Toward the close of the Second World War, I was at an R.O.T.C. summer training camp near Mineral Wells, Texas. One gloomy day a newspaper courier came through our company area, crying out: "There's good news! Read all about it! We're winning the war this morning!"

Needless to say, paper sales were brisk, and before long the whole camp was alive with excited conversation about the news. Tidings of victory can not be greeted with indifference, nor the message self-contained.

But how much more thrilling is the joyous sound of the gospel of Christ—the good news of His victory over the power of death and hell—"the astounding declaration" that God Himself, the Creator and Lord of the universe, has personally intervened in human history, and through the mighty conquest of Jesus Christ, made a way whereby "whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). Making this fact known is evangelism.

The Revealed Word

What makes the announcement so compelling is its divine source. Contrary to the notions of popular humanism, the gospel does not originate as a human deduction, the valiant groping of humanity after a higher life; rather it comes as a message sent from heaven, the revelation of God's quest for his people, ever seeking to save the lost. To persons perishing with no sense of direction or certainty, that is good news indeed.

Where we begin in theology largely determines where we end. If we begin with human speculation, however smart, we will end with frustration and failure, for humanity's darkened intelligence and perverted will can never attain to the incorruptible nature of divine truth. Until God speaks, human beings are utterly adrift on a sea of self-deception.

The written deposit of this "heavenly teaching" is the canon of inspired Scripture. As the Word of God, uncorrupted by human finite and defiled experience, the Bible speaks "without error in all that it affirms, the only infallible rule of faith and practice." Herein is the objective authority for all Christian theology. "It is impossible," as Calvin observes, "for man to obtain even the minutest portion of light and sound doctrine without being a disciple of this Book." Not surprisingly, then, systems of thought which circumvent or compromise scriptural verities do not produce strong evangelistic concern.
That God has spoken redemptively to humankind anchors evangelism in the very nature of revelation. At the same time, the saving magnitude of the Word carries an urgency that it be told to every creature. From this mandate issues a theology immediately related to the propagation of the gospel. It does not rest upon a few isolated texts of Scripture nor any particular church tradition; rather, drawing upon the whole scope of Scripture, and "the total meaning of the Christian faith," it focuses the purpose of all that God has revealed. In this case, evangelism is the measure by which any Christian doctrine must be validated. By the same criteria, "an evangelism which lacks from theological rootage is equally a misnomer."

The Sovereignty of God

A few years ago J. B. Phillips wrote a delightful book entitled Your God Is Too Small. Though it was not intended to be a treatise on evangelism, he put his finger on a basic problem, for, as the title suggests, most of us tend to impose upon God our own human limitations, thereby belittling His gospel. I have a feeling that this is the greatest single shortcoming in evangelism today.

The Word proclaimed is but the reflection of the God who has spoken. He is utterly unlimited and infinite in Himself. Though transcendent from the worlds which He made, God is everywhere in all His works, yet contained by none. Standing above time, the past and the future are always present in Him. Never changing, with full knowledge of all things, and able to do whatever He pleases, the Lord God omnipotent reigns forever.

Yet it is impossible for God to act otherwise than in accordance with absolute integrity. He can never be untruthful, unjust, unholy, or unloving. Thus, whatever God does is perfect, for He cannot violate His own nature, just as every attribute of His character is in perfect harmony with all the others.

Best of all, God is personal and personally concerned for His creation. As a Person, He is self-conscious, rational, and free in all His actions. An overwhelming sense of confidence and hope is created in the heart of those who accept this truth, for it means that He who was before the planets swung into space, Whose will is the source of all law, Who is the life of all that live—the great God over all—is our Father. He understands. He cares. He delights to make Himself known. He gives us His hand—and we see at last that it is not the hand of a cold doctrine of abstract truth, but the hand of a real Person—the hand of One who finally took upon Himself the form of our flesh and walked among us in the Person of Jesus, and Who now continues to minister to us in the Holy Spirit.

