

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN EVANGELISM

John 16:7-11.

It seems that we have lost a word out of our Christian vocabulary -- the word "concern." We sing "Rescue the Perishing", but our rescue efforts do not prove that we have a real concern. Do we ever say to the lost what Whitefield said: "I am willing to go to prison and to death for you, but I am not willing to go to heaven without you"? We certainly need a revival of concern. Many of the unsaved can truthfully say, "No man cared for my soul." How sad that any human being should ever have occasion to utter that statement!

Evangelism is a beautiful word. It means the proclamation of the good news of God in Christ with a view to winning others to faith in Him as their personal Saviour and fidelity to Him as their Lord and Master. The good news is that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

Evangelism has made Southern Baptists what they are and it must preserve them. Every saved person is a product of evangelism. Where Baptists have failed to introduce people to Christ they have died or are dying. A church must evangelize or perish. What breath is to the body, and what the soul is to man, evangelism is to a church. Evangelism is not optional; it is imperative.

The motives that constrain us to evangelistic efforts are as wide as the earth, as inclusive as the needs of men, as lofty as the love of God, as deep as the pit of hell, as long as eternity, and as broad as time. One motive is the command of Christ: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." If we love Him, we shall strive to please Him. Another motive for evangelism is the condition of people. Without Christ people are lost in sin. If we love them, we will strive to win them to Christ. Another motive is the welfare of our churches. If we love our churches and want to see them grow, we shall do more to win the lost to Christ and church membership. Still another motive for evangelistic effort is the desire for personal blessings. Among these blessings are the greatest possibly joy, personal fellowship with Christ, and the fulness of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

In this great work of evangelism there is no substitute for a heart of love. The German philosopher and poet, Heine, one day stood in the Louvre in Paris before the statue of Venus of Milo. He was in a mood of disillusionment and despair, and he said to Venus, "Ah, yes! I suppose you would help me if you could, but you can't. Your lips are still and your heart is cold." In this matter of witnessing for Christ, if our lips are still, it is simply because our hearts are cold.

Introducing people to Christ has its shining rewards. Its results accumulate with the passing centuries. Among these results are: -- the salvation of those who trust Christ, the peace of soul in doing God's will, the joy of helping others, the undying gratitude of those you win to Christ, the satisfaction of helping to increase the population of heaven, and the appreciation and commendation of Christ.

We never know how far-reaching may be the results of introducing a soul to Christ. Think of Andrew. He was an humble, quiet, unassuming and consistent Christian. Perhaps the greatest act of his life was that of bringing Simon Peter to Christ. Andrew was the acorn, Peter was the oak, and three thousand converts at Pentecost were the great forest. Andrew will share in the rewards for Peter's work because he introduced him to Christ.

Think of Stephen and Ananias in helping to bring Paul to Christ. Think of Dr. J. B. Hawthorne, an orator whose services were sought by scores of Southern Baptist Churches, and whose sermons were heard by thousands. On one occasion he assisted a pastor and his church in a two weeks' evangelistic campaign. At the end of it only one little unpromising boy had made a profession of faith in Christ, and Dr. Hawthorne and the church were a bit chagrined over the result. But that boy was A. T. Robertson, who became the greatest Greek and New Testament scholar of the twentieth century.

Never despise the day when a child is won to Christ. Only the Lord knows that that contribution may mean to the cause of Christ. Have you ever introduced a person to Christ? Bringing somebody to Christ is the greatest service you can ever render for Him. How many have you tried to win to Christ? You are not responsible for results, but you are responsible for your testimony.

If we are to be successful in our evangelistic efforts, the Holy Spirit must be given His rightful place in our lives and work. It is disturbing that so little emphasis is being placed on the Holy Spirit in the preaching, teaching, singing and witnessing of today. In many churches months and years have elapsed without a single sermon being delivered which specifically honored the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. In a class that he was teaching a pastor asked, "How many persons are there in the Godhead?" A woman who was zealous in Christian work, answered "There are two persons in the Godhead, the Father and the Son." The pastor replied, "Woman! don't you know that the correct answer is 'there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?'" The woman answered, "We hear you mention the Father; and sometimes you mention the Son in your preaching; but we have never heard you say anything about the Holy Spirit." So far as many professing Christians are concerned, the Holy Spirit is the neglected member of the Godhead.

