. The rest of it is to support that. The rest of it is to give details. The rest of it is to present the background against that which everything can be seen. Remember what Jesus said, “. . . *‘Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I came’*” (Mark 1:38) That is why He came to earth. That is why we came into Christ. Christ came into the world to preach and teach. We came into Christ to preach and teach. Find someone who does not know about Jesus and tell them what you know about our saving Lord.

The Nature of the Gospel (1)

The Christian missionary has but one message — the Gospel. He has but one task — the communicating of that Gospel to every creature in the world, so that the ones who can, will be saved. Since the only avenue to God is through Jesus Christ and the Gospel of Christ, the obligation of every Christian is to transmit that saving Good News to all of creation.

The Nature of the Gospel

The Gospel has a divine origin. It is not from man; it is from God:

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11–12).

The Gospel, the Good News about Jesus, that Paul preached “to the churches in Galatia” was not man-made, nor was it man-revealed nor man-taught. Paul said that he had received the Gospel from God through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul said the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 1 Corinthians 11:23:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3).

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread (1 Corinthians 11:23).

The Gospel is not man-made! It is not something that man thought was good or that man originated. It has a divine origin.

For several chapters in this book we will be reading the text to see what the Scriptures have to say about the Gospel, the heart of the missionary Message. In 1 Peter 1:18 it says that Christians are not redeemed with “*corruptible things*.” Notice that 1 Peter 1:19–20 says we are “*redeemed . . . by the precious blood of Christ*”:

...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

This Gospel that was “*revealed*” and the Word by which we are “*redeemed*” and even “*Christ, a **lamb** without blemish or defect . . . **was chosen** before the creation of the world.*” It was revealed through the Gospel by God’s sovereign will. Paul said the same thing in Ephesians 1:3–5:

*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. For **he chose us in him before the creation of the world** to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.*

Jesus was chosen to be the Lamb before the foundation of the world. Christians were chosen in the Lamb before the foundation of the world. God willed it that way by His sovereign will.

God planned it that way by His love. Consider what John said in 1 John 4:8–9: “*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.*” Think about this verse along with the most familiar verse in all the Bible, John 3:16, which says, “*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.*” God planned the saving Gospel. He planned the death of His Son in His love.

In Romans 1:2 Paul told the saints in Rome, “*...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.*” God promised in the Scriptures His Gospel and His Son. In Romans 3:21–26 Paul wrote:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand go unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

God provided this salvation, this Gospel in His Son. God has provided the Good News of salvation in His Son, Jesus Christ.

He provided salvation apart from the Law by the death of His Son. He requires faith from the Christian. He did it that He might be **just** for forgiving the sins done aforetime and that He might be **just** in forgiving sins at this present time. He did it to demonstrate that He has always been **just** in forgiving sins. He took Enoch home in spite of the fact that Enoch was a sinner. He allowed Noah to save the world from the flood in spite of the fact that he was a sinner. He let Abraham be the father of a great nation in spite of the fact that he was a sinner. He let Moses lead the children of Israel out of Egypt in spite of the fact that he was a sinner. He said to these men, and to David, and to countless others in the Old Testament, "I forgive you. I have put your sins behind my back. I have cast them into the uttermost part of the sea. I will never call them to mind again." They did not understand why and they thought that perhaps God was unjust. Jesus came, He lived, He died, He was raised, and He is enthroned. The Gospel was written and proclaimed in order to declare that God is righteous in forgiving the sins of sinful men. The Gospel is divine in its origin.

The Messianic content or the center of the whole Gospel of Christ is centered in Jesus, the Messiah. The word Messiah is the Hebrew parallel to the word Christ, which (Christ) literally is a Greek word. Both of these words mean "the anointed one of God." Jesus is the King, the Messiah, the Savior. The Gospel is centered in Him. He is the content of the Gospel. The Gospel has many facts, but only one theme, Christ. The facts include God loves man, man can be saved, man can be right with God, and many others, but there is one single theme: Christ. Paul wrote the following "*to the church of God in Corinth*":

*When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except **Jesus Christ and him crucified**. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my*

preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (1 Corinthians 2:1–5).

The center of the Gospel is not its facts, but its Factor. Paul said he preached Jesus and Him crucified. He did not preach through his own strength or wisdom or his own eloquence. He preached with fear and trembling and with weakness, so that they would have faith not in Paul as a wise man, nor a proclaimer, nor as an apostle, but in Jesus Christ. Too many times Christians put their faith in the messenger or in the message rather than in the One who is the Message. Our faith needs to be in Jesus because of the revealed Word and because we have heard it from a human messenger.

Consider the sermons that were presented in the Book of Acts. All New Testament preaching that is recorded is centered in Jesus. It is not centered in a promise, or a command, or in a precept, or a principle. All New Testament preaching was centered on Jesus who makes promises, who gives precepts, and who does demand that we do certain things. Consider the following sermons:

- The very first sermon that is recorded in the Book of Acts begins in Acts 2 when Peter stood with the other apostles before a crowd gathered on the day of Pentecost. There was the great miracle as they “. . . *began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them*” (Acts 2:4). The text says that Peter stood with the Eleven and he spoke to them about Jesus:

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and

foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:22–24).

Jesus lived, Jesus died, and Jesus was raised. Peter went on to proclaim later —

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out this which you now see and hear (Acts 2:32–33).

He lived, He died, He was buried, and He has ascended. The only thing that remains is for Him to come. Between that ascension to the throne and that coming at the end of time, He is interceding for Christians in heaven. In Acts 2 the Message is centered in Jesus.

- Now consider the end of the second sermon in Acts 4:2 —

*They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and **proclaiming in Jesus** the resurrection of the dead.*

- Again in Acts 5 the apostles were teaching Jesus:

Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood” (Acts 5:27–28).

The apostles were still teaching Jesus and Him crucified. The high priest and his associates made them appear before the Sanhedrin because they were still proclaiming Jesus and trying to blame them for His blood, to be guilty for His death.

- Notice in Acts 8 the Church was scattered upon the stoning of Stephen and wherever they went they were preaching the Word of God. Acts 8:5 says, “*Philip went down to a city in Samaria and **proclaimed the Christ** there.*” He was proclaiming the Messiah. In Acts 8:35 that same man, Philip got into a chariot with the Ethiopian eunuch and using the passage of Scripture where the eunuch was reading in Isaiah — “*Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the **good news about Jesus.***”
- In Acts 9:20 after his conversion Paul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus and — “*At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.*”
- In Acts 28 Paul preached in Rome even while he was under guard. Acts 28:30–31 says:

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Notice that in 2 Corinthians Paul wrote the following:

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake (2 Corinthians 4:5).

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore **Christ's ambassadors**, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:18–21).*

Christ is the center of the Gospel Message!

A man by the name of Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf started a missionary movement called the Moravian Movement. He gave millions of dollars that Christ might be known among the heathen people. He made the following statement: "The heathens already know of the existence of God. What they need to hear about is the love of Christ." The crucial question is: "What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?" The New Testament teaches and the early Church believed that Jesus Christ is a unique person having two natures, one human and the other divine (cf. Romans 1:3–4; Philippians 2:6–7). The Church needs to proclaim the dual nature of Christ.

The Christian creed is a simple creed — **Jesus Christ is Lord!** Jesus is His family name and expresses His humanity. Christ is His divine name and expresses His deity. Lord is His title and reflects His divine right and expresses His ownership and the fact that He is Master over all things. Christians need to think about the incarnation of Jesus. It was the greatest event in the history of the world. It remains to this day the greatest mystery of the Christian faith. Paul told Timothy:

*Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:
He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit,*

was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory (1 Timothy 3:16).

Jesus was manifested in the flesh and justified in the Spirit. Think about this baby in the manger among the cattle and other barn animals where the atmosphere smelled deeply of manure. It was a heavenly atmosphere. God, the Eternal, Immortal, Invisible One, wrapped Himself in the mantle of humanity and appeared on earth in the humble guise of human flesh. God, the Almighty One, became the Babe of Bethlehem and fled to Egypt to escape the wrath of an earthly king. God, the Timeless One, broke into time and for thirty-three years was subject to the laws and limitations of time and space. God, the Architect of the universe, became the Carpenter of Nazareth and mended broken furniture for the people next door. God, the Creator, Sustainer, and Possessor of all things, became a penniless preacher, dependent for His daily bread on the charity of others. At the same time He is “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

The humanity of Christ is an example and a comfort to Christians. The deity of Christ is fundamental to the Christian faith. Deny the deity of Christ and with that denial lose the way of salvation, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting. Jesus Christ is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. Both facts are essential parts of the Gospel. Remove the humanity of Jesus and remove the sympathy. Remove the deity of Christ and remove the ability. Jesus has both the sympathy and the ability to save. These facts are at the heart of the Christian Gospel.

There is a balance in the Gospel. It is to be Christo-centric, but there is also human outreach. While Christ is the theme of the Gospel, man is its object. Man is the sole candidate for salvation. Man alone is created in the image of God. In six days God made all things in heaven and earth. Near the close of the six days, God reached down into the dust and He formed a man’s body from the dust of that earth. He breathed into that

creature the breath of life and man became a living soul. Before God did that the Godhead declared within its sovereign will:

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image . . .’
So God created man in his own image, in the image of
God he created him; male and female he created
them” (Genesis 1:26–27).*

From the dust of the ground and from the rib of a man came that which is in the image of God. All shattered and all dysfunctional and distorted by sins, but still in the image of God was man. Vile and wicked and crawling in the dust, but still in the image of God was man. God wants Christians to go to other men to make them what we are, because we once were what they are. He wants all men to become the sons of God. The greatest sinner whoever lived is not beyond redemption. Jesus came to call not the righteous, but the wicked. He came not for the healthy, but for the sick (cf. Matthew 9:13). Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15, *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.”* Man in his sin is the object of God’s pity and compassion. The two great truths of the Gospel are — (1) God loves the world and (2) Christ died for all.

The cross is God’s way of saying to a prodigal world, “I love you! Come home!” Study again the story of the lost son in Luke 15:11–32. The story of the prodigal son is one of the great stories in the Bible. A good father had two sons. Neither one of them loved the father very deeply. One son wanted what was rightfully his. He received what was rightfully his, went to the far country, and there he wasted it in riotous living. He became a friend to the immoral, rich, worldly people, but soon he ran out of money and his friends left him. He was reduced to such unholy desperation that he hired out to feed pigs, the most reprehensible thing for a Jew to do. He would have eaten the slop that the hogs ate, but no one would give it to him. In that

hog pen he recognized that he was away from his father's care. He said this is stupid for even the hired servants in my father's house have more than enough to eat. He decided to go back to his father and tell the father that he had sinned. At that point the son qualified for the father's forgiveness, just a confession and a return are all it takes. The son returned to the father in his hog stained clothes and his smelly body. The father had been looking for his son and he ran out to meet the boy. The father threw his arms around his son who had been with the hogs. The son started his confession speech saying, *"I have sinned against heaven and against you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son"* (Luke 15:21). The father kissed his son and put a robe on his filthy back, a ring upon his hand, and shoes upon his filthy feet. He sat the son down to eat the fattened calf that he had kept for the return of his son. The prodigal son learned that God loves sinners.

Consider the proud son who would not celebrate the return of his brother or make any confession, instead he had a complaint. Confession puts man at the table, and complaints leave him outside. He complained saying, "You never even gave me a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends, but when this ungodly son came home you killed the fattened calf for him." The father told the son that everything he owned belonged to him. He would have liked to hear that son say that he was also unworthy but grateful to be in his grace. The father had longed for the return of the sinful son and wanted the brother to feel the same way. The elder brother was glad the wasteful boy was away. The Bible does not say how many times the father thought about the son who was away in the far country, but each time he did he illustrates the Gospel of Christ — sinful man is the reason Jesus came to the world from the heart of the Father. Paul said in Romans 5:8, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Conclusion

The heart of the Gospel is that Christ died for the ungodly. The theme of the Gospel is Jesus and Him crucified. This is the message of every sermon preached in the Book of Acts. It is at the heart of every single Gospel presentation made to the Church to mature them in the epistles. It is at the heart of all that John said in the Book of Revelation. Jesus Christ crucified is the theme of the Gospel. The object of that Gospel and the reason that Jesus died are people in the heart of God. The reason Jesus lived and died is for people. People are at the heart of God. This is missionary. May God give us the strength and the love to bring people to Jesus.

The Nature of the Gospel (2)

This chapter will continue the study of the nature of the Gospel within the study of the Biblical Theology of Missions. It is important to remember that the Gospel is divine in its origin. It came by revelation through the Spirit to the apostles. The Gospel is Christo-centric in that it is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The theme of the Christian Gospel is Jesus. The object of the Gospel is human outreach as Christ reaches out to sinners.

The Dynamic Operation of the Gospel

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation. These verses are very familiar verses in which Paul expressed a godly pride in the Gospel of Christ:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”
(Romans 1:16–17)

Paul said, “. . . the gospel . . . is the power of God for the salvation of everyone . . .” The word “power” in the Greek language is the word ***dunamis*** from which we have the words dynamic and dynamo. Paul’s point is the dynamic character of the Gospel of Christ which God uses to bring salvation to all

men who have faith. There is a single requirement — “*salvation of everyone who **believes**.*” Man must understand what belief is. It is the total commitment and trust and reliance on someone. It is much more than mental ascent. It is even more than total agreement with what is said. It is putting one’s full weight down on what is said and relying completely on what is said. The word “*belief*” will be used numerous times in this study of missions. It is a word that has various uses, but notice when people believed on Jesus superficially the Scripture says that Jesus did not believe on them (cf. John 2:23–25). These people only believed intellectually when they saw His miraculous signs.