Though the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, as any mystery, cannot be fully explained, it affords a means by which the structure of God's perfection can be interpreted. God might be seen as the Father in administration, as the Son in revelation, and as the Spirit in operation. Or building on the concept of His self-disclosure, God the Father is the revealer or cause; He is the
Revelation or act in the Son; and He is the Revealedness or effect in the Spirit. However inadequate may be our formulations of God’s triune nature, “neither confused in unity nor divided in number,” evangelism is the expression of the Trinity in action.

Recognition of divine sovereignty, thus, is implicit in salvation theology. If God is, then everything that exists or happens must acknowledge His Lordship. Only God is great, and before Him every knee must bow. “Look unto Me,” He declares, “and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:22).

Failure to see our lives within this context makes the gospel meaningless. This is the basic fallacy of theological liberalism, and all other schemes of human self-sufficiency that begin with the premise: “Know thyself.” Human beings, of course, must know themselves, but unless they first recognize their Creator and Lord, they are in no position to evaluate themselves or their neighbors. Only as persons behold their image in their God and Savior can they know who they are and what they are destined to be.

The Predicament of Humanity

When the Gospel does bring persons to see themselves “in the light of God’s law and holiness,” they realize how short they have fallen from his glory. Despite their original lofty estate, made a little lower than the angels, spiritual beings able to know and to love their Creator, they, the creatures, have turned to their own ways, and rejected the absolute claims of God upon their lives. In doing so, they have followed the same course as Satan and his demons.

This assertion of independence lies at the heart of sin. A sinner “sets himself up in God’s place,” presumptuously acting as if he can do as he pleases. Like the proud author of Invictus, he is the “master” of his own fate; the “captain” of his own soul. Such an attitude is nothing short of idolatry, the worship of humanity as a false god. Its ultimate expression is seen in the defiant rejection of God’s only begotten Son—“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (Jn. 1:11; cf., 3:19, 36).

The contagion of this blasphemy has prevailed the whole human being, alienating affections, darkening the intellect, perverting the will. So depraved, the fallen person is destitute of any positive good. Destruction and misery are in one’s way. Human nature is at utter enmity against God. What is more, this moral disease has spread throughout the human race, bringing degradation and strife to all society.

Sin cannot be ignored by a just God, since it is an affront to His holiness. Inevitably, then, the profane must be separated from Him. Furthermore, His wrath upon iniquity cannot be annulled as long as the cause of evil remains. Since life is continuous, all the spiritual consequences of sin continue on
forever in hell. Those who object to this teaching on the ground that it diminishes God's nature of love fail to comprehend the undivided nature of His Being. Indeed, if God's judgment did not fall upon that which would destroy His beloved, his sovereign love itself would be called into question. "It is not because God's love is limited but because it is unlimited that hell as well as heaven is made necessary."

Knowing, therefore, what is at stake, evangelism strikes the heart of sin. A theology which does not come to grips with this cause of all human woe, individually and collectively, is irrelevant to the world's need. Though the disclosure of human rebellion, and its consequence, may be bad news, still the gospel shines through it all, for God judges that He might save.

The Incarnate Savior

The redeeming work of the Trinity assumes incarnate form in the Person of His Son—"the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Jesus is not God apart from the human, nor the human apart from God; but He is God and human united in one Personality. In this perfect union of eternal consciousness, Christ becomes the reconciling center of the gospel. All that took place in salvation before His coming was in anticipation of Him; all that has taken place since His coming has been accomplished in His Name—"the only Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Let it be clear that any system of doctrine which does not affirm the deity and humanity of Christ has no evangelical substance. In fact, "if the Gospel records about Him are not entirely true, and if Christ is not really what He claimed to be, then there is nothing left of Christianity." To say that His claims were invented by His followers, as some allege, is to discredit both Christ and His disciples and to make the New Testament a travesty.

