



The term itself 'evangelise' or 'evangelism' is one that has a firm scriptural foundation! The NT word for Gospel 'euaggelion' Mark Ch16v15, 'go ye into all the world and preach the gospel...' It is from that word that the word evangelist or evangel is derived. Turn to Eph Ch4v11; we have the word 'evangelists' [plural] 'euaggelistes.' In that verse we are told that Christ is the one who has given evangelists to the church, but in v12 their purpose is revealed, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Evangelism must therefore be regarded as that which aims not only to the bringing of the claims of the gospel to the lost, but it aims at the instruction and edification of the Lord's people. In those two verses (v11-12) we have both the position of the evangelist and the work of the evangelist within the framework of the Church of Christ, his work being to teach and to preach Christ to the unconverted and the saints of God, the word of God has a two fold impact, [*the emphasis upon the saints*] if it doesn't have that effect I.e. God's people being edified, there's something wrong! But that is the pattern laid down by Christ in regards to the evangelist and his work in the Church today, therefore apostolic theology and methodology are to be adopted as a pattern for Evangelism today.

One of the marks and central features of the New Testament church was the evangelisation and the proclamation of the gospel amongst the unconverted. When we study the book of Acts and the epistles written by the apostles two things will be revealed to us. (1) That it was the firm conviction of the apostles to evangelise and propagate the gospel among the unconverted Acts Ch8v25. (2) That the theology and the methodology employed by the apostles in their evangelisation was in accordance with that set forth by Christ 1 Cor Ch1v17. Paul says that Christ has sent him not to baptise but to preach. From those two statements regarding the evangelism of the New Testament Church we learn that true evangelism should not only be an integral part of the life of the Church today, but also the methodology that is employed in evangelism by the Church today should be in synchronised harmony with God's word.

I want us to consider Evangelism in relation to the propagation of the Gospel to the lost. Because in many ways there is an urgency to preach upon this subject, an urgency that flows not out of a need to remind God's people of the Churches duty to the unconverted, for never in the history of the Church has there been as much activity in the area of evangelism, as today! The urgency flows out of an evident willingness for professed reformed evangelical churches to embrace evangelical methodology that has no scriptural mandate or warrant, and most certainly had nor has any place in the N.T Church. There are certain key features or hallmarks of Biblical and Reformed Evangelism lets us look briefly:

1) Evangelism Has at its heart God's Sovereignty.

People often say, 'what has God's sovereignty got to do with evangelism?' the answer is everything! There is no truth/doctrine that is so despised by the natural mind than 'The Sovereignty of God' Human nature loathes the thought that God, orders, sustains and rules over all things. But nowhere is the Sovereignty of God more abhorred than in the realm of salvation. Especially in two areas (1) God's decree to save (election). (2) The Means ordained (the word).

I know that many struggle with coming to terms with these matters, *that it is God that saves, saving faith is a gift of God, and salvation is of the Lord that God does that which is pleasing to himself.* Yet while that may be so, that is what the scripture teaches. Man's redemption is due to the grace of God; therefore the grace of God must be the starting point in our evangelisation of the Lost. There are men who outrightly object to that statement and say that the sovereignty of God is a hindrance, it torpedoes evangelism.

However, as we will see all biblical evangelism, missionary enterprise is fuelled by this truth! Paul preached with that in mind Acts Ch18v9-10 Paul's preaching at Corinth. The sovereignty of God is at the heart of evangelism, and that is what the lost must be presented with. Acts Ch18v9-10 This passage certainly deals with the error of hyper-Calvinism. Paul knew that God had a people to be saved, yet he didn't sit back and say, well there is no need for me to preach at Corinth, sure they will all be saved anyway, the doctrine of God's sovereignty is used by many today as an excuse for spiritual laziness among other things! How audacious for Christian's, whose voices are never heard praying to accuse!

(2) Evangelism Focuses upon the Scriptures.

God's sovereignty doesn't begin and end with the decree of election and predestination; God's sovereignty encapsulates so much more. For example in 1Cor Ch1:17-25 Paul is outlining God's sovereignty in relation to His own word, (v21) it pleases God to save men through the word.