God's Word makes it perfectly clear that the Holy Spirit is much more than a benevolent influence; He is a person. When reference is made to the Holy Spirit in the Bible, personal qualities are ascribed to Him, personal deeds are performed by Him, and a personal office is held by Him. To think of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal influence is to rob Him of the honor which is due to Him. If you think of Him as a mere influence, then your thought will be, "How can I get hold of that influence and use it?" If you think of Him as divine person, which He is, then your thought will be "How can the Holy Spirit get hold of me and use me?"

The Holy Spirit spoke of Himself in personal terms. He said: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). That really means, "Put a ring around these two men; circle them off. I have something to say to them, something I want to do through them."

The Holy Spirit works with us in a threefold manner. He works upon us as sinners; He works in us as saints; and He works through us as servants.

I. The Holy Spirit's Work With Sinners.

An illustration of our state when we were dead in trespasses and sins is seen in the vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37). As the breath of God came upon those bones, and caused them to live, so the Spirit of God has come upon us, and quickened us from the death of sin, so that we are now alive unto God, by His power, through Jesus Christ.

1. The Holy Spirit bears witness to lost sinners concerning the truth regarding Jesus Christ.

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me" (John 15:26).

2. The Holy Spirit illuminates the understanding.
3. The Holy Spirit convicts.

"Convict" means to bring to light all the facts which prove to man that he is out of harmony with God, that his guilt is inexcusable, and that God's demands must be satisfied or he will be punished.

Of what does the Holy Spirit convict the sinner? In John 16:8 we read: "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

According to this verse the Holy Spirit convicts of three things:

(1) Of sin committed.

Christ indicated the nature of that sin and described it as failure to believe in Him. He said: "Of sin, because they believe not on me" (John 16:9). The Holy Spirit cannot do His convicting work unless Christ is preached and offered to men as Saviour and Lord. No human power can convict any sinner. Real conviction for sin can only be produced by the Holy Spirit. How important that we realize this is our soul-winning efforts today!

(2) Of righteousness imputed.

When Christ was here among men He exhibited a life of perfect righteousness, and always did those things that pleased the Father. When we point to the perfect life of Christ, which was followed by His death and resurrection, we make it possible for the Holy Spirit to convict the unsaved of their absolute need of that righteousness which Christ alone can give.

(3) Of judgment accomplished.

The Holy Spirit convicts of the judgment which God passed upon Satan and sin in the death of Christ on the cross.

(4) The Holy Spirit persuades the convicted one to believe.

When the sinner hears the gospel of Christ, the Holy Spirit uses it to prompt faith unto salvation. In other words, He persuades the sinner, whom He has made conscious of the guilt of sin, to believe on Christ and to receive the salvation which was planned by the Father and provided by the Son.

(5) The Holy Spirit regenerates.

The Holy Spirit regenerates or imparts the divine nature to human beings when they repent toward God and believe on Christ as their Saviour. Men may convert, and frequently do, but only the Holy Spirit can regenerate.

II. The Holy Spirit's Work Through The Saved.

The Holy Spirit guides us as believers in the study of the Scriptures and enables us to understand and interpret them correctly. He also directs us in the Lord's work, provided we have a sincere desire to discover God's will and a strong determination to do it. Moreover, the Holy Spirit empowers us for service. Christians cannot witness for Christ in an effective manner without an absolute dependence on the Holy Spirit. Most Christians have worldly knowledge, culture and talents, but they lack spiritual power. Churches have splendid physical equipment, educational qualifications and opportunities, ample organizations, numerous plans and excellent programs, but are woefully lacking in power.