A missionary friend in Kenya was sitting in the airport waiting for a flight to go home. Another man walked in wearing clothing that marked him as a missionary. The missionary asked this other man if he was a missionary and the other man said, “I am in a way. I am a translator for the Wycliff Bible Translators. These people go to tribes that have no written language and live among them listening to their speech. They write the words out phonetically and make an alphabet for the people. Then they teach the people the alphabet and show them what they have been saying by showing them their words. They make an actual written language for the tribe and then translate the Book of Mark. Then the translators move onto another tribe and others come in to preach the Gospel of Christ. The missionary asked the translator what was the hardest word to translate into a tribal language. The translator, without any hesitation, said, “Faith!” When the missionary asked why “faith” was such a hard word to translate, the translator answered, “Because they have no synonym for that word. They do not trust each other. They do not rely on each other, so they do not have the word trust, rely, belief, or faith.” To illustrate how they translated the word “faith” the translator opened his Bible and read a familiar passage from the Kenyan Bible with these words: “*Go into all the surrounding tribes and tell them the good news about Jesus Christ. He who puts his full weight down on what he hears and*

is dipped will be delivered.” The missionary immediately recognized Mark 16:15–16:

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” was easily understood in the translation — Whoever was dipped would be delivered and whoever put his full weight down was the one who “believed.” This is the way the word “believe” will be used in these chapters. All that God requires is that kind of belief that is willing to put the full weight on what God says. Faith/belief is to put your full weight down on God and Jesus and you will be saved. When you have faith and belief, then you will do anything and everything that God says. When a person puts their full weight down on someone, anything that person says is not going to make sense because you will believe everything he says. It makes sense just because he said it. And your desire, even your life, is to fulfill his wishes and commands. What builds that in the Christian? What is it that enables the Christian to have that kind of faith? It is the Gospel! The Gospel is the dynamic of God that dynamically operates in the Christian life to bring him to a saving faith.

Consider the following passages from the Gospel of John:

- “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and **believes him who sent me** has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24). Jesus said that “. . . he has crossed over from death to life.” That happened because man (“whoever”) heard His words and he believed.
- When Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman, she asked how He could ask her for a drink. Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks

you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10). Jesus told the Samaritan woman that He came so that she might have “living water.”

- *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). In this passage Jesus was claiming to be the Good Shepherd. Jesus came so that man might “. . . have life, and have it to the full.” The Gospel was the good news about Jesus.*

In his letter to the Romans, Paul said, “. . . *through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death*” (Romans 8:2). Jesus Himself told His followers that He was *“the bread of life”* — *“I am the bread of life”* (John 6:35, 48). The words Jesus spoke were Spirit and life. If man wants the Spirit of God to reign on this earth and life to be present in the spirits of people on this earth, Christians must take them the living Word of Christ.

Most modern men are well aware that they are in a predicament in this world from which they cannot save themselves because of sin. Watching television, reading the paper, and listening to the radio it is obvious that man does not know the way out of this predicament. He is bound and he knows it. Man does not really recognize the reason for the problem. Men blame the problem on the system, the establishment, on the government, or the environment; he blames it on anything except himself. The blame is in man himself. The real problem is not ecological, and it is not economical, not political, not social, not even religious. The real problem is sinful man. That is the predicament of this world. What has the dynamic to raise man out of this predicament? Notice in reading the Gospels that Jesus never told anyone that they had to learn to live with the problem. If I tell people today that they have to learn to live with the problem that is not telling them any good news.

The Gospel is the dynamic — man can be converted. When Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, he said:

*“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless **he is born again.**” “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is **born of water and the Spirit.** Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:2–8).*

Jesus told Nicodemus that man can be born anew “. . . of water and the Spirit.” The way out of the sinful predicament that all men are in is **UP!** We cannot go to the right or the left, we cannot go forward, and we cannot go back to escape. Man must look **UP** and hold a hand **UP**. When man reaches a hand up, reaching for the greatest prize of all to grasp the greatest reward, when man holds up a hand in faith, he will find a hand in his hand. Man can find the hand of the Man from Nazareth and it will be a scarred hand, a nail scarred hand that will lift man **UP** from the predicament of sin. That is why man prays, “Lord, deliver me out of the midst of this temptation.” Man does not ask to be delivered from being tempted, he asks that the Lord lift him **UP** from the quagmire of temptation. When the Lord does lift man **UP**, man becomes a new creation. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

When a missionary proclaims this message, he is not saying that the Gospel solves all of man's problems or answers all the questions. Jesus said that we will have the poor with us always (cf. Mark 14:7). Jesus did not come to take away the problems of poverty and wickedness. Wicked men are going to wax worse and worse. The Bible says so. There will be more wicked men to sit on more wicked thrones for more wicked nations as long as the world stands. The Gospel does not solve the problems in this world with ecology and politics. Jesus came to solve the problem of sin. He solved that problem with its penalty and its power over man. That is the Gospel Message.

The dynamic of the Gospel of Christ is that it delivers man from the power of sin and the penalty of sin. Praise God, the Gospel saves man from the propensity of sin (cf. Romans 6–8). Man is no longer under the penalty of sin because Jesus died for man's sins. He took our sins away. Man's sins have been nailed to a tree. The sins that man committed in the past are no longer on his record. As the Christian walks in the light, 1 John 1:7 says, "*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*" The blood of Jesus His Son keeps the Christian clean. In the baptistery, the sinner is plunged into a bath of water which represents a bath of blood that took away his sin. As the Christian walks day by day, he walks under a shower of blood that cleanses him from his sins. That is the dynamic of the Gospel! Christians have been removed from the penalty and the power of sin. We no longer think like we used to think or live like we used to live because of the blood of Christ. It is the blood of Jesus that redeems man from the empty life that he once lived. That is the Gospel! That is the missionary Message!

The Gospel also dispels man's greatest fear. That is the fear of death. The writer of Hebrews said,

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15).

Jesus died to deliver man from the fear of death. Death holds no fear for the child of God. Paul said:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me (Philippians 1:20–26).

Death is an enemy, but it is an enemy that has been defeated by Jesus. That is the dynamic of the Gospel. The dynamo of the Gospel of Christ is that it lets man approach the thing that man fears the most with a cheerful thought that this dreaded enemy is about to be used by God to usher the Christian into the presence of God. It is a transfer to the Home Office, which is a promotion that anyone would accept.

The Universal Appeal — It Is for All

The Gospel does not appeal to just a few. It is not just for the elect, but it is for “*whoever/whosoever*.” It is for all. The

world in Jesus' day was a rigidly divided world no matter what area of the world you came from. The Jews divided the world into two groups: the Jews and the Gentiles. The Greeks divided the world into two groups: the Greeks and the barbarians — those who spoke cultural Greek and those who did not. The Romans divided the world into two groups: citizens and non-citizens. Non-citizens could be compelled to work for the citizens. They could be compelled to carry a citizen's load for a mile and the non-citizen could put it down after the mile so that the citizen had to find another non-citizen to carry it the next mile. A Roman citizen could go all the way around the world finding non-citizens to carry his load. The Jews hated the Gentiles. The Greeks disdained the non-Greeks. The Romans despised the non-Romans. The world was divided between the "us" and the "them." It is still that way today. There is still black and white, bond and free. Wherever you are there is a division between "us and them." The "Us" are the elite, the privileged, and the righteous. The "Them" are the unprivileged and the unrighteous.

However, the great word of the Gospel is "*whosoever*" — "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16, KJV). Consider Romans 10:12–13 where Paul said:

*For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For **whosoever** shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved* (KJV).

The New International Version uses the word "Everyone" — "*— the same Lord is Lord of **all** and richly blesses **all** who call on him, for, '**Everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*" Consider Revelation 22:17 near the end of the Bible. It is interesting how a book closes; these are some of the last words of The Book:

*The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” **Whoever** is thirsty, let him come; and **whoever** wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life — . . . let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. **Whoever** desires, let him take the water of life freely (NIV/NKJV).*

The Gospel word is “**Whoever/whosoever**.” The Word is not only for the Jew or the Gentile or for only the Americans and not for the un-American. The Word is not just for the good and not for the bad. It is not just for the righteous and not for the unrighteous. The Gospel is for all! The saving Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all. Christians dare not say that there are no heathens at home or no heathen abroad, because everyone without the Gospel of Christ is a pagan. Everyone without the Gospel of Christ is lost.

The Gospel of Christ insists on two things: God loves the entire world — John 3:16: “*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.*” The Gospel insists that Jesus died for all men. First Timothy 4:9–10 says:

*This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the **Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.***

Jesus is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe! There is not a person in the world for whom Jesus is not their Savior. He has not saved them because they have not believed. All one has to do is “put his full weight down on” Jesus, do what He says and he will be saved, because Jesus is his Savior. Christians should not say Jesus ought to be your Savior; that is not the missionary message. The missionary message says Jesus is the Savior of all men. It does not matter where you live or

who you are. It does not matter what you have done or what you think you have done — Jesus is your Savior and all you have to do is believe. He is especially the Savior of those who believe. Both the fact that God loves all the world and the fact that Jesus is the Savior of all men is manifested in the Gospel. In God's sight there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, there is no difference between any race, there is no difference between any nationality. The same Lord is the Lord of all and blesses all who call upon Him.

Jesus acknowledged that salvation was from the Jews, but it was for all men. Salvation is from the Church, but it is for all men. When Jesus sent His disciples out on the limited commission in Matthew 10, He sent them only to the Jews, but He declared in a parable to them when they came back that the *"field is the world"* and He was going to sow them as righteous seed into that world (cf. Matthew 13:37–43). After Jesus died and when He had been resurrected, He gathered them to a hill and from that hill from which He was to ascend into heaven before their amazed eyes, He said:

*"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).

There are four great facts that are implied in the universal appeal of the Gospel (remember that the Gospel is for all men) — *"whosoever"*:

- The effect of sin is universal — *"for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). *"All have sinned"* . . . ALL! If God wanted all men saved, then who did Jesus have to die for? He died for all!

- The offer of salvation is universal — *“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to **all** that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call”* (Acts 2:39, KJV).
- The command to repent is universal — *“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now **he commands all people everywhere to repent**. 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 all men** by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30–31).
- The invitation to believe is universal — *“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved”* (Romans 10:9–10).

Conclusion

God wants everyone to believe. He wants everyone to be saved. The Gospel is universal in its appeal. It does not matter where you live or who you are, God wants you to be saved. If you are saved, then God wants you to be saving. He wants you living the Gospel, teaching the Gospel, and preaching the Gospel. The next person you and I meet is the next person we need to talk to about Jesus. The last person we meet is the last person we need to talk to about Jesus. May God help us to be His missionary for the Gospel of Christ.

The Nature of the Gospel (3)

This book covers the nature of the Christian Gospel as it relates to the task of preaching the Gospel to every creature. The first five chapters have covered the following points concerning the Gospel:

- The Gospel had a divine origin. Paul told the Galatians, “. . . *the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 1:11–12). He did not learn the Gospel, nor was he taught it by any man. He “. . . *received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*” The Bible is not man’s opinion. It is not the best news to the world, it is the only news for the world, it is the good news that Jesus died for the world.
- The Gospel has a Messianic content. It is Christo-centric in character. When Paul left intellectually centered Athens and arrived in Corinth, the immoral city of his day, he said, “*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Consider again all the sermons in the Book of Acts. Each one centered in Jesus and Him crucified. The proof of the life and death of Jesus is seen in the resurrection. The theme of the Gospel is revealed in the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, and the coming of Jesus.
- The object of that Gospel is the human outreach. God was not glorified just in the presentation of Jesus’ life. God is glorified in the redeeming of man. The human outreach of

the Gospel is not simply in the view that humans are presenting the Gospel, but sinful man is the object of the Gospel.

- The dynamic operation of the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God. Paul said, “*I am not ashamed of **the gospel**, because it is **the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile***” (Romans 1:16). This is not in reference to God’s character of righteousness. It is the righteousness that God imputes to mankind because of his faith. That is what God demands from the very beginning and that is what He will demand until the end. He demands that men put their full weight down on what God has said. He asks that man fully trust, rely, and commit themselves and all that they are to Him.
- The Gospel has a universal appeal. It is not a provincial Gospel. It is not simply for the Jews, or the Greeks, or the Romans. It is for all men. The reason the Gospel is for all men is because all men have sinned. Because all men have sinned, then all men stand short of the glory that God would have them to live. That is the meaning of the word “*sin*.” It means to fall short or to be short of what God demands.

The Personal Application

The sixth point concerning the nature of the Gospel is the personal application of the Gospel. Men live together in societies, cities, states, or governments. Sin does have social implications. This was particularly true in the Old Testament because Israel was a theocratic nation. Their ruler, king, or president, the One in control was God Himself so they related as a nation to God. Any time any individual had sinned in Israel, Israel had sinned. Notice in Joshua 7 after the fall of Jericho, God said, “*Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep*” (Joshua 7:11).

One man, Achan, had committed the sin of taking “*some of the devoted things*” from Jericho, but it had implications for the entire nation because that was their relationship to God. Throughout the Old Testament, when the prophets spoke and even to this day, cities and even nations will come under the judgment of God because sin has become so rampant that everyone seems to be involved. That is the background of the Old Testament prophets. However, in the New Testament no longer are people related as a nation to God. Jeremiah prophesied:

No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD . . . (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:10–12).

Sin and guilt have personal implications in the New Testament. Faith and salvation are also personal and individual. Each man must decide whether to accept or reject Jesus Christ. Consider the following passages that make this fact evident:

- “*So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning **each of you** night and day with tears*” (Acts 20:31). Paul was speaking to the elders at Ephesus, speaking to them for what he thought would be his last time. Paul made sure that each one of them understood that each one of them was individually related to God.
- “*But to **each one of us** grace has been given as Christ apportioned it*” (Ephesians 4:7). To each single individual God has given grace.
- “*We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching **everyone** with all wisdom, so that we may present **everyone** perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me*” (Colossians

1:28). This is the Gospel of Christ in its individual character.

