

Personal Evangelism

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Recently in our congregation in Redlands we had a series of three meetings to focus on the above-named subject. News of this somehow came to one of the members of the Beacon Lights staff and he asked me to reproduce the messages used in these meetings for the Beacon Lights. I humbly submit these messages with some modification in three installments. We pray that they will be used of the Lord to remind us of our calling and responsibility as Christians. In this article, we will try to convince you that personal evangelism is indeed the calling of every Christian, of every faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ. In the second installment, we will address the question of what exactly we are called to do in “personal evangelism” and in our final article we will focus on some of the practical aspects of how we are to fulfill our calling.

We know that the subject of personal evangelism has of late been addressed on numerous occasions both in evangelism meetings and in articles written in our church papers. We have noted this with joy and thankfulness. Nevertheless, we believe that this subject is one that we need to be constantly reminded of. There are few subjects for discussion that more easily make us feel our short-comings and failings than this subject. It is so easy to become complacent and careless in this very important area of daily Christian living. We need always again to be stirred up from our lethargy to greater faithfulness and renewed zeal.

We have often as Protestant Reformed Churches been criticized for lacking interest and zeal for evangelism. While sometimes this criticism has been unjust, rather than merely dismissing this criticism we ought to examine ourselves and consider whether the Lord Himself is not by such criticism calling attention to some real weaknesses and failings on our part. Is it true, young people, that Christians from other churches sometimes are more free and zealous to speak about their faith and love for the Lord than we are? We need to be convinced that being open about our faith and speaking about it zealously to others should be characteristic of all of us. We may not excuse ourselves for being reserved and reticent about our faith as though this is just simply due to our Dutch Reformed background and character. Being zealous about our faith in the Lord and openly speaking about it is not an Arminian character trait. This is a character trait that we as Reformed Christians must possess and manifest in the world. Furthermore, we need to be convinced that there is no faith as glorious and as wonderful as the Reformed Faith which God has in His mercy preserved in our churches. This is a faith worth talking about. It is unique in the apostate church world today. This faith is thoroughly and consistently biblical. It is a faith that exalts God alone and not men. It is a faith that declares that all the hope of man’s salvation rests alone on the Sovereign Gracious Almighty God in Whom we believe and Whose name we confess. It is a faith that declares the perfect love of God and His mighty and glorious power to save His people from all their sins as well declaring His righteous judgment upon impenitent ungodly sinners.

The Lord has not in His great mercy given His truth to us to keep for ourselves. We are called to publish it to others, and that means also others outside of our own churches. We may not as a denomination be self-centered and self-satisfied. We do not exist for ourselves in the world.

Evangelism is the central calling of the church. God has given the evangel to His church. The evangel is the glorious gospel of salvation. It is the good news that God saves His people by sovereign almighty and free grace for the glory of His own name. It is the good news of the

coming of the eternal and glorious Son of God into our flesh for the salvation of His people. It is the good news of His perfect sacrifice on the cross and the everlasting righteousness it merited. It is the good news of His victorious resurrection and ascension. It is the good news that Jesus is Lord of all. It is the good news of His glorious coming again at the end of the age for the judgment of the world and the final salvation of His church. It is the good news of the hope of the new heavens and earth and of eternal life and glory promised to those who love the Lord.

The church performs the calling of evangelism as the official minister of God. She does this through her ordained office bearers. The church does the work of evangelism when and wherever she preaches the Word of God and maintains the glorious truth of Christ Jesus. Evangelism in its true broadest scope is done by the whole ministry of the church to the members who are already in the church. The church preaches the gospel each Lord's Day for covenant families, believers and their children. The church does evangelism in catechism classes, societies, and Bible studies among her members. We as Christians must all be living and active members of the true church, faithfully supporting the whole ministry of the church with our daily prayers, our faithful attendance at worship services, our active involvement in the life of the communion of the saints and our love for one another. No one can be truly involved in personal evangelism unless they are faithful and active members of the true church of Jesus Christ.

