

## **OUR DISCERNMENT IN OUTREACH**

When outreach opportunities arise, we bear in mind the varying types of people needing to convert. Psalm 1 refers to three types—

- *The ungodly (KJV) or wicked (ESV).* So lightly do we take sin today that we assume this person is the worst of the worst. Actually, the wicked may be in church on the Lord's Day, accepting intellectually all the doctrines of the faith, yet, in spite of them, refusing Jesus as Savior and Lord. The ungodly are the cultural "Christians" of our day, Sunday-only "followers" of Jesus. Instead of walking in their counsel (Ps. 1:1), we pray for them, for their way will perish (v. 6). They "will not stand in the judgment" (v. 5). Having been exposed to God's truth, theirs will be the "greater condemnation" (Mk. 12:38-40).
- *The sinner* is the person who has either left the church and ceased to play the hypocrite, or who was never reared in the faith. Christ is neither his or her Savior nor Lord. While we have occasion to relate to sinners in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces, our interaction must be consistent with Christ's Lordship over our lives. We neither date them nor ape them to win them. As things stand, they are due for exclusion from "the congregation of the righteous" (Ps. 1:5).
- *The scoffer* not only stands aloof from Christ, he or she (typically they, for they run together) is dedicated to disparaging Christ, the Christian, and the church. We pray for the scoffer, but we "do not give to dogs what is holy . . . [nor] throw [our] pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack [us]" (Matt. 7:6).

## **OUR DEMEANOR IN OUTREACH**

While we should be known by our godly practices and holiness of life (Ps. 69:6), we err considerably if we are satisfied never to open our mouths for Christ (Ps. 39:1-3; Rom. 10:17). Rather, we are to follow his example—

- *Christ dwelt among us* (Jn. 1:14). Since he took on our flesh to live in reach of the lost, our remaining in Christian ghettos, disdaining unbelievers from afar, is a denial of the gospel. The world needs to see and to hear that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).
- *Christ distinguished blind leaders from the blind.* He reserved his righteous anger for those who led sinners to hell by their teaching or influence (Matt. 23:1-36). Likewise, we may be incensed by those who destroy life, who enslave in sin, and who teach error, but we are to weep for those hurt by blind leaders (Matt. 23:37-39).
- *Christ was full of grace* (Jn. 1:14). While discerning, Jesus' default attitude was one of generosity. His heart went out to the sheep without a shepherd (Mk. 6:34), he spoke tenderly to the woman caught in adultery (telling her to sin no more [Jn. 7:53-8:11, variant reading]), he called on his Father to forgive those who crucified him (Lk. 23:34).
- *Christ was full of truth* (Jn. 1:14). His full and perfect balancing of grace and truth cautions us against coercing the truth to suit the sentiments of our hearts and of our age (Jer. 6:14), and, conversely, against declaring hard truths unlovingly (1 Cor. 13:1-3; Rev. 2:1-7).



## **OUR COMMISSION**



***"... God gave us a spirit not of fear but of love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7 [ESV])***

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*(First written at the request of the Eldership of Little Farms Chapel, Coopersville, Michigan, USA.)*

***"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . And FROM HIS FULLNESS we have all received, grace upon grace." (Jn. 1:14, 16 [ESV])***

## OUR DOCTRINE ENCOURAGES OUTREACH

- *The doctrine of God.* There are no Atheists. Everyone knows that God exists (Rom. 1:18-21). He speaks to us through nature, all the time and in every place (Ps. 19:1-4). It is in man's heart and not in his head that he says that God does not exist (Ps. 14:1; 53:1). Atheism, then, is a convenience not a conviction. Our job is to tap into what man already knows, but which he suppresses in his unrighteousness.
- *The doctrine of man.* Men and women are made in God's image. God's law remains written on their hearts. They have a conscience and know of God's existence, of sin, and of the coming Judgment (Rom. 1:32; 2:14-16). These possessions afford us the springboard for our outreach.
- *The doctrine of election.* We Reformed ought to be confident in outreach, for we know God is going to save his elect. The Father has chosen them, Christ has died for them, and the Spirit brings them to life. The Spirit draws them to Christ, Christ grants them access to the Father, and the Father receives them. Effective outreach depends, then, not on our gifts but on God's grace (Acts 13:48).
- *The doctrine of atonement.* Christ died not to make sinners salvable, but to actually save those the Father has chosen (Matt. 1:21). We need, then, no other Savior, for Jesus is sufficient to save all his people to the uttermost, from across history and the world.
- *The doctrine of the kingdom.* Now risen, all authority has been given to Christ, the God-man, in heaven and on earth. His kingdom has spread, is spreading, and will spread until the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20). We have every reason to expect gospel success.

## OUR DEVELOPMENT COMPELS OUTREACH

The more we ourselves become fully devoted disciples of Jesus Christ, the more we long to see others come to Christ. This passion arises from—

- *A God-centered life.* Authentic Christians yearn to see God honored and his glory displayed in the salvation of his people, the growth of the kingdom of heaven, and in reordered lives previously disfigured by sin.
- *A gospel-centered-life.* When conscious of our profound need of grace, and grateful for our pardon from sin through repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot but speak to others, as led by the Spirit, of what God has done for us.
- *A balanced life.* We are aware that God could, in his sovereignty, bring all his people to himself without our outreach. Yet, God has ordained not only the end (his glory in the salvation of his elect), but the means (our labors). Christ who claimed all authority in heaven and on earth, used that authority to send the church into the nations with the gospel (Acts 1:8). We venture forth trusting God's power to enable us to do God's will.
- *A holy life.* Holiness is not an other-worldly separation from life on earth, but a service to God *in* the world, yet without becoming *of* the world. Recall, that no one was ever holier than Christ, yet he came in our flesh and ministered not only to the self-righteous and religious, but to prostitutes, embezzlers, *et al.*
- *A Spirit-filled life.* To be filled with the Spirit is to be full of the Christ. Christ tirelessly sought the lost (Lk. 15; 19:10). Warning of hell, he commanded repentance, inviting sinners to trust in him for salvation. Recall how the Spirit-filled church in Jerusalem boldly spoke forth God's Word (Acts 4:31).

## OUR DESIRES PREPARE US FOR OUTREACH

The passion to see God glorified in the salvation of his people matures into a settled outlook on life in and through the daily practices of the faith—

- *Hearing from God.* There's an adage that begins, "I open my Bible and God speaks to me". Therein we are reminded that our God is a missionary God, whose plan is to save an innumerable company of people from every tongue, tribe, and nation (Dan. 7:13-14 ; Rev. 7:9-11).
- *Speaking to God.* The adage continues, "I close my Bible and I speak to God." We bring to God not only our maintenance, but our burden for the advance of the kingdom. Note the priority of our Lord in the pattern prayer: "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). He has taught us to implore his Father to save his elect, to increase the kingdom, and to build his church.
- *Openness to God.* Within the big picture of God's plan, we observe how he makes use of his people (Acts 8:4). Indeed, he blesses us that we may be a blessing to others (we are conduits of blessing not *cul-de-sacs*). We thus exit the Lord's house on his day and our homes in the week praying to be led to the elect for their conversion.
- *Obedience to God.* In tune with God, being directed by his Word, and asking for opportunities, we seek God for the courage to live and to speak for our Lord. Some openings come to us, and some we are prompted by the Spirit to take (1 Sam. 9:15 [NKJV]; Acts 8:29). Trusting in God's election, we are not selective as to which opportunities we take or the people to whom we speak.