- *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus **every knee** should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and **every tongue** confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:9–11). Jesus humbled Himself and died on the cross, so therefore God exalted Him. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is the Christ and He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
- *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that **each one** may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10). Each man’s life will determine where he spends eternity. Each man will receive eternal life or eternal damnation depending on the life that he has lived.
- *“If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of **each man’s** work”* (1 Corinthians 3:12–13). The test of man’s work in life is as an individual — each man’s work will be tested by the fire of trials. The Gospel is applied individually. That is the nature of the Gospel. It has a personal application rather than a group application.

The Revolutionary Implications – Acts 17:6

The seventh point concerning the nature of the Gospel is its revolutionary implications. In Acts 17 in the city of Thessalonica Paul had been preaching in the synagogue and, of course, the Jews did not like what he had been preaching because he was preaching Jesus and Him crucified. The Jews looked for Paul and Silas at Jason’s house and did not find

them there so the Jews “. . . *dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here”* (Acts 17:6). The Greek version of this verse says, “*These that have **turned the world upside down** are come hither also*” (ASV). This confirms that the Gospel was revolutionary.

There are two revolutionary aspects of the Gospel. One is the narrow concept which has to do primarily with death, burial, and the new walk with Christ. By Christ’s death God is reconciling the world unto Himself and not counting their sins against them any more — “. . . *that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation*” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

In its fullness the Gospel embraces everything Jesus taught. Consider the final words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18–20:

*“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.”*

In the parallel verses Mark simply said, “. . . ‘*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*’” (Mark 16:15, NKJV). The Gospel is going to teach man, “*every creature,*” to do “*everything*” Jesus has commanded. In the broadest sense the Gospel is everything that Jesus commanded the disciples to do. That is revolutionary. That will change man’s entire life. Man’s life is to be built on not what is expedient, but on what the Lord Jesus has commanded.

At the heart of the Gospel is the concept of self-denial (cf. Luke 14:25–33; Philippians 2:4–8; John 12:24). Consider what is the most significant challenge from Jesus to those who want to be His followers, His disciples:

*Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not **hate his father and mother**, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not **carry his cross** and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not **give up everything** he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 14:25–35).*

These verses are revolutionary in all their implications. It is necessary for the missionary-minded person to know, to teach, and to demand this. Jesus said there are three things that are revolutionary and necessary for anyone who wants to be His disciple:

- Discipleship demands an **unrivaled love**. Jesus said, “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple.*” The biblical word for “hate” in these verses does not mean to

detest, it literally means to love less. In the parallel verses in Matthew, Jesus said:

*“Anyone who loves his father or mother **more than me** is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”* (Matthew 10:37–39).

There is no reason to be offended by this use of the word “*hate*.” A husband loves his wife in an unrivaled way. Any woman who tries to take the place of his wife would not be loved less, she would literally be hated because she had the audacity to think she could take the place of his wife. Any person, institution, or any being who wants to take Jesus’ place is not to be loved less, it is to be hated. If one is a disciple of Christ, Jesus occupies an unrivaled place in his life. Jesus is not first in a list of things, He is to be first in every list. He is preeminent. He is the only One who has that place of love and honor in man’s life or he cannot be a disciple of Jesus. Not only does the Christian need to own that and realize His importance in our lives, the people we teach need to know that He demands an unrivaled place in their lives.

- Discipleship demands an **unceasing dying**. Jesus said, “*‘And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.’”* “Carry” means daily. Earlier in Luke 9:23 Jesus had said, “. . . *‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’”* Cross bearing is a constant thing. It is not something that one does occasionally. It is not done in one special moment. It is not done just to be a part of the “holly and the lily crowd.” In other words, it is not something to be done just on Christmas and Easter. That is not what

Christianity is all about. Christianity is not to be just for one day a week. Christianity is not just to be for several hours of the day. Christianity is an unceasing dying to self, to sin, and to society. That is the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. That is revolutionary. A lot of people will react against Christianity when this concept is taught because their personal freedom and their personal rights are more important to them than service to the Master.

- Discipleship requires an **unqualified renunciation**. Jesus said, *“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”* Literally “give up” means to renounce. Everything that man has, he has it because he is a steward of God. Everything man has belongs to God. That must not only be man’s attitude, it must be the fact of his life. That must be the practice of his life. Christians need to own and live this and we also need to teach it.

Christians must teach these concepts to the people we are trying to bring to Christ. We are not doing anyone a favor if we make Christianity an easy thing. It is not easy to be a child of God. It takes divine help and empowering from God. Christianity involves total self-denial. Jesus has to be first in every aspect of the Christian’s life. It involves taking His suffering cross up daily to bear it before fallen man. Christians must renounce everything they have as their own. Everything we have must belong to God. If the Christian does not give everything to God, he will never finish the job. He will be like the man who began to build a house, laid the foundation, but was unable to finish it.

I have a personal illustration of this. In one place where we lived, I drove past the place where a foundation had been laid for a home for unwed mothers. I drove past for two and a half years and nothing else was done except laying the foundation. Pretty soon the weeds grew up and covered the foundation. Finally the weeds got so high that they covered the sign that

said Future Home of _____ Home for Unwed Mothers. People in the community laughed about it saying apparently those people are not very serious. Evidently those people did not have the money to finish the project. They became the ridiculed laughing stock of that community. If man begins the journey to become a disciple without stopping to consider the cost, he becomes one who will be ridiculed. Christianity will cost everything a man owns. Is it worth it?

Jesus told some parables that affirm that it is worth the cost. If a jewel dealer found that one precious jewel and sold everything he owned to be able to have that one precious jewel, would he consider that he had been cheated? Would the jewel dealer think that it was not worth all he had? Jesus said that man would rejoice because he now had the ultimate precious jewel. For the Christian, possessing Jesus is worth all that he has.

Self-denial is the exact opposite of the self-indulgence that is so characteristic of western civilization. Many of the sayings from Jesus are not taken seriously by the world in which man lives. Jesus does not want man to put his trust in the things that are going to perish in this world. Consider the following verses:

- *“Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’”* (Luke 12:15).
- *“‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’”* (Matthew 6:19–21).
- *“‘The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted’”* (Matthew 23:11).
- *“‘You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: “These people honor me with their lips, but*

their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men”” (Matthew 15:7–9).

- *“‘Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say?’” (Luke 6:46).*
- *“‘Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets’” (Luke 6:22).*
- *“‘Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it’” (Matthew 10:37–39).*
- *“‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me’” (Luke 9:23).
“‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid’” (Luke 14:12–14).*

Conclusion

When Christians are persecuted because of Christ, we can leap for joy because we have a reward in heaven. We have joined the company of all the great prophets and preachers of God. The Gospel is revolutionary. If we tone it down so that it is no longer offensive to man, it will no longer be good news. Wicked people will hate the Gospel and the Gospel preacher, but it is all that will save mankind. It is exclusively the word and will of God. Find someone today and tell them what it cost to be a Christian. Tell them the promises and blessings when they do.

The Nature of the Gospel (4)

In this study of the nature of the Gospel seven points have been presented thus far which point out its uniqueness. These seven characteristics of the Gospel are important for anyone who would place their trust in the saving word of God and His Son. Remember this study is dealing with eternity and eternal destinies. Consider the previous points concerning the Gospel:

- The Gospel is of divine origin; not man-made, man-revealed, and not man-taught. The Gospel was received from God by revelation (cf. Galatians 1:12).
- The Gospel is Messianic. It has but one theme which is Christ. It is Christo-centric which includes His life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, and His second coming.
- The Gospel has a human outreach. Man is the object of the Gospel. Mankind is the sole candidate for salvation. The Gospel lifts man from depths of the pit of sin and enthrones him with Jesus at the right hand of God.
- The Gospel is dynamic in its operation. The Gospel is the dynamic power of God exercised for the salvation of lost mankind (cf. Romans 1:16). Man does not save himself with his own power. The power of God is impressive to save man and judge him.
- The Gospel is universal — “*whosoever*” will may come. “*Whoever*” is thirsty may drink. The Gospel was from the Jews, but not exclusively for the Jews because it encompasses all mankind.

- The Gospel is personal and individual. It is not nationalistic as the Old Testament was. The New Testament applies to the individual, the true Israelites, the true circumcision, the one who **by faith** accepts Jesus Christ as Lord, believes in Him in a saving way, repents of his sins, is immersed by baptism into Him, walks in newness of life, lives faithful unto death, and stands before the throne of God sinless because of the blood of the One in whom he has believed.
- The Gospel is revolutionary in its concepts and commands. When the Gospel was preached in the first century, it turned the world upside down. The Gospel will do the same thing today in the twenty-first century if Christians love Jesus with an unrivaled love, if they will unceasingly die to self and sin, and renounce all that they own as belonging to God. The Gospel can be revolutionary in the individual life of every Christian in the world and in the Body of Christ.

The Exclusive Claims

The Gospel makes the claim that Christianity is an exclusive religion, the one and only true religion. Jesus said,

*... “I am **the way and the truth and the life**. No one comes to **the Father** except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him” (John 14:6–7).*

In Ephesians 4:4–6 Paul said:

*There is **one body and one Spirit** — just as you were called to **one hope** when you were called — **one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all,***

who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4–6).

Paul claimed that God is the only God:

. . . They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10).

It is important to notice that “*they . . . turned to God **from idols** to serve the living and true God.*” Paul said there were other gods, but they are not real gods, they are false gods or “*dumb idols*” — “*Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led*” (1 Corinthians 12:2, KJV). In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul said: “*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*” There is one God, one Mediator, and one man. That one man stands before that one God and that one Mediator stands between that one God and one man.

Jesus Himself claimed to be the Son of God in a unique sense. In a way all men are the sons of God by creation. Consider what Jesus said to the Jews after He had healed the man by the pool in Bethesda:

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also

does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it” (John 5:16–21).

Jesus was confirming that He indeed was uniquely the Son of God. Again and again Jesus confronted the Jews with the facts concerning His Sonship:

“I and the Father are one.” Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?” “We are not stoning you for any of these,” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.” Jesus answered them, “. . . what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp (John 10:30–39).

Boldly, with no denial, Jesus said “I am the Son of God. I am equal to God. The Father and I are One.” In John 19 as Jesus stood before Pilate and His life was at stake. Pilate wanted to release Jesus if only He would deny the Jews claims:

As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!” But Pilate answered, “You take him and crucify him. As for me,

I find no basis for a charge against him.” The Jews insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God” (John 19:6–7).

The Jews understood His words. They understood that He was indeed claiming to be God. His words were understood, though rejected, by His enemies.

Jesus also claimed to be many other things that were uniquely Him. In each of these verses Jesus was claiming something that was unique to only Him. In every case when Jesus made claims about Himself, they were claims that would separate Him from all other men. These were the exclusive claims. Consider the following verses and His claims:

- Jesus claimed to know the mind of God: *“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him”* (Matthew 11:27). Christians know things about the Father and we know things about the Son. But Jesus said no one really knows Me but the Father.
- Jesus claimed to speak the Words of God: *“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my word; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it”* (John 12:48–49). Jesus said He did not speak His own words because He was speaking the Words of God.
- Jesus claimed to do the works of God: *“Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does’”* (John 5:19).
- Jesus claimed to be the “bread of life”: *“I am the bread of life . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven.*

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. The bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:48, 51). Jesus came to provide mankind the spiritual sustenance they needed.

- Jesus claimed to be the *“light of the world: “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (John 8:12).*
- Jesus claimed to be *“the way and the truth and the life”*: *“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).*
- Jesus claimed to be older than Abraham: *“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58).* Jesus made this claim after a long argument with the Jews. They did not understand how He could make that claim. Jesus said, *“Before Abraham was born, I am.”* That is bad English. He should have said, *“Before Abraham was born, I was.”* No, in this instance, Jesus was claiming to be Jehovah. He was claiming to be the great *“I am that I am.”* Jesus was claiming to be the Eternal God and they knew it because in John 8:59 they *“... picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.”*
- Jesus claimed to be wiser than Solomon: *“The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:42).*
- Jesus claimed to possess all authority in heaven and on earth: *“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’” (Matthew 28:18).*
- Jesus claimed to forgive sins: *“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .” (Mark 2:10).*

- Jesus claimed to bestow “eternal life”: “For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him” (John 17:2).
- Jesus claimed to execute judgment: “And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:27).

The apostles believed all the claims that Jesus made. Consider Acts 4:12: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” The apostles knew that salvation could be found only in Jesus. As he wrote to the Corinth church, Paul said, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). He also told Timothy, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time” (1 Timothy 2:5–6). As he was writing to the Brethren in Galatia, Paul said:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we [the apostles] or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6–9).

There is no other name, there is no other foundation, there is no other mediator, and there is no other Gospel. The apostles understood the uniqueness of Jesus Christ —

There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4–5).

Missionaries for Christ are not in a popularity contest. We are not trying to prove a point or thrust our beliefs on others. There is new life in Christ! We have a passionate desire to share the Good News with the whole world. The Good News is all there is to save man. Mission work, evangelism, is simply one beggar telling another beggar where the **only Bread** can be found. The missionary beggar beseeches all men on the behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God. That is the Christian spirit because there is no other way to salvation.

The Divisive Results

Sadly, there is a divisive nature in the Gospel of Christ. Not everything in the Christian life is blue skies and rainbows, but there is a tragic side to the Good News. It literally divides people. Consider Matthew 10:32–39 as Jesus quoted Micah 7:6 to the twelve:

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’ Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Jesus warned His disciples that the Gospel of Christ would divide them from the people they loved. This concept is in contrast to the Christmas card Christianity which would proclaim that there is no bad news in the Good News of Christ. He did not come to bring peace to the earth. The Gospel will cause disruptions in relationships.

Christians need to understand and proclaim this principle. We need to know for sure that being a Christian is the only ultimate important thing in life. We need to understand that when we go out to the world that what the world would call Good News is not the same because the world is concerned with temporary things. They are concerned with the things that the eye can see, the hands can feel, the mouth can taste, the ears can hear, and the things that life can enjoy. Christianity is not that way — *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Timothy 3:12). That is the Word of God.

