

A REVIVAL OF CONCERN

"I looked on my right hand, and beheld, that there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul". Psalm 142:4.

Any discussion of man's relationship to God is incomplete unless it takes into account the fact of sin. Any transgression of, or want of conformity to, the revealed will of God is sin. Sin is any thought, desire, word or deed contrary to the will of God. Sin includes all evil thoughts, words, and deeds.

Experience, observation, history, and the Bible prove that sin is a reality. The scriptures plainly teach that human sinfulness is universal. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Rom. 3:23. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Rom. 5:12. The verdict of the Holy Spirit is that "There is no man that sinneth not." I Kings 8:46.

Man is depraved. His whole nature has been weakened by sin. He is totally unable to deliver himself from the power of sin, and without the redeeming power of God's grace he will sink deeper into sin. He is dead in trespasses and sins, deserving of wrath, without Christ, without God, and without hope in the world. Left to himself, man is helpless and hopeless. He will never be able to save himself. The Word of God teaches plainly that man without Christ is lost.

Just think of the perilous plight of the sinner. The wrath of God is abiding on him because of his rejection of Christ. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" John 3:18. He is in the plight of an exhausted swimmer far from shore, his desperate condition requires someone to save him--not someone to teach him to swim. The lost man is in the plight of a man who has been poisoned. He needs an antidote--not someone to ask him how he is feeling. The lost woman is in the plight of a woman upstairs in a burning house. She needs firemen to rescue her from the flames--not some lecturer to speak on the ravages of fire nor some insurance agent to compute the loss.

And the appalling thing about it is the immense number of people who are in this lost condition. For example, in Kentucky alone there are far more than one million people above the age of nine years who have never made any profession of faith in Christ. Many of our own relatives, neighbors, and friends are without Christ.

It was God's will that lost souls should have a Saviour. To this end He provided the Lord Jesus Christ, Who died on the cross for their salvation. Man's only hope of salvation is in the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without a doubt there are multitudes who would like to know Christ as their Saviour, if only someone would introduce them to Him.

Present-day Christians are terribly neglectful of lost souls. Because there are so many lost souls in the vicinity of every church who have never been asked personally to receive Christ as their Saviour, we need a revival of concern for the lost. We certainly need a new realization of the supreme business entrusted to us. Any church that is not striving with all of its interests for the salvation of immortal souls, no matter how fundamental its doctrines, or how orthodox its practices, is disobedient, backslidden, and dishonoring to Christ. The fact is we are not working at the business of soul-winning as we ought. Many about us can say, "Nobody cares for my soul."

"No man cared for my soul" is the language of David, when he was shut up in the cave of Engedi. There his enemies had pursued, caged, and surrounded him, while his friends were afar off, unable or afraid to assist him. It was an anxious, lonely, and wearisome time; all the harder to bear because David knew that he was innocent of any evil intentions concerning the Lord's anointed. In his despondency, when everything seemed to be going wrong with him, David concluded that nobody really cared for him. Taught by necessity and grace, he cried to God for help, and he was delivered.

There are many lost people around us today who can say, "Nobody cares for my soul." Through the years they have associated with professed Christians who knew that they had no hope of heaven, and who talked to them about everything else except about that which they most wanted to hear them speak--the salvation of their souls. They are convinced that nobody cares for their souls because they just let them alone. The reason for their being let alone is not because they would resent such interest and endeavor. Often they greatly desire someone to speak to them; for they know they are lost, and they need somebody to help them to be saved. The neglect of souls on the part of those who should care for them is a terrible and distressing fact.

Every Christian should have a passion for souls and work continuously to get people to forsake sin and to accept the Saviour. The absence of this longing and activity in the lives of Christians today is indeed appalling. Multitudes of church members never pray for the salvation of a lost soul, and never put forth any effort whatsoever to the end that they might be saved. If one does not have the desire to see others saved, it may be due to one of the following conditions or causes:

1. An Unregenerate State.
The unsaved do not have the inclination or the ability to lead others to Christ.
2. A Worldly Life.
The disobedient are not interested in winning the lost to Christ.
3. A Lack of Faith.
Some do not believe they can win souls to Christ, and, therefore, never attempt it.
4. The Dread of Criticism.
Some are afraid of what others might think and say.
5. Fear of Doing Harm Rather Than Good.
The duty is ours, so let us perform it in the right spirit, and the Lord will take care of the consequences.

It seems that we have lost a word out of our Christian vocabulary--the word, "concern." A great need of this hour is a genuine concern for the salvation of other people. Many, who are unsaved, can truthfully say, "No man cared for my soul." 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"? Do we not need a revival of concern? What an amount of pathos is contained in this expression, "No man cared for my soul"! How sad that any human being, who has lived in our midst should ever have occasion to utter it.