Paul dwelling upon God's sovereignty is directed to the sufficiency of the scriptures, another hallmark of Biblical [reformed] evangelism, the employment of the word in the evangelisation of sinners, [the W Divines summarised it well in the Shorter Cat Q89, "*The spirit of God maketh the reading but especially the preaching of the word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners...*" You might say well is this important? The result of the rejection of God's sovereignty is a turning to pragmatic methodology. The rejection of that truth or a misunderstanding of the truth of the sovereignty of God working through His Word, is the very reason as to why Churches embrace pragmatic methods. They lose confidence in the sovereignty of God to use the preached word to reach the unconverted! This is a real problem that

faces the church; I believe that the Lord is reminding us of the danger of ever having our confidence shaken in the power of God through the word. J.I Packer stated *'If we forget that it is God's prerogative to give results when the Gospel is preached, we shall start to think that it is our responsibility to secure them. And if we forget that only God can give faith, we shall start to think that the making of converts depends, in the last analysis, not on God, but on us, and that the decisive factor is the way in which we evangelise.'* John Calvin on God's sovereignty and the scriptures states, *"The majesty of God is indissolubly connected with the public preaching of His truth, if His word is not allowed to have authority, it is the same as though its despisers attempted to thrust God from heaven."*

Why is it that so many reject the sovereignty of God and the sufficiency and authority of the Word of God? One of the effects of the preached word is that men are offended (*it causes offence*). Offence is the natural or spontaneous result of faithful bible based evangelisation. Paul in 1 Cor Ch1v23 states that to the Jews the preaching of the gospel was a stumbling block, (*they believed their messiah would be a prince*) and that to the Greeks it was utter foolishness (*they laughed at the thought of a crucified saviour*). Did Paul change his message NO! Though men naturally may view the gospel that way, yet in v24 Paul says, *"But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."*

Paul is saying that even though the gospel finds in the heart of man a wicked response, the purpose of God to save men by the means of His word still stands and goes unhindered [Rom Ch10:17].

Instead of seeing this offence as the natural product of biblical evangelisation, many today view it as a hindrance to their evangelistic efforts and seek to have it removed, they go for the soft sell, they outline the benefits of the gospel, but exclude the motivating factors, God's sovereignty over their lives, e.g., *"If you become a Christian, you will have happiness and love etc"* The worlding will answer, *'sure I can get those things in the world!'* That is why there is a downgrading of what is contained within Gospel preaching, a demotion of the Scriptures. The question is asked, *'What can we use that doesn't offend men?'* and of course the product is, the user friendly service, plenty of singing, and forms of entertainment, but very little of the preached word, guarantees of brevity, assurances of non-offensive language etc, why, because these things seem to work. We need a gospel that works, and look it is working, our buildings are full! The church is not for entertainment! Set apart to preach the gospel, there are means at our disposal for engaging the ungodly, but our primary focus is the word! If the gospel does not offend there is a something fatally wrong!

The question is sometimes asked, where and when did Calvinistic bible based evangelism become replaced by a liberal man centred form of evangelism? We cannot be dogmatic, but I believe that evangelicalism today both in America and the British Isles has suffered greatly largely due to the influence of an early 19thC American evangelist by the name of Charles Grandison Finney 1792-1875. Finney is viewed by many to be a champion in the field of evangelism. Finney denied the sovereignty of God. He taught that faith was the product not of God but of man, and that his movement towards God secured the salvation of a man. His denial of God's sovereignty led to other errors, he denied the doctrine of imputed righteousness, saying, *"The doctrine of imputed righteousness, or that Christ's obedience to the law was accounted as our obedience, is founded on a most false and nonsensical assumption."* Regarding evangelism, he believed that the purpose of evangelism and the task of the preacher was to convince men to *'choose for Christ' 'to make a decision.'* How was this to be achieved? By a reliance on the Holy Spirit through the medium of the word No! But by any means that seemed to work! Did he get results through his preaching, certainly! However, his results lasted as long as the morning dew, snow on a ditch!

Finney's theology laid the foundation for much of modern day evangelism, and resulted in the decline of reformation theology! In London several years after Finney's death Spurgeon was fighting what was probably his greatest battle, a battle, which became known as the *'Downgrade controversy.'* Spurgeon saw the downgrading of both the word of God and the Sovereignty of God in British evangelism, resulting from Finney's campaigns in London (1850-1860 approx) there was a toning down of the offence, to take the words of Prof. John Murray, *"To eliminate or tone down the offence of the cross is to preach another..."* Spurgeon saw another gospel being promoted that's alien to the Gospel of the bible.

3) Evangelism Centres upon Christ.

Along with a failure to acknowledge God as sovereign in all matters of faith and practice there will be a rejection of Christ. In the Church of Christ we can do things one of two ways [God's way or our way] our methods can either be man centred or Christ centred. If our evangelism, does not center on Christ, no matter how good or helpful, our methodology or our theology we are preaching *"with words of wisdom, and the cross is being made of none effect."* What Spurgeon saw during those years of the Downgrade controversy was in actually fact the relegation of Christ. 1Cor 1:17 Paul states that anything other than the preaching of the Cross the preaching of Christ renders the cross of none effect.

These things ought to concern us, it is not for the sake of theological superiority or a high standard of orthodoxy that we mention these things, but it is men's souls that we are dealing with, family members! As fathers we must feel the great responsibility over our children, particularly in relation to their salvation, and because of that we should consider their evangelisation not only in the home but in the place where they worship of great importance.