The Holy Spirit alone can give us the power which we need for the advancement of the Lord's cause. You cannot separate the Holy Spirit and power. Our purpose as Christians is to witness for Christ and to make Him known to others. This purpose can never be accomplished unless we honor the Holy Spirit by a sincere recognition of our dependency on Him.

As a splendid example of the work of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, I want to direct your attention to Acts 8:26-39.

To escape death by violent persecution, Philip fled from Jerusalem to Samaria and there he preached Christ to the people, and many were saved and added to the church. What a joy it is to see a layman who loves the Lord and people enough to introduce them!

Philip promptly responded to the divine call without a single excuse or a word of complaint. He knew that the mandate came from the Lord, and that was enough for him. Traveling south, Philip reached the place to which he had been sent just in the nick of time. Had he hesitated, thought the matter over, or consulted his friends, he would have lost the opportunity of a lifetime. Presently, Philip saw a chariot coming towards him. Then, he heard the command of the Holy Spirit. "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." Again his response was immediate, for he ran to the chariot, ready and anxious to witness for Christ.

Riding in that chariot was an Ethiopian eunuch, a man of great prominence. Even though he was a man of great prominence, prestige, position, pomp, possessions and power, he was far from being satisfied. As he wended his way homeward under the heat and glare of the sun, he was reading aloud from the fifty-third chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. Even though he found these scriptures beyond his understanding, he studied them with humility and diligence. He longed for someone to lead him into the light of God's truth.

With eagerness, earnestness and enthusiasm Philip ran to the chariot and quietly made an inquiry which really meant, "Pardon me, but do you understand what you are reading?" While it must have been a very strange experience for the eunuch to have an unknown man approach his chariot and ask him a question like that, Philip's face was so radiant and eager that the statesman felt at once that here is one who knows. Philip's question drew a frank answer. Each felt that the other was the man he needed. As is so often the case, the Holy Spirit was working at both ends of the line. He had prepared and commissioned Philip to go to the eunuch, and then He saw to it that the latter was in such a state of mind and heart that he would receive the Lord's messenger and His message through His servant. Before one can enlighten another spiritually, there must be on the part of one a possession of a knowledge and both the ability and the willingness to impart it, and on the part of the other a disposition to receive it.

Having confessed that he did not understand what he was reading, the eunuch invited deacon Philip to enter the chariot with him. He gladly accepted the invitation, mounted the chariot, seated himself beside the eunuch and began with the scripture which he was reading and preached unto him Christ. It is always the task of a Christian to point a sinner to Christ, and then to get out of the way.

So far as we know, the eunuch had never heard the Gospel of Christ before. But, he affords us a splendid example of the power of the Word to prepare a soul to hear the Gospel of Christ and to accept the Saviour. Philip showed real wisdom by preaching Christ, for He is the substance of all Gospel preaching. He is a theme which can never be exhausted by all the sermons of all the ages.

Upon being convinced that Christ was the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, the eunuch immediately believed on Him, or received Him as his Saviour, whereupon his sins were forgiven and he was saved. As they traveled along, Philip taught the eunuch that every child of God should follow Christ in baptism, whereupon the eunuch was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing.

To you, as a child of God, the Word says: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Your obedience to these commands is a test of your love for God. Being filled with the Spirit means the possession and mastery of the human spirit by the Holy Spirit. As to the fulness of the Holy Spirit, there is considerable teaching lying under the cover of grammar in this verse.

This verb is in the present tense; therefore, this is a present blessing. It is not a blessing to which we are bidden to look back. Nor is it something to which we are to look

forward. It is a present blessing which we may experience and enjoy now. The verb is in the imperative mood, "Be filled." It is not a suggestion, or a proposition that you may just take into consideration. It is an urgent command which does not leave you any option. This verb is in the passive voice. We are not bidden to fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit, but to "be filled." Being filled with the Spirit is not something you have to do, but it is something that you have to let God do. The Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual power."

What a privilege it is to be a connecting link between the Saviour and a lost sinner. Illustration — Mr. Vivian in broadcasting station in New York when the King of England was to speak at the disarmament conference.