I. The Meaning of Evangelism.

Evangelism is a beautiful word. It is 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 evangelism must sustain them to the end. Every Baptist individual, church, institution, agency, minister, and missionary are the result of evangelism. Where our people have failed to win souls they have inevitably died and are dying. A church must evangelize or perish. What breath is to the body, and what the soul is to man, evangelism is to the church. What color and fragrance are to the flower, what water is to the sea, and what power is to the engine, evangelism is to the church. Our Baptist people must ever remember that evangelism made us, and evangelism alone can preserve us. If we are to have Baptist churches in the future, we must win the lost to Christ and to church membership today. Evangelism is not optional. It is imperative.

While making Christ known to lost sinners is not the only task of the church, it is nevertheless the primary one. The first and supreme work of every church, every preacher, and every Christian is to win souls to the salvation and service of Christ. Every New Testament church needs a minister who will stand up in the pulpit and open his mouth boldly to make known the message of the gospel; a minister whose message concerning God and Christ and man and sin and salvation will carry home to the minds and hearts of his hearers, because that message is based upon the Word of God, and has been found true in his own experience. But every church needs more than this. It needs men and women in its membership who have been born again, and who by God's grace are willing to live the Christian life, to bear the Christian witness, and to do Christian work. One of the great weaknesses of our present-day churches is that they have delegated the soul-winning work to the preachers and a few missionaries.

Christ lived and suffered and died to save the lost. He said, "Follow Me." Therefore, every Christian should work with all his might to get others to forsake sin and to accept Christ as Saviour. Certainly something is wrong with any professed Christian who does not try to win lost souls to Christ. Our supreme business is to find the unsaved and to tell them about the Saviour. The need for evangelism is greater today than ever before. Every Christian is to be an unceasing witness for Christ. How can we face our Lord at last if we have been unfaithful and negligent in this supreme task?

II. The Message of Evangelism.

On every hand the question is being asked: "Have God's people an adequate remedy for the needs of men in these changing times and this troubled world?" In all humility, but with unflinching faith and deep conviction, and with boldness unafraid, we answer that they have. And that is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel is the one and only adequate remedy for every need and condition of mankind.

Christ's gospel is not concerned with what men should do, for there is no good news in that for any sinner, but it is concerned with what God has done already for sinners. It is the announcement of the fact that He has provided righteousness for unrighteous men.

With the exception of Christianity, all religions speak of salvation by character or by conduct. They hold out the hope of earning salvation by merit of one kind or another. But salvation by conduct or by works is the doctrine of Satan, no matter by whom nor where it is preached. Christ alone can save. Man must accept salvation as a gift from God; otherwise, he will never receive it. The fact that salvation is entirely of the Lord, apart from any work of man, cannot be overemphasized. It is wonderful news to hear that God has done for us that which we could never do for ourselves. His glorious gospel consists of three facts: Christ died for our sins, Christ was buried, and Christ arose. In these three central facts there is nothing except that which should increase our faith in Christ, our love for Christ, and our devotion to Him. Without any hesitation whatever I take my stand believing firmly in His supernatural birth, His absolute deity, His vicarious atonement, His bodily resurrection, and His personal return.

III. The Methods of Evangelism.

The methods of evangelism vary. Among them are the following; Gospel sermons, Bible teaching, family influence, saved friends, and personal work. Christ used the latter method extensively and urged others to do likewise. Personal evangelism--the believer in Christ witnessing to and working with the lost sinner--is the most effective method. It is mathematically correct, is ordained of God, and is the program of the Holy Spirit. Experience, observation, and study convince us that one of the greatest weaknesses of present-day evangelism is our over-reliance upon sermons--pulpit evangelism in the place of the personal testimony of every believer. Preaching to the masses may effect much, but it is only by the individual approach that intensive work is done. And besides, due to the fact that the masses of the unsaved do not attend the church services, we must contact them where they are, or they will never be reached.

Any evangelism which is not church-centered is not the New Testament type. And, for any Christian to fail to tell others about the Saviour is criminal negligence. It is the inescapable duty of every child of God.

IV. The Motives for Evangelism.

The motives for evangelism that constrain us to this endeavor are as wide and varied as the whole earth, as inclusive as the needs of men, as lefty as the love of God, as deep as the pit of hell, as long as eternity, and as broad as time.

1. 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.
2. The Condition of people.
Without Christ people are lost in sin. If we love them, we will strive to win them to Christ.
3. The Welfare of the Churches.
If we really loved our churches and wanted to see them grow, we would do more to win the lost to Christ and church membership.
4. The Desire for Personal Blessings.
Among these blessings are the greatest possible joy, personal fellowship with Christ, and the fulness of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

To the end that our people might be saved, that our churches might live and grow, that Christ might be glorified and honored, let us give ourselves to the main task for which every minister is called and every church exists--scriptural, Spirit-filled evangelism, the hope of the world.