The culture of Christianity is an utterly counterculture in countries that are Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist. Christianity is totally different from these other religions. Missionaries have been severely criticized especially by anthropologists who think that the message taken into any country should be conformed to the culture and society of that land. Christians have been criticized for taking converts out of their nature habitat and alienating them from their friends and relatives making life unnecessarily hard for them and disrupting the social life of the community. In a way this is true because in a land where there is an exclusive religion like Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, naturally to oppose the norm will bring persecution. Converting people out of that society is to convert them out of their community, maybe even out of their own homes. That is what Jesus was talking about. He warned His disciples not to think

that it would be easy or peaceful to be a follower because He had not come to bring peace, but a sword. That happens today in Thailand or India or in any place where the Gospel is taught. Some people just will not acknowledge that their children have found “the Bread.” They think that they are feeding on the things that are life sustaining, but Jesus said, “*I am the Bread of life*” (John 6:35, 48). In some cases missionaries have not been wise, but most of the time it is not the missionary or the convert who is to blame for the division. Blame the Gospel! The Gospel is the divisive factor. It is because Jesus is unique. It is because there is one Gospel and one Body that there is a division in a family or the community.

The truth is it is the Gospel that divides. Those who accept the Gospel are on one side. Those who reject the Gospel are on the other side and they end up persecuting those who accept the Gospel. Community demands conformity. Any community is prepared to punish anybody who gets too far out of line with the community. This is particularly true in the religion of Islam. In the Islam faith there is a law called the law of apostasy. The law of apostasy permits the community to kill any man who defects from the faith. Converts from Islam lose their jobs and lose their families. It is not the Christian who rejects his Muslim friends and family. It is the Muslim family who repudiates him. The same is true in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and even some forms of Christianity and some of the cults that confront us.

Christians need to understand Jesus’ point when He said, “*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*” (Matthew 10:34). That “*sword*” is the sword of salvation. It is the scepter of uprightness! It is the sword that is called the “*word of God*” (Ephesians 6:17). It is the sword that is called the truth of God. It is the sword called Jesus Himself. In Revelation 19 as the Bible is drawing itself to close, Heaven is opened and out of Heaven comes a Rider on a white horse, that Rider is called the Word of God, and out of that Rider’s mouth comes a sharp two-

edged sword. He is not coming simply to be the Savior, but He is coming also to be the Judge of all mankind. That is a part of the Gospel of Christ. At its very heart, the Gospel is intended to divide. It is intended to divide the whole world into two groups: the saved sinners and the lost sinners — the saved sinners because they believed the Gospel of Christ putting their full weight down on Jesus and the lost sinners because they refused to believe; they refused to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Christians must take this saving Gospel into all the world so that men who believe will be saved and those that will not will be eternally damned by their own rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Uniqueness of the Christian Faith

The notion that one religion is true and all others are – to a lesser or greater degree – false, is not very popular and hardly in keeping with the insights of the popular view. There is a science called anthropology which is the study of man. To many people mission work ought to be in that frame work within the science of anthropology. According to the gospel of anthropology, religion is a purely social phenomenon, so religion must therefore be in keeping with the social mores of the people to whom it is addressed. That makes the uniqueness of Christianity offensive to people.

Most of the great ethic religions of the world have a lot of things in common. They all believe in the presence of a supreme being. They all possess sacred scriptures. They all have a well-defined system of salvation. They normally believe in life after death. They all have a system of ethics. They have human founders about whom they make certain claims. They have a priestly caste and religious orders. Paganism is not normally exclusive, but Christianity and Islam are the two exceptions to that rule. Christianity, and, therefore, the Christian mission, is unique and this chapter will consider the characteristics which point out this uniqueness. Taken together there are four characteristics that render Christianity unique, but not any one of these characteristics by themselves would prove any uniqueness to the Christian faith.

The Character of God

God is an eternal Being. He is self-existent. Because God is unique, the Christian's faith in Him is also unique. He is self-existent and therefore eternal. When Moses was preparing to go back to Egypt, he asked God:

... "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13–14).

God not only explains every existing thing, He is Himself self-existing. In Deuteronomy 32:40, He said, "*I live forever.*" He is eternal. In Revelation 4:10–11 John said:

The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

When Paul was speaking of Jesus to the Brethren in Colossae, he wrote:

*For **by him** all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things** were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him **all things** hold together (Colossians 1:16–17).*

God is a personal Being. He is eternally separate and distinct from all other things. There must be some One who is separate and distinct from everything else because there has to be an origin and an originator of all things. He possesses the power of self-determination. The uniqueness of Christianity is that the eternal cause is a Person who can love (cf. John 3:16) and be loved. In Matthew 22:37–38 Jesus said:

... “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment.

God is an infinite Being. Every characteristic of God is unlimited and nothing in His attributes can be limited. God is all good (cf. Exodus 34:6), He is all wise (cf. Romans 11:33), and He is all powerful (cf. Isaiah 40:18–26). He fills the heaven (cf. Isaiah 66:1) and the earth as well. The psalmist David wrote:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast (Psalm 139:7–10).

God is infinite. God is both imminent (cf. Acts 17:27–28) and transcendent at the same time (cf. Isaiah 55:8–9). He fills all things and goes beyond all things.

God is a moral Being. The pagan gods were more immoral than their followers. This is not so with Jehovah. He loves “righteousness” and hates “wickedness” (cf. Hebrews 1:9). He “. . . is righteous in all His ways . . .” and holy in all His works (Psalm 145:17). He is both “light” (cf. 1 John 1:5) and “love” (cf. 1 John 4:8). He is not only the “light” that brings knowledge to everyone, He is also the “love” that brings

significance to everyone. His “*light*” and “*love*” balance each other. His “*love*” is a holy “*love*.” His holiness glows with “*love*” and His “*love*” burns with holiness. He is a holy God (cf. Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 6:3) and demands holiness of all His people (cf. Leviticus 19:2; Hebrews 12:14).

God exists as a Godhead. He exists in three persons — the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Christians are baptized “. . . *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .*” (Matthew 28:19). Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30) and yet they are separate because —

*As soon as **Jesus** was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a **voice from heaven** said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16–17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22).*

The Spirit of God descended on Jesus in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven spoke — all three persons of the Godhead were represented there.

God has revealed Himself to man. This is the most important point concerning God’s character. He has revealed Himself in creation:

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 (Romans 1:18–20).

God is seen in judgment. Isaiah wrote, “. . . *When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness . . .*” (Isaiah 26:9). God is also seen in the conscience of man. Paul wrote the following to the Romans:

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them) (Romans 2:14–15).

In Ecclesiastes 3:11 Solomon said, “*He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*”

Primarily, God has revealed Himself in the written Word. A word that was given to men and they wrote it down. When man reads that Word he can learn about God. Gather all of these characteristics together and man can know the unique character of God: He is eternal, personal, infinite, and moral. He exists in three persons and He has revealed Himself to man.

The Person of Christ

The person of **Christ** makes **Christianity** and its work unique. Christ is at the center of Christianity. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul told the brothers in Colossae:

*. . . which is Christ in you . . . We proclaim **him**, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To*

this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me (Colossians 1:27–29).

There are six things that make Christ unique and, therefore, make the Christian faith unique.

Christ is unique in His virgin birth. The birth of Jesus is proclaimed in Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 2:1–20. An angel appeared to Joseph after he learned that Mary, his future wife, was pregnant, but the marriage had not yet been consummated. He had the right by law to stone her to death, but he did not want to do that. He wanted to divorce her privately. While he was considering this —

... an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” — which means, “God with us.” When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (Matthew 1:20–25).

Jesus was born without any human “seed” involved. That is why He can be called the “seed” of the woman because His father is God and His mother is human which makes Him the God Man. The virgin birth is not some oddity of the Christian faith. It is at the heart of the Christian faith. This Man, who died on Calvary’s cross having touched lepers, healed the sick, raised the dead, and ennobled the prostitute by making her life

pure again, is also the Man who with a word brought everything into being. He is the God Man because He was virgin born.

Jesus had a sinless life. Jesus' sinless character makes Him unique. Paul wrote to the Corinthians to tell them, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The sinless character of Jesus is not a spiritual oddity to be learned for its own sake, but it is necessary for Christians to be righteous. His sinless character is the basis of the Gospel so that He can save man. In 1 Peter 2:22 Peter quoted Isaiah 53:9 to say that Jesus went through all of the trials and suffering on this earth without committing any sin and "*no deceit was found in his mouth.*" In 1 John 3:5 friends testified that Jesus had no sin in Him. Paul, Peter, and John all claimed that Jesus had a sinless character. These were all friends/disciples of Jesus.

Jesus' enemies testified to His sinless character also. As Jesus stood before Pilate, who was an expert at finding fault with people, he said three times that he could find no fault in Jesus (cf. John 19:4–6). In John 8:46 Jesus asked the Pharisees, "*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?*" They were professionals at finding fault with any man. Jesus challenged His enemies, who had looked at His life through the microscope of their own prejudices for three and a half years, to find one single flaw in His life and they could not do it. Even the thief on the cross told the other thief on the cross — "*Don't you fear God . . . since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong*" (Luke 23:40–41). The sinlessness of Jesus, who is the founder of the Christian faith and the basis of that faith, shows the uniqueness of that faith.

The third thing that makes Jesus unique is His atoning death. His death is a fact of history. The fact that He died for the Christian's sins is a fact of revelation. First Peter 3:18–22 says:

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. **It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ**, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

When man is immersed into Jesus Christ, he is saved not by some bodily washing, but by the out cry of his faith through the “*resurrection*” and the death of Jesus Christ. He died to save. Jesus defeated the devil and all the forces of hell by dying —

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy 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).

Jesus brought the devil to nothing by His atoning death.

The resurrection of Christ declares the virtue and the power and significance of His death. His death is tied to His resurrection just as the cloth is tied to the thread that it is made out of. Jesus' victorious resurrection declares Him to be unique. Every sermon in the Book of Acts is centered in the cross and is proven by the resurrection. When Paul wrote to the saints in Rome, he said:

*Regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was **declared with power** to be the Son of God **by his resurrection** from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 1:3–6).*

Jesus bruised the devil's head, He defeated the devil at the cross, but it was declared and made a point of public knowledge that this was true when Jesus was raised from the dead. He was declared to be God's Son and He was declared to be God's Son with power. Paul wanted to know the power of the resurrection because it shows that the Christian faith is secure. Our faith is firm and it is unique.

Jesus' glorious ascension into heaven makes Him unique above all others. In Acts 1 the disciples and Jesus were talking as they went up on the Mount of Olives. They had been discussing the things about the Kingdom of Heaven for the past forty days. Acts 1:9–10 says:

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

Imagine standing beside Jesus, looking at Him eye to eye, and all of a sudden their eyes followed Him as He was taken up. Their eyes followed His image as it rose and then they were staring into a vacant sky as a cloud hid Him from their sight. Jesus vanished out of their sight. What did they think? Did they wonder where He had gone? Was He going to come back? Then the two men dressed in white said:

*“Men of Galilee . . . why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, **will come back** in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).*

The Book of Revelation in a way allows men to be on the other end of that journey as Jesus rose into heaven. God is on His throne with all the angels and all the redeemed around the throne and all the cherubim to do His bidding and all heaven and earth bows before Him (cf. Revelation 4). And then comes the Lamb, the Lion of Judah, the Lamb who has been slain. He comes to the throne and He takes the Book of Destiny out of the Father’s hand and then all the redeemed and all the angels and all of creation sings:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9–10).

Jesus’ glorious ascension declared that He is coming again. It declares more than that — it declares that Jesus is seated on the throne of the universe. It also declares:

- Jesus is Prince of Life — *“the author of life”* (Acts 3:15).
- Jesus is the *“Lord of Glory”* (1 Corinthians 2:8).
- Jesus is the *“head of the body, the church”* (Colossians 1:18).
- Jesus sits at *“the right hand of the throne of God”* and *“He is able to save”* (Hebrews 7:25, 8:1).
- Jesus has *“all authority in heaven and on earth”* (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus died, He was buried, He was raised, He ascended, He is enthroned, and He rules the universe. At the center of the universe is the One who loves me more than He loved being equal with God. He loves man more than He loved His own life. He loves you more than anyone in all the world who has the capacity to love, much less the desire to love. He is unique!

Jesus Christ is coming again. His second coming makes Him unique. He is coming to gather the Church. That is what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Jesus is coming to judge the wicked. That is what He Himself said:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left . . . Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matthew 25:31–46).

Jesus is coming again. And He will gather all redeemed to Him and He will give them a body like His. They will look in His face and they will sing His glory to a day called eternal. It was not preceded by yesterday and it will not be followed by tomorrow. It will just be the ever present now. For that same length of time, those who have not accepted the Lord will be

punished by God. The Lord says there are sheep and goats, He says there is right and wrong. The Lord says there is a broad way and a narrow way. Christians need to understand the uniqueness of the Gospel and the uniqueness of Jesus' person.

The Doctrine of Salvation

The doctrine of salvation makes Christianity unique. The Bible declares there is one faith and one way to be saved. Luke recorded Peter in Acts 4:12 as he spoke to the *“rulers, elders, and teachers of the law,”* *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* Christian missionaries do not preach a better way or even the best way, we go to the mission fields to preach **the only way** there is to God.

Salvation is the gift of God, not the work of man. Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* The New American Standard says, *“... the **free gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* In Isaiah 55:1 the prophet said, *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”* Salvation is free!

Salvation is rooted in morality in the justice of God. God sent forth Jesus that He might be a “satisfaction” that He might be just in forgiving sins already done and that He might be just in sins done now. Salvation is deliverance from sin. Sin's penalty is no more. Man is guiltless of any sins that he had committed and guiltless of any sins practiced. Man is given the power to live a righteous life.

Salvation includes the whole man — body, soul, and spirit: *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Salvation is a present possession as well

as a future prospect. The doctrine of salvation, the way man is saved and the extent in which he is saved, is unique.