In contrast to the speculative idealism seen in much modern thought, God's essential message in Christ centers in documented facts—the kind of news that can be proven in "real history." That Jesus lived and died and rose again is a matter of public record. "This is the solid foundation on which everything else rests." The gospel is no theological abstraction, no aberration of wishful thinking, but a living, visible Person Who stands before us, and says, "Follow Me... I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 1:43; 14:6).

His redemptive mission reaches its climax at the blood-red hill of Calvary. There in the fullness of time Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the cross, suffering in our stead, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (I Pet. 3:18). Though no theory of the atonement can adequately explain what transpired when Christ died, it is clear that something happened in the heart of God entirely changing His relationship with sinful mankind. Once and for all, Christ, by the offering of Himself, made a full, perfect and complete satisfaction for the sins of the world."
Here supremely we see the love of God. Not that we loved Him, but that He loved us, and gave Himself for us. It is all of grace. Nothing deserved. Nothing earned. God simply moves in and does for us what we could not do for ourselves.

The bodily resurrection of Christ, and His subsequent ascension into heaven, brings the cross forcibly to human attention. For when One dies Who has the power to rise from the grave, in all honesty we must ask why He ever died in the first place. To this penetrating question, the gospel answers unequivocally: "He was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).

The Transformation of the Spirit

It is the Holy Spirit who makes the Word of God come alive. He effects in us what Christ has accomplished for us. The Third Member of the Godhead has been at work in the world from the beginning of time unfolding God's redemptive purpose, but His ministry focuses supremely on the Son whom He always exalts.

As Christ is lifted up, and we see ourselves in the light of the cross, the Spirit moves us to repent and accept the gift of salvation. The gospel call is to turn from sin unto God, casting ourselves upon Him in childlike trust. Unless there is such a conversion, no one can enter the Kingdom. The responsibility to respond to His Word clearly rests upon the person, though the enabling power is all of grace.

Through faith in Christ the believer is introduced to a life of forgiveness and righteousness. "Old things are passed away, behold, all things become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). The transforming grace of the Spirit indwelling the heart is so real that it is likened to being "born again" (Jn. 3:3). There is an actual impartation of the divine nature, so that the regenerated person begins to live in the Savior.

While the guilt of sin is remitted in justification, the Christian still must strive against the effects of sin. This is described in the on-going work of sanctification, whereby the believer is progressively conformed to the character of his Lord. As Donald G. Bloesch puts it: "Justification is the narrow gate, while sanctification is the straight way." Both aspects of the gospel are essential, though, unfortunately, the tendency in the history of Christian doctrine is to emphasize one to the neglect of the other.

The way holiness of life is interpreted, of course, varies widely among theologians. Generally, in any absolute sense, the attainment of complete sanctification is viewed as being only partial in this life, but most agree that nothing less should be our goal. Calvin might be representative, at least of Protestant thought, when he said: "Perfection must be the final work at which we aim, and the goal to which we strive." The Puritans and Pietists were
especially sensitive to this concern. Wesley even went further, claiming that perfection, understood as pure love, can be received by all believers through faith in Christ, though there is no end to growth in grace and knowledge. Regardless of what has been experienced thus far, there is more beyond. The Christian life is always growing “unto the perfect man; unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

To the degree the Spirit of God fills the believer, life takes on the character of Christ. It is this inward dynamic, however defined, which makes Christianity a savoring force for holiness in the world. Out of it flows compassionate deeds of mercy and bold evangelistic outreach.

The Fellowship of the Gospel

The faithful evangelistic ministry of the Word calls forth the church, the fellowship of the redeemed. All who live by faith in the Son of God—past, present, and future—become part of “this communion of the saints.” There are no isolated Christians.

Despite its human shortcomings, this community is “the agent of the Kingdom of God,” the means by which His reign comes, and His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. It is a ministering body, like that of Christ in the flesh, continuing now in its life the work of her Lord.

Each member of the body has a vital part in the mission. There are diversities of gifts and offices, to be sure, but every believer is a servant in the priesthood of Christ. Whether one is considered clergy or laity makes no difference. When this is forgotten, as is often the case, the potential work force of the church flounders in inertia. This becomes most tragic in the area of evangelism, for unless the gospel message gets out, bringing forth new believers, how can the church be perpetuated?