The church must also preach the gospel outside of her own walls. She is called to do this according to the Lord's great commission to all nations wherever the Lord gives an open door and sends forth His servants to preach. This calling begins in the community and environment in which the Lord has raised and established the local congregation. Our calling to do personal evangelism is connected especially with this aspect of the life and existence of the church.

By personal evangelism we mean the calling of each member of the church to give a personal testimony of the truth of the gospel in his daily life as a Christian to whomsoever the Lord places on the pathway of his life. Personal evangelism is not so much occasionally being involved in some organized program in the church or serving on the evangelism committee of the church. Personal evangelism is the calling of every member of the church to speak freely and zealously to his relatives, friends and neighbors, about the truth of the gospel he has learned in church. Personal evangelism must be carried out in the everyday course of our life as Christians.

There are always two aspects to the witness of the Christian in the world. These two aspects are inseparably related. They are of course the confession of the Christian's mouth and the testimony of his daily life. There are often those who want to maintain the one without the other. There are those who say that we need not say anything because our daily walk shows that we are Christians and everyone will know from our walk that we belong to the Lord. Well this is in the first place quite an astounding statement to make. We had better be sure that our walk is distinctively Christian enough that the world can know without any doubt that we are Christians. But it must also be said that there is no such thing as a silent witness. The reason for the distinctive Christian way that we live must be given through the testimony of our mouth. This is what I Peter 3:15 says. We must also speak about what we believe about God and the faith and hope that we have in Christ Jesus alone. We must do this in a lively zealous sincere and personal way. Our hearts must overflow with this testimony out of love for God and His truth. On the other hand, if our life is not consistent with the testimony of our mouth we will show ourselves to be hypocrites and we will only bring shame to the name of the Lord.

The greatest motive for doing personal evangelism is the glory of God. As Reformed Christians, we confess that the glory of God is central to all things. It is absolutely primary above all things. God will glorify Himself in all things. He is not dependent on us in any way. He will

glorify Himself centrally through saving the people He has chosen through His Son Jesus Christ. He has saved us for the glory of His own name. It is nevertheless also His will that we consciously and faithfully live for His glory. That is not a mere pious platitude. We show forth the glory of the Lord by walking in His way and speaking of His truth. If we are truly Reformed Christians we will earnestly desire that the name of God be glorified in and through us. Personal evangelism is a very important way in which this is done.

We must be engaged in personal evangelism out of zealous love for the truth of the gospel. The gospel itself is exceedingly glorious. We will never be faithful in personal evangelism unless we are thoroughly convinced of that. We have something to talk about that is far more glorious, far more significant, and far more wonderful than anything else in the whole world. We have something far more glorious to talk about than merely the day's weather, the score of our golf game, the latest good restaurant in town or the triumphs of our favorite sports team. Why are we often heard talking so much about these latter things and so little about the glorious gospel of God?

We must be engaged in personal evangelism out of love for our fellow man. Men are by nature hell-bound sinners. Many of the people we live and work with every day are bound for eternal destruction in hell. We may not have a callous attitude towards that awful fact. This is a dreadful thing beyond all imagination. There is a fearful aspect of personal evangelism in which we are called to warn concerning the judgment of God that will come upon ungodly and impenitent sinners. God will use the testimony of Christians in their daily life to warn sinners of the coming judgment. But we also have a more positive purpose in speaking of the gospel. We desire the salvation of God's people. We do not know for certain who they are. Therefore, we must bear a testimony before all men. We must have an earnest personal desire for the salvation of our fellow man. Our desire is not a mere "gospel hucksterism" according to which we caulk up converts that we can boast in "having brought to the Lord." We must have a sincere and personal desire for the highest good and salvation of our fellow man, especially those whom we go to school with and work with and meet every day. This is Christian love in the highest sense of the Word.

We must be engaged in personal evangelism in the conviction that the Lord in His mercy and according to His sovereign purpose will use our witness for the glory of His own name and to bring His own unto Himself. There is great joy and honor and blessing in being so used of the Lord.

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