The Holy Scriptures

The holy Scriptures make the Christian faith unique. Other religions have holy scriptures, but not like the Bible that Christians can hold in their hand. Consider the human element in this Book. There were more than forty authors who wrote over a time period of fifteen hundred years to cover more than two millenniums from Genesis to Revelation to compile one book, the book that covers one story. There is no other book like the holy Scriptures.

Consider the historical element of the holy Scriptures. Will and Ariel Durant wrote a book called The History of Civilization which is an eleven volume set. In the first volume covering man's oriental heritage, Durant said, "The only reliable history for this ancient period of time is found in the Bible." When he wrote that he did not even believe that the Bible was the work of God, but he knew it was historical. The Bible mentions Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome and puts them in historical order mentioning historical statements. The Bible mentions peoples that other histories do not even mention like the Hittites. The Book of Acts is history to the core. It mentions Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa, Pontius Pilate, Caesar Augustus, Caiaphas, Gallio, and others who are well-known figures in Roman history.

Consider the Messianic element of the holy Scriptures. Notice a few of the ways the Old Testament speaks of the coming Messiah:

- "*Seed*" of Woman – Genesis 3:15, KJV.
- "*Seed*" of Abraham – Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:16.
- "*Tribe of Judah*" – Genesis 49:10; Revelation 5:5.
- "*House of David*" – 2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 22:22.
- Born of a "*Virgin*" – Isaiah 7:14.

All of these prophecies were minutely fulfilled in one Man. There is no mathematical possibility of that; it is true because it is true.

Consider the dynamic element of the holy Scriptures. It is a living book. Hebrews 4:12 says,

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

It is a life-giving book. Consider the words of Jesus:

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit . . . The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 3:5; 6:63).

Conclusion

Christians need to understand that we are not one among many in the marketplace for people's faith. We come with the only Christ, the only way, the only hope, and the only Body of saved people in the entire world. It is our work. It is our task.

Missions in the Book of Acts (1)

The study of Biblical Theology of Missions is a study centered around the Bible to see what it has to say about preaching the Gospel to all the world. The Book of Acts has been recognized for centuries for being the missionary book. It shows how the Gospel went from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. It is called the Acts of the Apostles. This book does not cover all the acts of all the apostles, but it is a good title because the disciples were changed from being only disciples to being Apostles — emissaries of Christ. Within this book is also the reason why they changed, and the power by which they were able to take the Gospel into all the world.

The Transformation of the Disciples

The Book of Acts is a unique book that contains several things that need to be imitated. It shows a unique Christ and a unique way to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Consider the mental condition of the witnesses in the Book of John shortly after Jesus was raised. The apostles were hiding in an upper room for fear of the Jews. When we look at the disciples in the Book of Acts, we do not find a hiding people. We find a people who would go where they were not wanted in any sense to preach a Gospel that was in no way desired. These men were intent on saving men in spite of themselves from themselves. What changed these men? What changed them from disciples to apostles? What changed them from followers to leaders? What changed them from fearful to fearless.

Consider the following three events that changed these men from disciples to apostles. First the resurrection changed them. When they saw the Lord, they knew that death held no threat. They watched their Lord die on the cross and be buried in the tomb. Their hopes had been dashed and they thought there was no reason to go on. When Jesus appeared without coming through the door in that room where they were all hiding for fear, from then on fearlessness was the key note of their lives (cf. John 20:19–20). They had seen the resurrected Lord. Read their sermons and find in the midst of and at the climax of every sermon is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They had seen the resurrected Lord and they knew the power of His resurrection.

Not only had they seen Jesus Christ raised from the dead, they had also seen him ascend into heaven:

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9–11).

They saw Him visibly go and one day they will see him visibly come. Between that going and that coming, they live with the faith that Jesus is at God’s right hand and He rules heaven and earth for them.

The third thing that changed the disciples was the day of Pentecost, or the coming of the Spirit on that day. Acts 2:1–4 says:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the

blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The disciples would never be the same. They were filled with the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, and speaking from the Spirit. They had a new power source. Their power source was no longer their life and their power source was no longer the physical presence of Jesus. Their power was now the indwelling Spirit of God.

The change that took place, because they had seen the resurrected Lord and they had believed in the enthroned Christ and because they were filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit of Christ, was immediately manifested in four ways. This is the beginning of Missions in the Book of Acts. The change in the disciples to apostles were manifest in a **new insight** into Scripture. Study the sermon in Acts 2:14–41. Peter, who could not explain Scripture before, was able to explain what Joel meant in the empowering of the apostles and others to come in the preaching of salvation and the preaching of judgment to come —

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be

deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls” (Joel 2:28–32).

Peter was able to go to the Psalms and explain Psalm 16 when David said:

I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand (Psalm 16:8–11).

Peter knew that David was not speaking of himself in these verses, but as a prophet he was speaking of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; that Christ’s body would not be left in the grave and that Christ’s flesh would not see corruption. From then on throughout the entire Book of Acts, Peter, and James, and Stephen, and Phillip and Paul were able to take the Old Testament Scriptures and with a new insight to reveal to men that these Scriptures spoke of Christ. Jesus had opened their minds to the Spirit that they might understand the Scriptures.

The apostles also had a **new initiative in action**. They had been bashful in their actions in days gone by; they had been fearful even in carrying out the will of God. They had been hesitant in doing what Jesus wanted them to do. That was to be no more. In Acts 1 they immediately took the initiative to appoint a new leader. When the Spirit came upon them they immediately began to preach and they preached in every place in their world. When trouble confronted the Church Peter did not hesitate to be used by God even to the execution of Ananias and Sapphira (cf. Acts 5:1–11; 6:1–7). On the island of Cyprus Paul struck Elymas blind because he was “*a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right!*” (cf. Acts 13:4–12).

The apostles also had a **new power in service**. In Matthew 17:14–21 they confessed that they were not able to do the miracle that the man wanted done. They asked Jesus why they had not been able to cast out the demons in the boy. Jesus said it was because they did not have the faith of a grain of mustard seed. The problem was not in their empowerment. The problem was in the use of their faith — *“Because you have so little faith.”* Compare these verses with the following examples of the ways in which they used their new power:

- In Acts 3:1–10 Peter and John healed the crippled beggar.
- In Acts 5:1–10 slew the covetous couple.
- In Acts 9:36–42 Peter, by faith, raised Tabatha (Dorcas) back to life.
- In Acts 13:10–12 Paul struck the sorcerer blind.
- In Acts 16:16–18 Paul cast out demons.

The apostles were doing the very things they were not able to do before the resurrection, ascension, and before Pentecost. It was not because of any lack of power on the apostles part, it was because of their lack of faith. They had seen the resurrected Lord, they had seen His ascension, and they had received the Holy Spirit, so now in faith they were able to have this new power.

The apostles also had a **new courage in witnessing**. In John 20:19 they were hiding in the upper room for fear of the Jews. In Acts 4 they faced the Sanhedrin and preached. In Acts 5 they faced the Sanhedrin and preached. In Acts 17 Paul faced the Athenian court and preached. Then he faced Felix, Festus, and Agrippa and preached to each one of them. Then he faced Nero and preached to him. Each one of the apostles found a new courage in witnessing. They were transformed from fearful disciples to fearless apostles! When a sinner turns to Jesus and believes on Him because of the resurrection, he believes that Jesus has ascended to the Father and rules from there. He believes the Spirit who empowered the apostles dwells in him

and that Spirit will strengthen him in all of his weaknesses. The Christian will be transformed from a fearful person to a fearless person. That is the change in the witnesses.

The Content of Their Witness — Jesus!

Notice the content of the witnesses. Their message had one single theme: “*God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact*” (Acts 2:32). This was not a matter of speculation for the apostles, it was a fact because their eyes had seen the resurrected Christ. Their fingers had touched the wounds in His hands and feet. Their hands had touched the wound in His side. They had eaten with Him and talked with Him. They knew that He was raised from the dead. The content of the apostles’ message was Jesus!

In 1 Corinthians 2:2 Paul said, “*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*” The apostles preached the identity of Christ, the identity of His person, and the factuality of His life. The apostles looked at Old Testament passages and saw that they were fulfilled in Jesus (cf. Acts 3:18; 13:27–29; 17:23). They proclaimed that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Look at Acts 13: 26–27 as Paul was talking to the Jews in the synagogue:

“Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.”

These Jews had read these passages Sabbath day after Sabbath day, but they did not recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of it. They fulfilled the Scriptures by killing Jesus.

The apostles also saw the identity of Jesus' person in the great works that He did in His ministry. When Peter was preaching to Cornelius in Acts 10, he said:

"You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached — how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:36–38).

The Jews gathered together and talked with one another concerning Jesus and the great signs that He was able to do. In John 10:32–39 as the Jews had gathered around Jesus to stone Him, He said:

*... "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came — and the Scripture cannot be broken — what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, **believe the miracles**, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.*

The people based their faith in the identity of the person of Jesus being the Son of God on the fulfillment of prophecy and on the mighty works that He did.

The apostles' message about Jesus also included the nature of His death. The fact that Jesus died in 30 A.D. is history. The fact that He died for our sins is revelation. When Jesus first died Pilate thought His death was a victory for him. Jesus' disciples thought that His death was a tragedy for them. But after they saw Him raised and after they received the Spirit, they knew that the death of Jesus was a tragedy for Pilate and victory for them. Consider the very first sermon that was preached on Pentecost. This sermon declared that they later saw His death as a triumph:

“Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 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. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’ Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:29–36).

Dead! Buried! Raised! Ascended! The nature of the death of Jesus brings salvation to the Christians and Lordship to Jesus!

The contents of the apostles' preaching also emphasized the fact of Jesus' resurrection (cf. Acts 2:29–38) Without the

resurrection of Christ, Jesus' death would be just like that of Socrates or any other man. It would simply be the death of a good leader and a moral man, a significant person in the world. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian Brethren, he said, "*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins*" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The resurrection was preached to the Jews in Jerusalem, it was preached to the Gentiles in Caesarea, it was preached to the philosophers in Athens, it was preached before Felix the governor, it was preached before Festus the governor, and it was preached before Agrippa the king. The resurrection was a central feature in the content of the apostles' message. It was a dynamic fact in their existence. It made them new creatures and gave them a new purpose in life. It gave them concern for others and gave them a new obsession in life to know the power of Jesus' resurrection. The fact of the resurrection prepared them to die. All of this is illustrated particularly in the life of Paul the apostle. The Gospel that they preached was centered in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The apostles' message was also centered in the hope of Jesus' return. The apostles stood there on the Mount of Olives and watched as Jesus ascended into heaven until finally they were staring into an empty sky —

. . . suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10–11).

When Paul was preaching in the city of Athens, he said God has appointed a day in which He will judge all men. God has given assurance to all men in that He raised Jesus from the dead (cf. Acts 17:31). The apostles knew Jesus was coming and the

second coming of Christ was a feature in the message they preached. That same fact needs to be a feature in the preaching in the twenty-first century because if we are not anticipating the coming of Christ, we are not likely to live the life of Christ on earth.

The Characteristics of Their Witness — Acts 4:33

The message of the apostles included the following characteristics:

It was a verbal message — They did not think it was enough to live a godly life (they did live a godly life because they were godly men), but no one is led to Jesus simply by a Christian life style. Without the Christian life style men may not hear what the Christian says, but faith comes by hearing —

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? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? . . . faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Romans 10:14–17).

The Gospel was verbally proclaimed in the Book of Acts. Check the sermons in the Book of Acts to see the importance of verbalizing one's faith. The Christian testimony about Jesus is not simply done through our lives, it is also done by the lips. Remember how the Book of Acts starts: "*The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began **both to do and teach***" (Acts 1:1, KJV). Jesus began "*to do*" and "*teach*" — "*both.*" The apostles' message was a verbal one.

It was a visible message — The apostles' message was visible by their lifestyle and by their courage before persecutors, and visible by the stripes on their backs. When Paul had argued about his apostleship through the entire Book of Galatians, he said, "*From now on please don't argue with me about these things, for I carry on my body the scars of the whippings and wounds from Jesus' enemies that mark me as his slave*" (Galatians 6:17, TLB). Throughout the Book of Acts, people were whipped, beaten, stoned, maligned, and they stood steadfast in their faith in Jesus. The Christian's witness in the first century was a visible message.

It was a vital message — It was a vital message because it was verbal and visible. Because the disciples of Christ verbalized and lived their faith, their message was vital. Consider Acts 5:40–42:

*His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged [thirty-nine stripes]. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, **rejoicing** because they had been **counted worthy** of suffering disgrace for the Name. **Day after day**, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.*

The Dynamic of Their Witness — Acts 4:33; 6:8–10; 7:54–58

Christians also need to notice the dynamic of the apostles' witness. Even though this has already been mentioned, it is worth looking at the three factors involved in their witness:

- When the apostles saw Jesus raised from the dead that **historic event — the resurrection** — restored and

strengthened their faith. They had lost their faith, but the resurrection restored it. They had stronger faith because they had seen the resurrected Christ. The apostles' faith was the dynamic of their witness, not the resurrection. Their faith was the dynamic of their witness and the resurrection was the content of their witness. The dynamic behind their witness was their faith in Jesus Christ who had been raised from the dead.

- The coming of the Spirit on Pentecost provided **the power** for the apostles' witness (cf. Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:3). The Spirit's help gave them the power in witnessing about Jesus.
- Then the **indwelling presence** of that Spirit and the living Christ throughout all of their lives provided reality in their lives. These men amazed their enemies. The rulers realized the apostles had been with Jesus because of their grammar and other things. They had been ignorant and unlearned men. They had not been schooled or trained (cf. Acts 4:13). Their enemies realized the difference in Peter and John ". . . *and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*" Jesus said if you go make disciples of all nations, I will go with you — "*I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20). He provided inspiration for their service, protection in their lives, and He brought them solace in their deaths. The dynamic in the apostles' witness was not in what they knew; it was in Whose they were. They belonged to God! It was also Who they were with; they were with Jesus! It was in what they had; they had the power of the Spirit and the power of God in their lives. They wanted to obey the law. This was the Supreme Court of the land telling them not to preach, but when the Sanhedrin told Peter and John not to preach . . .

