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Evangelists and Evangelism

Thousands of men are honorably engaged mainly in their leisure hours in teaching and preaching Christ. Yet it is probably true to say that the number of evangelists is lamentably few, and as a direct consequence our churches and fellowships languish. If we are to covet earnestly the best gifts, then surely there is a call in these days for young men to covet, with a holy ambition, that rare yet greatly desirable gift of the evangelist. What, then, are the outstanding, and in some part, unique marks and indications of the gift of an evangelist?

An evangelist must have a consuming passion for the souls of men. A preacher who will not evangelize except with a view to the creation or upbuilding of a church may be right in his ambition and admirable in his objective, but he has not the essential quality of an evangelist. The Apostle Paul had the evangelist's heart when he said of those who preached Christ of contention and envy and strife: "What, then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1:18). His great yearning desire was that Christ should be preached. "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16)! The evangelist must long for souls. He must weep over them. He must spend himself to the utmost for them.

The evangelist must be a man of one theme and that of the Gospel. The true evangelist is a man of one message. He must say with Paul: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him

crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). This does not mean on the one hand that he should confine himself to a few Gospel texts and illustrations variously applied such as too often constitute the stock-in-trade of the travelling evangelist. It is one thing to preach about the Gospel and quite another to preach the Gospel. It is his province to proclaim it rather than to expound it. It is his gift to make the tidings appear to his hearers good tidings indeed "worthy of all acceptance" rather than good doctrine worthy of their intellectual approval.

The evangelist is essentially a winner of souls. It is this that differentiates him from a preacher or teacher. Not that these latter may not have the joy of seeing men saved under their faithful ministry, but it is the essential quality of the evangelist that he is a soul winner. His message convicts men by the power of the Spirit. Philip, the evangelist, pointed the eunuch to Christ, then baptized him and then, his work accomplished, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip and the eunuch saw him no more" (Acts 8:39).

The evangelist is a bold and fearless preacher of Christ without apology or concession to modern opinion. Today we are faced with a far more educated population of men and women impressed from their youth with views concerning the unreliability of the Scriptures and the decadence of the Christian religion that make the work of the evangelist one of unprecedented difficulty. It is almost axiomatic today to say that the public is not interested in Gospel meetings or missions and does not attend them. People are not usually actively hostile to the message but totally uninterested.

The departure of the intelligentsia among men from faith in the revealed word of God has landed the world in a condition of unprecedented chaos, and it is high time that present day pseudo-scientific apologetics gave place to a return to the "Thus saith the Lord" of the old prophetic preachers. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). If men of conviction and determination would dare to proclaim the everlasting Gospel on the basis of its being not Pauline theology but the message of the living God, and if that testimony had the backing of a host of believers prepared to proclaim their faith in it at the cost of personal reproach, then I am convinced that what all the Gospel campaigns in the world will never achieve would be brought to pass and that in a surprisingly short space of time.

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Evangelism is the redistribution of spiritual wealth.

John Blanchard