Our theology must lay more stress upon Christ’s great commission to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19, 20). The command is not to make converts but to make disciples—persons who will learn of Christ. It is a summons to follow Him; to seek His kingdom above all else; to deny self and take up His cross. By placing the emphasis on becoming like Him, Christ assures that His church will not only grow in His character, but also become active participants in His mission.

As disciples make disciples, and teach them in turn to make disciples of others, through the process of reproduction, Jesus knew that ultimately the whole world would be reached with the gospel. His faithful witnesses, like an ever enlarging army, would storm the gates of hell and shatter the principalities of Satan. Nothing could permanently defeat them. Victory is certain; in the councils of heaven the celebration has already begun. In His Word you can hear them now singing and shouting around the throne of God, “a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, kindreds, and people, and
tongues” (Rev. 7:9; cf. 5:9), saying, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15; cf. 5:9-14; 7:10-12; 12:10; 15:3, 4; 19:1-7).

Evangelism as the heartbeat of all Christian theology directs our energy toward that inevitable goal to which history is moving, when the completed church, the blood-washed bride of Christ, will be presented “faultless before the Presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). This is more than a doctrine of hope. It is the ringing affirmation that Jesus Christ is victorious over all.

Someday the trumpet will sound, and, with all His hosts, the Son of Man shall descend from heaven in trailing clouds of splendor. Before Him every knee shall bow, in the realms above and on the earth below, and every tongue shall declare the praise of His glory.

Such a theology puts a spring in the step and a song in the heart. For whatever may come in our present experience, however agonizing the sufferings of this world, we know that God is working through every circumstance to accomplish His purpose. So rather than be distracted by the struggle, let us fix our attention upon the victory. The King is coming! While it does not yet appear what we shall be, “We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). With this vision ever before us, let us go forth to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Lord God Almighty reigns, and, in Him, we, too, are more than conquerors.


2 Edwin Lewis uses this description of the Gospel because it is good news so utterly without comparison to any news heard before, Theology and Evangelism (Nashville: Tidings, 1952), pp. 12, 13.


5 The Lausanne Covenant, Section 2. Based on the integrity of God, the statement affirms the inerrancy of Scripture, but in saying this, as John Stott notes, “We commit ourselves to the responsible work of biblical interpretation, so that we may discern the intention of each author and grasp what is being affirmed,” in “The Authority and Power of the Bible,” The New Face of Evangelicalism, ed. by C. René Padilla (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976), p. 37.

6 John Calvin, op. cit., p. 66.

7 A good case in point is the modern ecumenical movement contained within the World Council of Churches. Though rooted in the world-wide missionary passion of nineteenth century Pietism, with its firm reliance upon Scriptural inerrancy, these strong evangelical aspirations seen in the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 gradually began to wane in succeeding generations, until they are virtually lost altogether in the WCC today. For a documented study of this evolution,
Some aspects of doctrine receive more attention than others, like "the objective atonement of Christ, the necessity of a new birth, or conversion, and salvation by faith," as noted by William Warren Sweet in A. Skevington Wood, *Evangelism: Its Theological Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966), p. 30. However, to limit theology of evangelism to a few special emphases does not do justice to its full-orbed scope.


In a broader context, as C. E. Autrey notes, "It portrays evangelism as a vital issue which can not be separated from the very nature and purpose of Christianity," *The Theology of Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman, 1966), p. 9.

A. Skavington Wood, op. cit., p. 32.


In acknowledging our limitations in explaining the mystery of the Trinity, John Wesley wisely observed: "Would it not be absurd in me to deny the fact, because I do not understand the manner. That is, to reject what God has revealed because I do not comprehend what He has not revealed," "On the Trinity," II, *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.* (New York: T. Mason and G. Law, 1840), p. 24.

T. A. Kantonen, op. cit., p. 25. This analysis based on Barth's statement on the trinity, "God reveals himself as the Lord."