" . . . or teach at all in the name of Jesus . . . Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether

it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18–20).

They were commanded not to preach or to even mention the name of Christ. They said, “**We cannot not preach** in the name of Jesus!” That is what it says in the Greek language. The apostles could have done a lot of things, but the one thing they could not do — they could not help but tell the things which they had seen and heard. That is the dynamic of their witness! They had seen and heard from the Lord, therefore, they could not help but speak about Him.

Conclusion

Christians need to see Jesus. We need to hear Jesus in a sure and dynamic way so that our witness will become dynamic like the apostles' did. Read the Book of Acts and live it!

Missions in the Book of Acts (2)

In a nutshell this book is about what the Bible has to say concerning the Christian's responsibility to evangelize the entire world. This was the heart of God from the beginning of creation. It was the purpose of God seen in all the prophecies, in the coming of Christ, the cross, and the resurrection. In all this, He had in mind the saving of a few. The first lesson in the study of the Book of Acts covered the changes that took place in the disciples, how they went from being fearful in the upper room to being bold and courageous, fearless apostles before the entire world. They became fearless because they had seen His ascension. They had received the Spirit on Pentecost, a new faith, and a new courage. Christians will be changed when they see Jesus as the Lord and we walk with Him as they did.

The content of the apostles' message was simply Jesus — that He was Lord in His life, death, and in His resurrection. He presently reigns at the right hand of God. This Jesus God raised to life to be seated at the right hand of God. He poured out the Spirit that they could now see and hear to prepare for His coming. He will come again as Lord of heaven and earth.

The nature of their witness was threefold: it was verbal, visible, and vital or dynamic. The Book of Acts is a book of clashes. It is a book of sermons. It is a book of people verbally sharing their faith. Their faith was seen in their lifestyles. It was seen in the individual actions in their lives. Their message changed the lives of those who heard it because of three factors:

the resurrection of Christ, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the indwelling of the Spirit in their lives.

The Extent of Their Witness

The extent of the apostles' witness involved only a few for a while because only a few knew. In Acts 2 men paid attention, they continued in the apostles' doctrine, they continued in fellowship and the breaking of bread. Christians paid attention and they continued to be taught. Consider Acts 2:42–47:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

By the time of Acts 8 when finally God brought about a persecution that scattered the Church throughout all the world, Acts 8:4 says, “*Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.*” **All** those who were scattered preached the Word! God sowed the “seed” into all the world. He sent the sons of the Kingdom into all the world. The sons of the Kingdom sowed the “seed” — the Word of God — wherever they were. God sowed the “seed” — His children! Then those children sowed the “seed” — God’s Word. All the world heard the Word of God.

There is an interesting scripture in Acts 19 after Paul had taught and preached for a while in the city of Ephesus. The extent of the Message became so evident that —

*Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas [twenty thousand dollars worth]. **In this way** the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power (Acts 19:18–20).*

Paul was teaching in the school of Tyrannus, but these Brethren put their lives on the line and put behind them all the things of the past. They changed their lifestyles and their words; and in that way the Word was spread throughout all the provinces of Asia.

Isn't it time for Christians to burn in the town square all the books and all the things that separate us from the commitment to God so that our lives and our lips will be seen to declare that we believe that we are each individually responsible and that we are all corporately responsible to see that the Gospel is preached in all the world. The extent of the witness of the apostles involved **the entire Church**. Not just a few and not just the preacher and the elders, not just the missionaries, it involved every single individual. The "Told" must tell! The "Saved" must save! The "Evangelized" must evangelize!

The chief task of the Church is world evangelization: "*Go into **all the world** and preach the good news to **all creation***" (Mark 16:15). This involved the entire Church and it extended to all the earth. That is what Jesus told his apostles in Acts 1:8: "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" Christians

need to start where they are; that is really the only place you can start. Christians can so teach and so preach that either they or the ones they have taught go into Judea and Samaria. That is the surrounding province. Then they can teach and preach so that either they or someone they have taught will go into all the world. Evangelism increases as a spiral does so that it spreads to occupy the whole space that is available. Christians will spiral until all the world hears the Word. It happened in the Book of Acts. They went to Samaria (Philip in Acts 8), Judea (Peter in Acts 9), and ***“to the ends of the earth”*** (Paul in Acts and Romans). It was Paul’s task to preach where no one had ever preached. He told the Romans:

By the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation . . . But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while (Romans 15:19–24).

The extent of the apostles’ witness included all classes of men. This message was not simply for a few. It was not just for the righteous or Americans, Asians, Europeans, or for the Africans. This message was for the whole world. In the beginning the apostles preached to Jews only — *“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”* (Acts 11:19). However, in Acts 8 Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, an important

official from Africa (cf. Acts 8:26–40) and Peter preached to Cornelius the centurion (cf. Acts 10:1–11:18). The Gentiles became totally accepted in Acts 15 after Peter and Barnabas had told the council in Jerusalem about “. . . *the marvelous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.*” The whole world was finally recognized to be under the canopy of God’s grace.

The church at Philippi was a microcosm of what the Church ought to be. Within that city there was a wealthy business woman named Lydia, there was a hardened Roman jailer, and a demon possessed slave girl. They became the chartered members of the church in Philippi. This is the congregation that supported Paul from the very beginning and he had nothing bad to say about them. Wealth, political rottenness, and moral corruption became new persons in Christ. That was the extent of the church’s witness in Philippi. The chief task of the church in Philippi was evangelism and the responsibility rested with the entire church. The same is true today.

The Techniques of Their Witness

There was a definite plan of action designed to produce desirable results. The Book of Acts is a mission-centered book and Christians need to see that the extent of this message also involved “how to” instructions and a technique to accomplish God’s plan. In the final analysis unless one has a technique taught to him, he will not know how to go about his mission. These ordinary people, fishermen and tax collectors, these extraordinary people, lawyers and intellectuals — how did they accomplish their task? Did they do it according to their ability or did they do it in a way so that they did not have to have special abilities to accomplish evangelism? God does not require any special training or ability for one to accomplish His will. He has a simple technique presented in the Book of Acts. If Christians will follow this technique, we will evangelize our

“Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the world” in our life time. The primary focus for the technique of evangelism is to involve everybody, involve the entire church. No one is left out of the task of evangelizing the world.

The first technique was for the whole church to preach the Gospel. They told everybody the Good News. God had acted decisively in the death and resurrection of Christ by providing reconciliation for the entire world. All that was needed was to communicate God’s plan to all the world. A good study for the Church would be to look at the communication words within the Book of Acts. The writer used the words preach, witness, testified, dialogue, and teach. There are all different kinds of words used in the Book of Acts to talk about the way the Word was communicated. There is a Greek word that is used more than all the other words combined to convey the method in which the Gospel was communicated. The Greek word is *laleo* which is translated into the English word “speak.” It was actually the word used in the New Testament days for the word gossip. When two people were gossiping or chatting about something it was said to be *laleo*. God used the word when he was talking about or teaching the Gospel that lets man know that everybody can be involved. It was a common action by everyone.

Two ladies visiting and talking around the kitchen table can be preaching the Gospel. One lady can be preaching, teaching, speaking the Gospel to the other. They do not have to have an outline with three points and a conclusion. They do not have to have an invitation song. One lady can share what she knows about Christ. Her husband may be the local preacher and on Sunday morning he may get up to speak to a multitude of people in a way that he stirs them to their innermost being. His method of preaching the Gospel is no more important than his wife sharing the Gospel at the kitchen table in a one-to-one manner. That is the beauty of being a Christian.

Evangelism is done in the framework of the individual’s arena, our own environment or work. Christians need to be

grateful for the different words of teach, preach, argue, debate, dialogue, and the word for witness. These words explain the extent of speaking that some people can do. However, every single child of God has the responsibility to speak, to tell, to share, to testify, and to bear witness for what he/she knows about the Lord Jesus Christ. The men and women of the first century preached the Gospel.

The Church in the first century called for a response to the Gospel. They asked people to respond. They demanded that the people believe (cf. Acts 4:4; 10:43; 13:39; 16:31). Whether before the Jews or Gentiles, in a synagogue or in a jail cell, they called for the people to believe. The apostles required repentance. They commanded immersion (baptism). In the very first sermon, the people asked, “*Brothers, what shall we do?*” They wanted to know what their response to the Gospel needed to be. And at that point Peter said:

... “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38–39).

Repentance required that each person must undergo a change of mind concerning sin, self, and society. They were required to be baptized (immersed, dipped in water) for the remission of their sins. The apostles promised forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit when the people were baptized. Nothing that any man or woman does can ever be beyond forgiveness. The apostle Paul was a murderer, a blasphemer, and he caused injury to many in the Church. God convicted him and brought him to salvation. Nobody is beyond forgiveness and no sin is beyond forgiveness. No one is beyond the need for forgiveness, because “. . . *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). “*All have sinned*” — the gutter-rat and

the enthroned king, the prostitute and the proclaimer, the drug addict and the do-good-er. Christians must tell the Gospel and promise forgiveness. The forgiveness that is promised is a present possession as well as a future expectation. Men are saved by the grace of God if they continue to make the response that the Word of God calls for.

The apostles warned of judgment:

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:40–41).

Paul also warned the Christians he met with the following scriptures:

- . . . *I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you . . . Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you (Acts 13:38–40).*
- *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 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 all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:29–31).*
- *As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come (Acts 24:25).*

The Gospel message is Good News, but there is also an edge to it. Jesus came and died that man might be saved, but a part of that Good News is that if man rejects Him, he will be damned eternally burning forever in an eternal hell.

They practiced baptism (immersion in water). It is amazing that baptism has such a controversial tone about it. It should not be that way. Baptism is the very thing that brings man to the end of himself. We can believe and boast about what we

believe. We can repent and change our lives and then even boast in the changes we have made. Men can confess that Jesus is Lord and even boast about that fact. In baptism man must surrender his body as if he were dead, to be buried by another and be totally passive underneath the water there to be united with Jesus in His death, and not having the ability to come up by himself, man must be raised up by the one who put him under, and at that point he can walk away in newness of life. This is the moment when man must surrender his body, soul, and spirit to God. Consider the following scriptures within the Book of Acts:

- Acts 2:38–40 — Speaking to the Jews: *“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be **baptized**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call’ . . . Those who accepted his message were **baptized**, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”*
- Acts 8:12 — Speaking to some Samaritans: *“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were **baptized**, both men and women.”*
- Acts 8:36–38 — Philip with the Ethiopian official: *“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be **baptized**?’”*
- Acts 9:18, 22:16 — Saul, a Pharisee and a persecutor: *“Immediately . . . he got up and was baptized . . . [Paul himself speaking about his conversion] ‘And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be **baptized** and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’”*
- Acts 10:47–48 — Gentiles, Cornelius and his house: *“So he ordered that they be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ.”*

- Acts 16:15 — Paul speaking of the conversion of Lydia, a Jewish businesswoman: “*When she and the members of her household were **baptized**, she invited us to her home.*”
- Acts 16:33 — Paul and Silas converted the Philippian jailor: “*At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were **baptized**.*”
- Acts 18:8 — Paul converted immoral Corinthians: “. . . and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were **baptized**.”
- Acts 19:5 — Paul baptized incomplete disciples in Ephesus who had received John’s baptism: “*On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.*”

The early Church practiced baptism because Jesus had said:

. . . “*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).

. . . “*Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned*” (Mark 16:15–16).

They established local churches. The place was not important. When Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman at the well, He said, “. . . ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem’” (John 4:20). Christians in the first century worshiped in the temple, in synagogues, in the home, in rented halls. The place where they worshiped was NOT important, because the building had no particular significance. God does

not dwell in temples that were made with hands (cf. Acts 17:24–25). Money was not a problem; they did not have any. Peter and John said they did not have any “*silver and gold*” (Acts 3:6). Numbers were not essential to the success of the Church. One factor, and one factor alone, was essential to make the Church a unique thing and to make missions a unique task. The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ was essential. He was the center of their fellowship. He was the theme of their preaching and teaching. Every one of the sermons in the Book of Acts is on Jesus. He was the motive for their service; He was the object of their worship. He was the secret of their power. They were the Church of Christ. That is the technique of the Church in the Book of Acts.

The Results and Characteristics of Their Witness

The amazing results of the apostles’ witness were immediate. Every contact brought nearly instant response. The only person in the Book of Acts who spent any time before their immersion was Saul of Tarsus. When the apostles presented their story, every person was given the opportunity to make a decision.

The results of the apostles’ witness were impressive. In Acts 2:41 three thousand souls were immersed into Jesus’ blood. In Acts 4:4 many believed the message they had heard and “*the number of men grew to about five thousand.*” In Acts 5:28 the high priest in the Sanhedrin said, “*Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.*” The Book of Acts continues to talk about how the Church multiplied:

- “*. . . a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord*” (Acts 11:21).
- “*. . . almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord*” (Acts 13:44).

- *“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers”* (Acts 16:5).
- *“This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord”* (Acts 19:10).
- *“... you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia . . .”* (Acts 19:26).

Hundreds and thousands of Jews alone had obeyed the Gospel and had been baptized before the Book of Acts was over.

The results of the apostles’ witness were permanent. The people were converted to Christ. They were not merely asked to “make a decision for Christ.” It was no cheap grace they accepted. The issues were clear. The choices were explicit! They could choose God or man (cf. Matthew 6:24), choose Christ or choose Belial (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:15). They could choose to experience life or experience death (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16). They could choose salvation or damnation (cf. Mark 16:16). The convicting power of the Holy Spirit was so strong that the work of grace was deep and lasting. Moreover, the converts were taught to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. When Barnabas arrived in Antioch *“... he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts”* (Acts 11:23). The vast majority of Christians did just that.

