

EVANGELISM: FAITH OR FRAUD?

By

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As Jesus concluded a parable on prayer, He mused, “When the Son of man comes, shall he find the faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). His question indicated that He does not really expect to find the true faith among many people. He does not ask, “Shall he find faith?”; that is people who profess some kind of faith, but “Shall he find **the** faith?”, the faith that was once for all delivered unto the saints, an without which man cannot be saved.

The faith Christ requires is faith in that which He has revealed concerning Himself and His eternal purpose. It is faith in historic facts of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus in the world in human flesh, the death He died to pay the penalty of our sin, His resurrection and ascension to the place of power in heaven to reign over the universe. It embraces the purpose of God from the cross to the second coming and the hope of eternal life in the world to come.

Few who call themselves Christian would deny that all the above is included in what we call **the faith**. But when it comes to evangelism and conversion, the faith seems to become something else. **To a large extent the evangelism that is going on is quite unlike the faith which it is supposed to produce.** If Christ should come today he would find much that is called “faith,” but the question is; would He find **the** faith delivered through the apostles chosen for that purpose?

When the early Christians “went everywhere preaching the gospel” they were laying the foundation for the true faith. They preached Christ’s death and resurrection, His Lordship and second coming to judge the world. Their presentation was Christ-centered, and their conditions for appropriating the benefit of the faith were repentance and baptism.

One of the chief objects of preaching is to bring man to repentance. John the Baptist’s first word was “Repent”. When Jesus began preaching after the terrible ordeal in the wilderness of temptation, His message was, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:17). The charge given the apostles was that “repentance and remission of sins” was to be preached everywhere (Luke 24:27). In keeping this charge, after Christ’s ascension, Peter commanded the believers on Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Man, in sin, is caught on a one-way street to death. The gospel says to turn around; go against the traffic.

To repent is to hate sin, to sorrow over it and to turn from it. It is the result of the Holy Spirit convicting the heart of its evil inclination, making the heart contrite before God. Therefore the apostles everywhere demanded repentance and baptism as the means of receiving the grace which was freely bestowed through the death that Christ died. No promises were made on the grounds of one’s special experience. Paul’s experience on the Damascus road was nothing like the experience of the 3,000 on Pentecost. Their experience was breath-taking enough, yet still different from that of the Ethiopian eunuch. Yet such experiences did not form the basis of their faith. They all believed the same gospel of Christ and all responded to the divine command to repent and be baptized. Faith was solidly settled on the facts concerning what Christ did in His death, and the

response was identical in every case, in spite of the diverse personal feelings and reactions. Their faith was genuine because it was established on truth revealed by Christ and not upon human experience. Then, as now, the true gospel did not always bring in a harvest. The apostles were rejected, despised and persecuted. Christians were the “sect everywhere spoken against.” Holding the true faith in a clear conscience was not the way to be popular and to reach the masses. Therefore there were many who went out corrupting the gospel, preaching to itching ears the things that would excite and bring response. Paul said that Satan’s agents fashioned themselves as ministers of righteousness (II Cor. 11:15).

As the time of Christ’s return draws closer each day (and we do not suggest any date for His return) the evil doers wax worse and worse, the love of many grows cold, and the faith become more scarce. Humanism has become the god of the major nations of the world, and the leaders and teachers seek to dethrone Christ, and fashion a god to their own specifications (Psa. 2:1–3). In fulfillment of Christ’s expectations, the faith gets harder to find all the time.

Since men do not readily accept THE FAITH, the evangels of our day have solved the problem by presenting something that men **will** accept. “Evangelists” now go forth to “share Jesus” and get “decisions”. They assure the sinner that if he will only “invite Jesus into his life” he will be saved. The sinner is called upon to make a “decision” for Christ. Such decisions may be made upon the basis of finding a new life, or solving current problems or having a great religious experience. Crusades in India report hundreds and thousands making “decisions” for Christ, but other Christians there testify that these multitudes who make “decisions” during the crusade soon go back home to their family gods. The “easy-believe-ism” of modern evangelism which merely says “invite Jesus into your heart” leaves out both the core of the atonement made in Christ’s death and the core of conversion found in repentance.

This “gospel” of easy-believe-ism bears no resemblance to anything found in the Bible. If preaching gets a response where repentance is absent, it is “another gospel”. An invitation to Jesus to “come in” as a guest in the heart simply means adding another guest, as if Jesus can join the host of devils already at home in the sinners life. True faith is to obey and follow Christ, not have Him follow us.

Evangelism in our day can mean anything and still be accepted in the broad-stream churches, which call themselves conservative or fundamental. Children, gathered up by the bus loads, may be scared unto “making their decisions” by the threat of God torturing them forever if they don’t. They may be bribed into the so-called decision simply through the appealing program of fun and games, or they may be pressured into it by the subtle psychology of clever youth leaders. Adults can be excited and mesmerized by animated preaching, and emotionally packed invitation settings. I have heard veteran Christians say that they were so moved by the invitation that they felt like going forward themselves. How could this be if the invitation were based upon the truth, which the Christian had already received, and in which he already stood?

Modern evangelism is presented under many guises designed to pack a church house. The most worldly and carnal attractions are utilized, from the athletic playboy and the rock-style music group to the animated preacher and the swarm of so-called councilors who act as pre-conditioned bait to lead the sheep down the aisle. Writing of innovations in evangelism, W.F. Lown of Manhattan Christian College says,

“Evangelism may include many or all of these notions, but it is really not any of them at base. All of these approaches begin with **means** and not **meanings**.” The faith must be founded on the meaning, and unless the meaning is present, all the means in the world that bring a crowd together cannot result in one product of true gospel evangelism.

Whatever apparent success men’s innovations may produce, we must acknowledge that the work of redemption and regeneration was assigned to Christ and is valid only in so far as Christ has said it is valid by His word. When there is a response on the basis of the whole gospel preached, that response is indicative of the true faith. But when the response comes in answer to man’s inventive genius, his skilled promotion technique and his clever psychological persuasion, then there is no basis for faith and no reason to think that one has been converted to Christ.

Much so-called evangelism is mere mass hypnosis, where the mind is charmed through the tools of emotional music and other revival systems and conditioned to respond at a given signal. The response is not in true faith where the faith has not been preached. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

We do not gainsay the need for exhortation. It is said of Peter that “With many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40). After having heard with understanding the truth upon which faith stands, the sinner needs encouragement to act upon it. But we decry the artificial environment and atmosphere created for the purpose of overwhelming his emotions and gaining a “decision” when he hardly has control of his faculties. It took a miracle to arrest Saul on the Damascus road, but he had three days to think it over in solitude before the evangelist told him to “arise and be baptized, and wash away (his) sins, calling upon the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Others in apostolic times were baptized in the same hour in which they heard the gospel, but never with any other tool than the truth of the gospel itself.

Elders are to take heed to the church as to how they feed the flock (Acts 20:28). Evangelists are charged to “preach the word” (II Tim. 4:2). Christians are to “prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I John 4:1).

If evangelism is to produce saving faith, then it must present the object of that faith in clear and true terms that can be reasoned with (Isa 1:18, Acts 17:2, 18:4). Evangelistic trickery, pressure and manipulation of minds produces a fraud and not faith.

“When the Son of man comes, shall He find the faith?”

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