

The Evangelist

The evangelist walked between the empty pews, and picked up a pew Bible. NIV. It was what he expected. He would read a verse from the NIV to begin his presentation. He would also challenge the congregation individually—the way he had done when he had begun his ministry. At that time, he would tell people they were sinners, and needed a Savior. These days there were few people that would respond to that initial approach. Evangelical church people, the ones he would be addressing in an hour, already believed they were sinners, and were saved by their faith in Jesus. In the broader community, people wouldn't believe that they *were* sinners, and if, with much effort, he could convince some that they were indeed, it was only to lead into telling them they could be forgiven. This had seemed odd, as well as difficult, to the point of unsettling him, and he had struggled with whether or not he should continue his ministry. He had, however, since, come to see the need for a message with a different starting point.

An hour later he was on the platform in front of the congregation. He asked them to open their Bibles to Paul's letter to the Romans, Chapter 1, Verse 5, and then read:

“Through him (that is through “Jesus Christ our Lord”, from Verse 4) we received grace and apostleship to call people from among the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”

“Paul says he has an apostolic commission to the Gentiles.

“If you are a Gentile, then Paul's apostleship is to call you.

“To what? To obedience.

“Are you obedient—with an obedience that comes from your faith?

“Jesus commissioned the church to 'make disciples—teaching them to obey everything (He, Jesus) had commanded them.' Notice that Paul's apostleship obeys Jesus' commission. Jesus and Paul do not disagree.

“Have you obeyed everything that Jesus commanded?

“Have you ever done *any* one thing simply and solely because Jesus did command it? Not some thing that you would have done anyway, even if He hadn't specifically commanded it.

“If you believe that you are a Christian, and have never done anything for the sole reason that Jesus says to do it, you should feel uneasy. Jesus said, 'Why do you call me “Lord, Lord”, and do not do what I say?’¹ He said, 'Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord (haven't we done many wonderful things in your name)?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Depart from me—you that practice evil.’”²

The evangelist was comfortable with this approach. He was calling people to the obedience that comes from faith—doing exactly the same thing as the apostle Paul. And doing exactly what Jesus has commissioned the church to do.

He was no longer trying to convince postmodernists that they were sinners. Let them try to obey. This will show them soon enough that they are sinners.

¹ Luke 6:46

² Matthew 7:22,23

“If you haven't yet tried to obey Jesus' commands, let me tell you what will happen. You will fail.

“Do you think, therefore, that Jesus has asked you to do something that couldn't be done? The answer is that He provides a way: He finishes off saying, 'If you love Me, you will keep my commandments' by saying, 'And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever—the Spirit of truth ...’³

“Again, Jesus said, 'It is good for you that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.'⁴ and 'Truly, Truly, I say to you, he that believes in me, the works that I do he shall do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to my Father.'⁵

“After His resurrection, and just before His ascension, He told his disciples to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, Who would give them power. 'You shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,'⁶

“The apostle Peter is a wonderful example of trying to do things of spiritual importance in our own power. Peter was with Jesus throughout His ministry. He, with James and John, was especially close to Jesus. He was there at the transfiguration. Yet after Jesus' arrest, when someone recognized him as one of Jesus' disciples, he acted cowardly. He cursed, and denied that he knew Jesus—this after formerly telling Jesus that he would never forsake Him.

“After the coming of the Holy Spirit, however, Peter—and the other disciples—were transformed. They boldly proclaimed what God had accomplished in the resurrection of Jesus. When Peter and John were hauled before the Sanhedrin because of this proclamation, Peter replied to their charge. The account, in Acts 4:8-12, begins with, 'Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, replied, ...' Later, when the apostles were again brought before the Sanhedrin, Peter again replies to their charge (in Acts 5) telling them that he and the other disciples were witnesses of Jesus resurrection—to which he adds: 'as is the Holy Spirit, Whom God has given to those that obey Him.'⁷”

He repeated that slowly: “the Holy Spirit, Whom God has given to those that obey Him” then continued:

“Let's review. Jesus commissioned His followers to make disciples. Disciples are learners. And Jesus is specific about what they are to learn: obedience to all His commands. The apostle Paul had a specific commission: to call the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. But faith in whom or what? Does it matter? I believe it does matter—enormously—and I believe Paul, when he wrote those words, had Jesus Himself in mind.

“In Acts 20 Verse 21 Paul describes his ministry: 'testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' The Lord Jesus Christ is the

³ John 14:15,6

⁴ John 16:7

⁵ John 14:12

⁶ Acts 1:8

⁷ Acts 5:32

object of the faith Paul is talking about. 'Have faith in God', said Jesus, 'have faith also in Me.' There is no doubt about the object of faith here.

“Obedience to Jesus follows from faith in Jesus. To put it the other way around, it would be nonsensical to say you had faith in someone, and make no effort to do what they say. But when I have spoken on the need for our obedience to Jesus, some people have reacted with a hesitation rooted in their particular theology. Someone said, 'We're not saved by obedience.' Another said, 'God sees us through Jesus.' Another began to explain dispensationalism to me. These different reactions stem from faith in very different theologies.”

He was concerned about saying too much. He didn't want his message to become obscured by involved theology. He wasn't a theologian, never attended seminary, and had begun his Christian ministry as a staff worker in one of the campus ministries. He was sure of his point, however: faith in the person of Jesus involves obedience, or at least attempted obedience, to the commands of Jesus. And it seemed clear that the reason people brought out these theological points was because they were putting faith in the points, and not faith in Jesus. He continued:

“In your pew Bibles we read in James, Chapter 2, Verse 14: 'What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?' The New American Standard Version says, 'Can that faith save him?' ... 'That faith'—'such faith'. ... The Bible makes a distinction between different kinds of faith. Some faith is saving faith. Some faith is not saving faith. Let me apply the last half of James 2:18 here: 'Show me your saving faith without obedience, if you think you can, I'll show you my saving faith by my obedience.'

“'We're not saved by obedience.' That was my own reaction, when I read in George MacDonald's works some years ago the statement, 'God requires of us today, exactly what He has always required: simple obedience.' And it has also been the reaction of some people that have heard me speak. Now it is true that we are not saved by obedience. We're saved by Jesus. But what is the relationship between salvation and obedience? What is salvation? Most people would say that it means going to heaven when we die. Well then, remember that, in what we call the 'Lord's prayer', Jesus tells us to pray 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' Heaven is where God's will is done. In heaven there is perfect obedience to God's will. So do you think it is necessary to obey, in order to be in the place of perfect obedience?

“Is obedience just for later, or are we supposed to be learning obedience here and now? Jesus' words in the Great Commission certainly say 'here and now'. His words are: 'teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.' To some people, the message of faith and obedience seems somehow out of place with their accustomed formula for salvation. Don't put your faith in anyone's formula for salvation. You are not saved by putting your faith in the right formula. Jesus saves. Put your faith in Jesus our Lord—and Savior—and do what He says.”

and being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. (Hebrews 5:9)

*He that has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves Me;
and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and
will disclose Myself to him. (John 14:21)*