Conclusion

The book of Acts presents a growing, glowing, demanding, steadfast, mature, disciplined movement to take the Gospel throughout all the world. Christians must get up and commit to the task of being witnesses for Christ to all the unwitnessed in the world. May God give Christians the strength to get up and get the Gospel out to others.

Missions in the Ministry of Paul

The previous two chapters covered the study of missions from the Book of Acts. This chapter will isolate one person out of the Book of Acts to study missions in the life of the apostle Paul or Saul of Tarsus as he was first known. He serves as the outstanding example of every Christian's missionary work in telling our neighbors and the whole world of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul was an unusual man. He had the heart of an evangelist, the discipline of a soldier, the devotion of a lover, the vision of a seer, the zeal of a reformer, and the passion of a prophet. By the grace of God Saul of Tarsus, the chief of sinners, became Paul, the greatest of all the apostles. He was the man who said of himself, “. . . *by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me*” (1 Corinthians 15:10). This chapter will look at the apostle Paul to see in him the example of what Christians need to be as missionaries for Christ in our block, in our neighborhood, in our city, and in our world.

Paul's Missionary Strategy

The word strategy as used here does not mean a deliberate, well-formulated, duly executed plan of action based on human observation and experience. The word used here denotes a flexible *modus operandi* developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and subject to His constant direction and control as Paul humbly searched the Old Testament and the New Testament as it was being revealed to him bit by bit, revealing God's will.

Christians live in a man-centered world instead of a God-centered world. We do not think much can be accomplished without a great deal of ecclesiastical machinery — committees, conferences, workshops, and seminars. The early Church depended less on human wisdom and expertise and more on divine initiative and guidance. More than anything else we need to get back to the missionary methods of the early Church! Consider the following things about Paul's mission strategy.

Paul maintained close contact with the home base. Acts 14:26–28 says:

From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

A great part of Paul's strategy was keeping the people, who had committed him to the grace of God and who had provided and supported him (possibly even financially) spiritually, informed concerning what had been done as God worked through him, through his co-worker Barnabas, who traveled with him, and through the Antioch congregation.

In the Book of Philippians notice the mission thrust which Paul had given the church in Philippi. They learned about missions from him, listening to him and watching him in his work. They supported him from the very first day until the last day. Whenever the church in Philippi knew where Paul was, this poor poverty-stricken church supported him. That is why Paul wrote the Philippians this letter. It is a love letter from Paul to the church in Philippi. He expressed his deep association and deep love with them. He ended the Book of Philippians by thanking them for the gift they had just sent him:

Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:17–19).

John used the same emphasis when he wrote the Book of Third John:

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth (3 John 5–7).

Paul wanted his supporters to understand the home base of people and how important they were to his work. John wanted Gaius, his beloved brother, to understand what his support meant to the people he supported. Whether Christians are the ones who do the sending or who are being sent they need to maintain a close contact with each other.

A second part of Paul's mission strategy was to confine his efforts to the four provinces of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. He was an apostle to the Gentiles who wanted to go to all the world, but he knew if he tried to reach too many he might not reach anyone. He had a job to do that made it necessary for him to limit the scope of his work. The extent of the Church's work is the whole world, but that is not a one person job even if that person has the skills of the apostle Paul. Reaching the whole world is not one church's job even if it is

a strong missionary church like Antioch or Jerusalem or Philippi. Christians need to focus their work on a small enough area that they get something significantly done, but a large enough area that they get something lasting done. If you consider the map of the area Paul focused on, that is a large area, but when you compare those regions to the whole world, that is a small area. Paul and Luke, who wrote the Book of Luke and the Book of Acts, taught primarily in provinces. In Acts 9:31 Luke said, *“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”* These men thought of the Church as a singular thing even though there were many congregations. The city of Lubbock has approximately thirty congregations. I think it would be good if the people of Lubbock thought of this group of congregations as the Church. The state of Texas has many congregations which could be referred to as the Church. Each one is overseen by its own eldership, but they are part of one singular Church. There is one Body (cf. Ephesians 4:4). Christians need to think of the different congregations as the one Church as they think of evangelizing places. Paul’s missionary activities lasted twelve to fifteen years focusing on just four provinces. Paul lived to see autonomous and indigenous churches that were able to take care of themselves in the bigger cities and provinces. Paul only traveled to six or seven of the cities within those four provinces, but the people he taught were so taught that they went to the other cities of those provinces to preach the Word of God. Paul made the following statement in Romans that gives his explanation about how God’s plan worked:

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done — by the power of signs and miracles, through

the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while (Romans 15:17–24).

Paul had a service that he rendered to God. That service was to preach the Gospel of Christ. In those four provinces there was no longer a place where Christ was not known, so Paul was going to the farthest outpost in the world by going to Spain itself. Paul could not do what he wanted to do because he had to do what he had to do. He was compelled to preach the Gospel of Christ in those four provinces.

The third part of Paul's mission strategy was to concentrate on the large cities. That is important for Christians to know because in the present day missionizing, Christians sometimes do not concentrate as much as they proliferate. We think we ought to scatter people putting one here and one there. We think that because it is more receptive out in the smaller villages and towns that is where we should go because of their receptivity. That was not the mission method of Paul. He concentrated on the large cities not because it was convenient or comfortable in the large cities, but it was from those strategic centers that the Gospel could and would radiate. Because of that, Paul traveled on the famous Roman roads. He did not travel the little byways, He traveled the highway. He paused at

famous Roman cities. He paused in Philippi, a Roman colony. He paused in Thessalonica, the commercial center of that area. He paused in Athens, the cultural center of that time. He paused in Ephesus, the religious center. He did not stop to preach in all the cities on the road. On the way to Philippi Paul passed other cities so that he could preach in Philippi because from that central city the Word would spread to reach many smaller cities. In Acts 17:1 Paul passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia because they did not have a synagogue and, therefore, no strategic center from which the Word of God could radiate.

Paul's work in the city of Ephesus is probably the best example of this methodology. When he came to the city of Ephesus, he started in the synagogue because there was a ready audience there. When he was kicked out of the synagogue, he rented the lecture hall of Tyrannus where he taught the Brethren and other people would come also. In one version of the Bible it says that he taught them from one o'clock to four o'clock every afternoon. That was the time period when the shops were closed so all the workers and all the owners could come to the lecture hall to be taught. Acts 19:10 says, "*This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*" Paul concentrated on the big cities so that all Asia heard the Word of God.

Paul made the synagogue one of the chief scenes of his labor. He took advantage of the principle mentioned in Roman 1:16 — ". . . *first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*" He took advantage of the Jewish custom to ask a visiting Rabbi to speak. Although he had been a Christian for a number of years, he was still known in the Jewish community because of his great standing at one time as a Rabbi. When Paul entered a synagogue many times, he would be invited to teach and only when he had been expelled from the synagogue would he go elsewhere. He knew the people in the synagogue were not right; he knew that the people did not believe in Jesus, that is why he went there. In the synagogue there was a ready audience who

believed in God and believed in the Old Testament. Paul could use the Old Testament and show the people that it spoke of Christ. Christians today need to concentrate on people who already believe. Although they do not believe significantly unto salvation, they do believe in God, in Jesus, in the Word of God, so there is no reason to by pass those who believe. Christians need to be among those who believe in God and Jesus listening and asking questions in order to teach them.

In Paul's mission strategy, he preferred to speak to the responsive people of the community. Not all people are equally responsive to the Gospel of Christ. Jesus said, "*... I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest,*" but not all fields are "*ripe for harvest*" (John 4:35). In some areas of the world, missionaries have gone over and over as teams teaching and preaching and very few people have been responsive, but two people may go into another area near by and multitudes have obeyed the Gospel. Everyone would prefer to preach where the people are responsive. That was Paul's preference; he was interested in results. When someone says they are not concerned about results, then they are not interested in souls because that is what the results are. The results are souls. The Book of Acts records numbers, then it records multiplication and great additions that Christians might know that we are to be concerned about people obeying the Gospel of Christ. Paul's interest in speaking to responsive people explains to a degree his agonizing decision to leave the synagogue and go out among the Gentiles. The Jews in the synagogue had thrust the Gospel from them and the Gentiles were accepting it.

One of Paul's mission strategies was to baptize his converts on the immediate confession of their faith. Consider the jailer in Acts 16 as an example of that fact. In Acts 18:8 Paul baptized an entire household: "*Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.*"

Paul wrote later to the Corinthians and even mentioned who he had baptized (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:14).

Part of Paul's strategy was to remain in one place long enough to establish a church. He did not simply preach and baptize a few before he left the converts to go to another place. He stayed long enough, or left someone else at that place long enough, to establish a self-perpetuating, self-supporting, and self-propagating church. He had two goals. His immediate goal was the speedy evangelization of the entire world. His ultimate goal was the establishment of strong, local churches. That goal cannot be accomplished by short term campaigns. Someone needs to stay with the new converts to carry those people onto perfection. Many times Paul could not do that, but he left others like Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphroditus, Onesiphorus, and others in his place who would carry those people onto perfection. That can only be done by what Jesus called "*make disciples*" as He spoke to His disciples in Matthew 28:19–20:

"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."

Jesus did not want just converts, believers, or even church members; He wants mission minded, self-sustaining, Gospel preaching congregations with the intended and stated goal of evangelizing the whole world. Paul's method paid off handsomely. After only fifteen years he had no more un-evangelized cities to go to according to Romans 15:19–24. He wrote the following to Thessalonica, one of the places where he only stayed a few weeks, but he had left Brothers there to establish the church:

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our

God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:2–3).

In most cases the present day Church has failed to establish missionary churches. We seem to build churches dependent upon the support from outside, and dependent upon having a man in the pulpit called the preacher, and not dependent upon simply Jesus and His Word. We are dependent upon the wisdom of men.

In his mission strategy Paul made ample use of his fellow workers. Paul was not a lone worker. He had no desire to go his own way or do his own thing. He believed wholeheartedly in team work. Even before his missionary journeys, he was involved in team work (cf. Acts 11:25–26). This concept of team work continued to happen on his first journey. Barnabas and Saul joined hands to preach the Gospel with Barnabas listed as the leader of their team which included Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and the last name on the list was Saul (cf. Acts 13:1–3). Before that journey was over it was no longer Barnabas and Saul, it became Paul and Barnabas, but still a team.

Paul's ministry strategy of team work continued on Paul's second and third missionary journeys. When Paul separated from Barnabas, he chose Silas as a partner and Timothy joined them in Lystra. Along the way he gathered other fellow workers who included Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, and Trophimus, who each added to the fruitfulness of Paul's outreach with the Gospel (cf. Acts 20:4). In his epistles the list continues with Epaphras, Demas, Epaphroditus, Archippus, Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, Titus, and Phoebe. All of these are named as co-workers. In Romans 16:1–16 there are twenty-seven people named as co-workers, of which ten are women.

Consider the one time that Paul recorded a sin of his. He committed many sins, in fact, he called himself the “chief” of

sinners (cf. 1 Timothy 1:16). Paul told the “church of God in Corinth”:

Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-by to them and went on to Macedonia (2 Corinthians 2:12–13).

Paul failed to do what he needed to do because he had no peace of mind without Titus. He was alone in Troas. This part of his ministry strategy was not dictated primarily by a desire for companionship. He knew the strength that a group of people had in a community as they testified concerning the Word of God. In Ecclesiastes Solomon said:

Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” This too is meaningless — a miserable business! Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:7–12).

When two men and God form a team there is always success. Paul was not a solitary evangelist. He was a shepherding servant of a large circle of missionaries. And the number of the co-laborers increased with the progress of his work. Christians need to follow Paul’s method of teamwork.

In Paul's mission strategy he became all things to all men (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19–23). As he talked to the Jews, he faced the problem of circumcision. Working with the Jews, he wanted his team to be the best they could so he had Timothy circumcised. When they asked to circumcise Titus, who was a Gentile, Paul would not permit it because that would have been teaching the Body that the Jews were better than the Gentiles. When Paul talked to the Gentiles, the problem he faced was idolatry. Paul told them to eat the meat that had been offered to an idol when they were asked. He said if anyone questions you refuse to eat it for the good of the Body. Paul said, “. . . *I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some*” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

The Christian missionaries (and especially Americans) need to be as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove (cf. Matthew 10:16). As far as possible they should give no offense to the Jews or the Gentiles or the Church of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:32). Remember that the Christian task is still to proclaim the Gospel that will divide fathers from sons, daughters from mothers, and a man's enemy will be those of his own household.

Factors in Paul's Success

The apostle Paul had the desire to win in his missionary efforts. One of the factors in Paul's success was his deep conviction regarding his call. He was an author, a preacher, teacher, traveler, organizer, tentmaker, but most of all he was called to be an apostle. Paul was totally dedicated to the will of God. He desired to see Rome but he would not see it until it was the will of God. When he was on his way to Jerusalem, his friends said you must not go for they are going to kill you. Paul said it did not matter if he lived or died. The important thing was to do the will of God.

Paul was completely dependant upon the Holy Spirit. When he wanted to go to a place, if the Spirit made it clear that it was not where he should go, he listened and he was happy about that guidance. Paul went the way he was headed until the Spirit told him this is where you need to be by the responses given from his preaching and only then would he stay there. Paul fearlessly proclaimed the Gospel. Proclaiming is everyone's task, but he fearlessly did God's will. He was afraid on occasion and —

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God (Acts 18:9–11).

Paul strongly emphasized the autonomy of the local church. He did not want any church to be dependant on him. He did not want any church to be dependant on another church. He wanted everyone dependant only upon God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Paul had a wise policy regarding money. He supported himself and his colleagues by working with his own hands. When he received money from a congregation, he praised God for it.

Conclusion

The example of Paul's life is great for Christians. We need to study this man from the Book of Acts and his epistles. Follow his example. We will find power for our missions that we will find no where else. Preach the Word of God!