T. A. Kantonen, op.cit., p. 27.

"Invictus," meaning unconquered, describes the proud but anguished soul of William Ernest Henley, whose head, though "bloody" from his mortal sufferings, remained "unbowed."

Among universalists, it is generally believed that if there is punishment for sin beyond this life, it is remedial, not retributive, and, therefore, ultimately all sinners will be reformed. In fairness to this position, let it be said that thought of an eternal hell for those who reject Christ is painful to accept. But what may be overlooked is that no one has suffered more in the contemplation of this human calamity than God Himself. The cross is His witness. It is the defiance of God's love that finally makes judgment inevitable. For a succinct discussion on universalism, see Leslie Woodson, *Hell and Salvation* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), pp. 29-108; also Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, II (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 211-234.

Ibid., pp. 224, 225.

"Perhaps the best known exponent of this position is Rudolf Bultmann, though he has many followers. Adherents of this school contend that most of the miraculous elements in Jesus' life and teaching were developed later by the church, and imposed on the Gospel accounts. Hence, the so-called demythologizing efforts of their biblical criticism."

Francis A. Schaeffer uses this expression to speak of "history in space and in time which could be written down and discussed as history," that is, "unchangeable facts which are true," *Escape from Reason* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1968), p. 92.


Lewis A. Drummond focuses this truth, while briefly sketching some theories of the atonement, in *Leading Your Church in Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman, 1975), pp. 41-44.

The question of the universality of the atonement in reference to the elect, while of importance, can not be resolved within the limits of this article. Suffice to say, as J. I. Packer notes,
"All agree that no limit can be set to the intrinsic worth of Christ's death, and that Christ never casts out those who come to Him," op. cit., p. 67.

C. H. Spurgeon once was asked if he could reconcile God's sovereignty and human freedom. "I never try," he replied. "I never reconcile friends." His way of viewing both truths in friendly tension may not resolve the problem, but of this we can be sure: God draws; man responds. Hence, salvation is entirely God's act; while separation from grace is due only to man's rejection. A good discussion of this issue is in C. I. Packer, op. cit., pp. 11-36; cf., Robert E. Coleman, *The Mind of the Master* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1977), pp. 80-84.

Donald G. Bloesch, op. cit., p. 43.

Perhaps the most notable exception to the postponement of absolute spiritual perfection until glorification after death is the doctrine of the beatific vision in Roman Catholic teaching, which allows that it is possible in this life for a saint to come to an experience of direct knowledge of God, a seeing that brings utter fulfillment to the intellect, will and every power of the soul, and consequent "total happiness." F. J. Sheed, *Theology and Sanity* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), p. 295; cf., pp. 141-148, 150, 151. Persons who attain this vision go immediately into paradise upon death. That few reach such a state of saintliness in this life is the reason for the Catholic position on purgatory.


Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1977), p. 12. Whether or not the Kingdom is separate from the church, as many believe, is an academic question which makes no difference in evangelism. If a discussion of this point is desired, see my *The Mind of the Master*, op. cit., pp. 107-112.

The subject of spiritual gifts, while too broad to treat here, has great significance to evangelism. For a simple application of the truth, see Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Glendale: Regal, 1971), pp. 73-83; cf. Kenneth Kinghorn, *Gifts of the Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976).

The Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, outside of revival movements, generally has been given scant attention by the church in its practical outworking in the world. However, this is changing today, even in Roman Catholicism, and though we still have a lot to learn, it is one of the most refreshing signs of renewal in our time.

In this Matthean passage, *matheteusate*, "make disciples" is the only verb. "Go," "baptize," and "teach" are all participles, which mean that they derive their force from the leading word, though "go" does stand in a coordinate relationship to the dominate verb. This command clarifies the parallel verse in Mark 16:15, where "preach the Gospel" appears in the same verb form. So whether going, preaching, baptizing, or teaching, the objective is the making of Christian disciples. See my note on this in *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1964), pp. 108, 109.