Missions Through Small Groups

This will be the last chapter in the study discussing mission principles as they are found particularly in the New Testament. This last study deals with what is called the church in the home, what we call house churches or small groups. This is a very valid mission principle. The Church will never rapidly grow and multiply if Christians are dependant upon the Sunday morning celebration. Neither will it multiply by depending on the congregations nor the Bible classes, the large groups as Christians gather together. Congregational groups enable Christians to enjoy praising God together, and large classes enable us to be filled with the Word of God. However, until Christians participate in small groups where we can intimately relate to our friends and neighbors, to God and one another, the Church will never reach that multiplying level.

Fears That Hinder Small Groups

There have been abuses made with the principle of house churches or small groups. This has caused some fears from within the Church for doing small groups. Some people have said that if the church breaks up into small groups it may divide the church. They look at it as many cliques all going their own way. There is a valid danger in that. That danger lies in the heart and attitude of the participants and not in the small group concept.

Some have also thought that small groups might cause some to go off into false doctrine or doctrine different from the mainstream. That is a possible danger, but it does not need to

be a fear that hinders. Many have thought small groups might cause some to go off into legalistic or psychological excesses. That is a possible danger. Any time that Christians get together and look one another in the eye, that danger exists. It needs to be a danger that we are aware of and not a fear that will hinder.

Facts That Help Small Groups

There are some facts that help and make it absolutely necessary that Christians become involved in small group work. Small groups are the New Testament pattern of doing things. The first century disciples —

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. **All the believers** were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread **in their homes** and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42–47).*

Notice that there was a corporate meeting of the whole Church in the city. They met together in the temple courts. There was a larger group who met together to continue in the “*apostles' teachings*.” It is possible that there were twelve Bible classes going on during the day every day with the apostles as teachers. These verses also show that “*They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people*.” Then and only then does the Scripture say, “*And the Lord added to their number*

daily those who were being saved.” Christians have not restored the New Testament order until we have a celebration in which everyone gets together to celebrate their faith, perhaps all the congregations in one city could meet for this kind of celebration. It is important to have large groups that we might call congregations gathered to study the Word of God. And until we have small groups meeting in homes to take the Word and make it real and practical so that we can be able to live it day by day out on the street we have not restored the New Testament Church. Christians need to worship, study, and share. All of that was happening within the first century Church in Acts 2.

Notice in Acts 5:41–42 this plan was actually the New Testament order:

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

The apostles had just been flogged and told that they could not preach anymore, yet they left the Sanhedrin “. . . rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” “In the temple courts” would refer to the large group. “From house to house” would refer to small groups. These people “. . . never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that is Jesus is the Christ.”

Consider Acts 12:11–12 when Peter had been in prison and when he was released —

Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.” When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of

Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

Peter knew where the Brethren would be; he knew they would be in the home of Mary where they had gathered to pray. In Acts 16:14–15 Paul was in Philippi and on the Sabbath they went to the river where they expected to find a place of prayer. Paul began to speak to the women who had gathered —

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

The Book of Acts closes with Paul establishing a teaching post in his house in Rome:

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:30–31).

The Book of Acts has examples of the Church meeting in homes. Notice the number of house churches in Rome nearly a generation later recorded by Paul. Romans was written near the end of Paul's life on his third missionary journey. Paul greeted twenty-seven different people in Romans 16. Several times he mentioned churches in their houses:

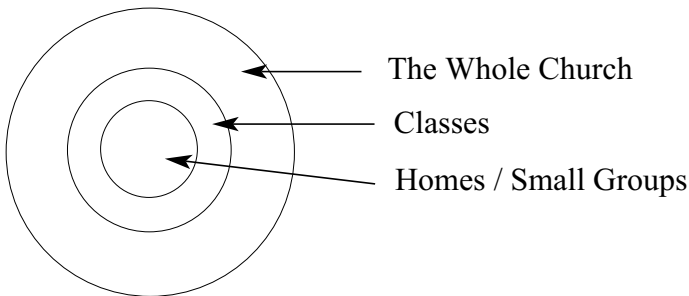
- *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the*

*churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also **the church that meets at their house.***

- *Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.*
- *Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.*
- *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.*
- *Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord.*
- *Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.*
- *Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ.*
- *Greet those who belong to the **household of Aristobulus.***
- *Greet Herodion, my relative.*
- *Greet those in the **household of Narcissus** who are in the Lord.*
- *Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.*
- *Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.*
- *Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.*
- *Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the **brothers with them.***
- *Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and **all the saints with them.***
- *Greet one another with a holy kiss. **All the churches of Christ send greetings.***
- *Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.*
- *I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.*
- *Gaius, whose **hospitality I and the whole church** here enjoy, sends you his greetings.*
- *Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.*

There were small groups in Colosse: “*Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house*” (Colossians 4:15). The church was in the home of Philemon: “*To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home* (Philemon. 2).

These were not separate congregations. These were small groups within the large group, churches within the Church. This is illustrated below:



First there was the group for the celebration for all the Brethren to come together. Within that there were several Bible classes or congregations who were studying under skilled master teachers. Finally, what was preached and what was taught was brought down to the home level for discussion and talking about how what they had heard related to individual Brethren. They talked about how it related to their lives as doctors and lawyers and other professions in their day by day lives. The Good News they had heard preached about God with great principles can be very practical in the life of every Christian. Some have suggested that these small groups grew out of the persecution of the Church, but every one of these passages were cited before the great persecution began. Something else must explain the reason for small groups. I believe small groups meet the needs of the members. There can be a living vibrant fellowship within the small group structure.

Factors That Give Hope to Small Groups

Small groups are psychologically sound. Jesus wants them done. The definition of small groups or house churches we are talking about are people who are bound together by their faith in Christ, by their similarity in culture, and by their desire to work. It is all to carry out the Great Commission of Christ to see that the Gospel is preached to every creature. Therefore, there must be by necessity a meeting in every neighborhood or city block on a weekly basis. Christians need to know that on one certain night a group meets in a specific house to open The Book to look at Jesus and to make the response that is called for from that Book.

The purpose of small groups or house churches is to provide a small and vital group fellowship with opportunities for mutual encouragement, to share in prayer, and to meet each other's needs. Small groups provide a means for a new convert to become immediately involved in the work of the local church to be able to build disciples capable of planning and carrying out the Great Commission of Christ. In that Jesus will meet the needs of the group, but it is also Jesus who will be magnified. Jesus will carry on the great work of His life.

Of course, Christians must beware of boasting, legalistic pressure, or dominating personalities. We will keep the target of evangelizing on our minds while avoiding Pharisaical attitudes that make us think we are more righteous than others. We will invite people to be a part of our group to come and share and in no way intimidate or pressure them. We will trust God and remember that this group is a part of a whole group and not a group in and of itself.

Features That Give Hope to Small Groups

The first feature of small groups which will bring health and create a vibrant group is the concept that they talk about

Jesus. He is seen as the real Leader of this group. He is alive. They read His Gospels. They hear His actions and hear Him speak. He leads and they follow. He disciplines and they are corrected. He teaches and they learn. He loves and they respond. He is working in their lives and they are better for it. He sets their tongues loose and they speak.

A small group cares for and about each other. This is because they know each other intimately. This causes the group to remain in touch with each other through the week. As they look at Jesus day by day, they are learning little by little the deep kind of love. A small group meeting never ends. It goes on after the members leave the house. If a problem is mentioned for one of the members, chances are he/she will receive numerous calls during the week to say I am thinking about you and to let them know they are being prayed for.

One of the benefits of a caring group of Brothers and Sisters is that they quickly come to know and accept the fact that God loves them. They pray with each other and for each other. They pray the urgent prayers particularly for each other. The New Testament is filled with the prayers of Brethren for each other as well as prayers of thanksgiving to God.

A small group willingly shares their faith because they have something good to share. They refrain from sharing their complaints and their problems. The following is a quote from a letter I received from a lady I helped to learn about small groups:

In our meetings we read about and talk about Jesus. You have to decide for yourself if Christ is real. If He is, what does that mean in your life? As we study and pray from week to week, we see that He is doing things in our lives that we have never seen before. A neighbor comes over and shares a problem, then pretty soon in helping with the problem we are talking about Jesus. And then the neighbor is led to a faith and belief in Christ.

That is what Paul said in Philippians 2:12–16:

*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for **it is God who works in you** to will and to act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which **you shine like stars** in the universe as you hold out the word of life — in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.*

The same is mentioned in Revelation 12:11 when John saw the redeemed around the throne: “*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*” John described the redeemed as the “overcomers.” They overcame because of the blood of Christ on the cross and because of “*the word of their testimony.*” The overcomers shared what they knew and they did not love their lives — they did not “*shrink from death.*”

Many who would never speak up in the assembly of celebration or in a large Bible class feel comfortable enough to speak in small groups because they feel free to speak within a small group setting. Sharing their faith is easier for some within a small group. The key to telling others has never been to train the flesh by teaching them to close sales and make presentations. The key ever since the first century has been to get the Christian so full of Jesus, so full of the Holy Spirit, that those who are around him are caught up in the spontaneous overflow. It can be illustrated as an overflowing oil well. An overblowing oil well gives forth much more oil than the ones that have to be pumped. Life in small groups helps keep the

believer open for the continual filling of the Holy Spirit and when the Christian life is kept full, we will tell others.

Another feature that gives hope to small groups is the fact that they see God's power. They are able to see the power of God alive and working in the lives of ordinary people. Within one small group there was a man who had received no help after seeing several psychiatrists, but he was brought to total peace through his experiences within a small group. He was like the woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years and no one could heal her. When she touched the hem of Jesus' garment, she was instantly healed (cf. Mark 5:25–29; Luke 8:43–48). Within that same small group, a hopeless alcoholic received the will to quit and to stay sober.

Within another small group, there was a divided home where the husband and wife had already filed their divorce papers, but in the small group they were led to peace and security so that they are not only living together, but he is preaching the Gospel of Christ. I have seen souls who were bitter against God brought to absolute loving service to Him within a small group. The power of God is easily seen within a small group.

Small groups engage in service to God that is not forced or phony. One small group decided they wanted to get involved in feeding the hungry. They made a plan to have a daily soup kitchen in a bad part of town. They took their plan to the elders of the church, the elders approved it, and without any monies from the budget, they themselves purchased, staffed, and fed people for six years.

Within small groups people grow in a marvelous and fabulous way. They grow because their gifts are exercised. There is a beautiful concept of giftedness that is discussed in 1 Corinthians 12:26–30, Romans 12:3–8, and Ephesians 4:1–16. God has given to each one of His children some gift (e.g., exhortation, showing mercy with cheerfulness, giving with liberality, teaching, faith, and wisdom). Many of the gifts listed

in these passages will not be exercised in the corporate worship. Where are members going to be able to exercise the spiritual gifts that God has given them? Where can a woman exercise her giftedness the best? It is not going to be in the corporate worship or in teaching an adult class. She can work the best in her own domain, the home. Small groups give Christians the opportunity to exercise our mutual giftedness. These spiritual gifts cannot be utilized appropriately apart from small groups.

Christians grow through “*one another*” relationships. Look up the words “*one another*” in a concordance. The Bible says that we are to bear one another’s burdens, we are to admonish one another, rebuke one another, consider one another better than yourself, urge one another on unto love and good works, we are to love one another. Where are all the “*one another*” passages going to be fulfilled? These things cannot be exercised to any degree in a large assembly or in Bible classes. These “*one another*” passages can best be fulfilled in the home or in small groups.

Christians will grow by their mutual experience in the Word of God. They hear the Word as they study it. As they see the Word of God living in the people they are bound to in a small group, they grow because of the exercise of mutual gifts, mutual love, and the mutual experience in the Word of God.

Christians learn to trust the Lord within a small group. Romans 8:28 is a message of trust: “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*” All things are worked together for good. We trust God in that way. There is a divine work — it is God who “*works.*” There is a thorough work — God works “*all things.*” There is a beneficial work — God works all things “*together for the good.*” There is a discriminate work — God works for those who “*love*” God and are “*called according to his purpose.*” There is an assured work — “***And we know!***” We have His assurance — we know that He is working in us! No matter what happens we know that

God is working together for good. This verse thrills the people who hear it preached. This verse fills the people who hear this taught. But it is within the small group that this passage instills one with the faith to go out and work. Christians need to be thrilled and filled by hearing this verse, but above all we need it instilled in us that **we can know** that the Lord will be with us in all that we do.

There is hope within small groups because they have life. Christians may attend a worship service all torn up inside and they do not necessarily get the life that we desire. The same thing may be true when we hear someone else teaching or even when we study the Bible by ourselves. If Christians can open up and share with one another in a small group and see Jesus living within each other, then we become conscious of how Jesus lives within each other and assured of how Jesus lives in the Body, the Church. It is easier to see His life within our Brothers and Sisters within a small group. Because of this we become conscious that the Body lives in Christ.

Within a small group a timid individual is able to come out boldly with their faith and share what they might not normally be able to share. No one leaves empty. Sometimes people who come to worship on Sunday morning will leave as empty inside as they were when they came. The small group is able to be more conscious of the truth that Christ lives in the Body. Timidity often gives away to boldness in the small group setting.

Conclusion

The Church will grow when the seed is sown abundantly through small groups. May God make us a missionary on our block using our home as the evangelistic center. Go preach the Word to every creature!



Richard Rogers

Richard Rogers was born in 1936 in Dallas, Texas. He was educated at Abilene Christian University and Florida Christian College. An avid reader and diligent student of the Bible, he authored some twenty teaching workbooks and published outlines.

Richard was a well-known and gifted evangelist, teacher, and lectureship speaker. Until his death he was in great demand as a missionary encourager and world evangelist. He taught for more than three decades at Sunset International Bible Institute, assisting in the training of thousands of preachers and missionaries. Richard mentored church planting teams in California, Mexico, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Richard preached for local congregations in Blue Ridge, Azle, and Midland, Texas, and the Sunset Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas. Speaking appointments took him to at least forty states and thirty foreign countries as well as to many Christian university campuses as a teacher and lecturer. He was also a frequent speaker at soul-winning workshops across the nation.

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Richard and his wife, Barbara, were blessed with four children and many grandchildren.

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