

THEOLOGY AND WORLD OUTREACH

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The theme to which we would direct our thinking is "Theology and World Outreach." Our subject is broad; we can do little more than begin to grapple with it. In order to save time, we will raise and attempt to answer -- if all too cursorily -- some eight questions, develop a little more fully ideas which we deem more important and conclude with some positive suggestions.

Our aim is to be Biblical, candid -- we did not come to participate in an inane but mutual admiration session -- and relevant. In short, our aim for the Bible Fellowship Church can be summed up in the words spoken of David, "he had in his own generation served the counsel of God." (Acts 13:36).

Question One

What is the Biblical basis for our evangelistic responsibility?

We would like to think of it as arising in the following: --

1. A sovereign God
2. Elect individuals from every tribe, tongue, people and nation (Revelation 5:9).
3. The redemptive work of Christ in saving a people (Revelation 5:9, Ephesians 1:7).
4. Christ's mandate for the church, viz., that of a witnessing communion (Matthew 28:18-20).
5. The necessity of proclaiming the gospel if men are to be evangelized (Romans 10:12-15).
6. The regenerating work of God.
He uses human instruments, but He and He alone gives life to the dead. (Ephesians 2:1)
7. Human responsibility (Matthew 11:28-30, Acts 10:43).
While man does not possess freedom of the will -- his will is bound by sin -- he, nevertheless, is a free and responsible agent.

In short, there is a biblical and theological basis for our evangelistic responsibility.

Question Two

Is there a relationship between theology and a vital program of outreach?

What is this relationship?

We would say an unequivocal Yes.

Unless one believes in universalism there is always a pressing urgency in the proclamation of the evangel.

Unless one believes in corporate salvation, there is always an uniquely personal aspect in proclaiming the evangel.

Unless one believes that the gospel has gone to all the world, there is the necessity of world-wide proclamation connected with Christ's return.

Unless one believes that society can be bettered by economic advance, educational increase, and the like, there is a primacy to evangelization. Everything is subordinate to this.

If, however, one believes that God is sovereign and Christ is Lord of all creation, then nothing is outside His domain.

If the theology expressed above is truly biblical, then one can rest assured that God will work through His Word and Spirit, even in the hardest of places.

What is the relationship?

This will be dealt with later.

Question Three

Can we evangelize without asking what is the evangel we preach?

To this we would say No.

In stating positively what is the evangel, we will use the words of James I. Pacher.

1. The gospel is a message about God.
2. The gospel is a message about sin.
3. The gospel is a message about Christ.
4. The gospel is a summons to faith and repentance.
Faith as well as repentance
Repentance as well as faith

To use the words of Roland Allen we would say, "St. Paul does not repeatedly exhort his churches to subscribe money for the propagation of the Faith, he is far more concerned to explain to them what the Faith is, and how they ought to practice it and to keep it." (The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church, p. 6)

Furthermore, if we believe that the Lordship of Christ extends to all creation, our evangel will contain a world and life view. Our evangel will have something to say to people in emerging nations, rapidly expanding cultures, to educators, politicians, industrialists, in short, men of every walk of life.

The evangel we proclaim should not be a truncated theology. One of the members of this committee put it this way: "The Bible Fellowship Church has a message for this hour. Our duty is not so much to seek to solve all the problems of the world as to point the way to Him who alone can help us. The power of salvation can be meditated to the world about us only through a flood of new spiritual life among our own constituency. Our hope is in a revival of spiritual power."

Question Four

How can we avoid becoming "experience centered" in our theological and evangelistic outlook?

We believe that biblical theology should correct any tendency to err in this direction.

The Bible is theocentric, to be experience centered is to be anthropocentric. If one makes securing a response -- especially a demonstrably emotional response -- his duty and goal, he will tend to bend his message and adopt his method to make it congenial to men. This may produce the desired results, but biblical theology should correct these errors. Evangelization, not success, is our duty. God's glory, not religious experience, is our goal. These we learn from the Bible.

As the Apostles proclaimed the gospel, we are told that "The Word of God increased." That does not mean that they started printing presses, it means something more important. It means that gospels were being printed in terms of transformed lives.

Question Five

How can we avoid becoming overly academic in our theological and evangelistic outlook?

We believe that biblical theology should correct any tendency to err in this direction.

Verbal assent to academic questions -- albeit religiously academic questions -- is not sufficient. The Bible always makes salvation a personal matter (Is not this the reason we reject infant baptism?)

While it is true that the appeal of the gospel is in some senses directed to the intellect, it is also true that the evangel is directed to the whole man -- intellect, emotion and will.

To make the appeal purely to the mind is to forget the whole man. Furthermore, in effect it often overlooks the role of the Holy Spirit in applying the evangel. Jonathan Edwards one time said, "The heart of true religion is holy affection." He contended that "our people do not so much need to have their heads stored as to have their hearts touched."

Question Six

Are there evidences of subtle syncretism invading the theology and practises of the evangelical churches including the Bible Fellowship Church?

To this we would say Yes.

This is always a danger. It exists, our being unaware of its presence. Some of the areas mentioned in the preparation of this paper were these:--

1. Arminianism
2. Materialism

3. American cultural accretions
4. Ecumenicalism
5. Blandism

Each of us tends to be a product of his age, reflecting the climate of opinion current in his time. Constant scrutiny of all of life, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, subjecting all of church life to the searchlight of the Word, these are our only safeguards against syncretism.

Question Seven

To what degree should theology mold methodology in our program of world outreach?

How can we give expression to this?

We would say that theology should be in complete control.

We will attempt to answer this question in more detail later.

Question Eight

What is the effect of the growing emphasis on theology and resultant emphasis on "revivalism" among evangelicals? In the Bible Fellowship Church?

We believe that some of the effects are these: --

Among Evangelicals

1. It results in driving men to study the Bible.
2. It results in reexamining old beliefs.
3. It results in enlistment and involvement.
4. It results in evangelism becoming truly personal and a year round job.

Among the Bible Fellowship Church

The above plus the following:

1. A cry of "intellectualism".
2. A fear of "overthrowing the old landmarks."
3. A question of "Where will this lead us."
4. A desire for a return to "evangelism" (so-called).

Let us now consider in a little more detail three matters pertaining to theology and world outreach.

1. What is the relationship between theology and a vital program of outreach. In discussing this question in preparation for today's meeting it was said that "the Bible Fellowship Church has a message for this hour. Our duty is not so much to seek to solve all the problems of the world as to point the way to Him who alone can help us. The power of salvation can be mediated to the world about us only through a flood of new spiritual life among our own constituency."

In reply to these statements it was said that there is a great need -- at home and abroad -- for developing and proclaiming a world and life view. Perhaps this can best be seen by raising this hypothetical question: "What would your evangel be if a whole city accepted the gospel and were truly converted? What then would be your message?"

Have not many Fundamentalists been all too content with a theology which was truly biblical as far as it went, but which if not expanded is grossly inadequate for today's world at home and abroad?

Has it not produced men who are Ph.D.'s in business but dropouts in theology?

2. What is the relation between theology and methodology?

This is perhaps the single most important, practical and pressing question before us. To make it relevant, let me cite a concrete example. A few years ago at Mizpah Grove we had a man whom some consider one of the finest, most able speakers we ever had at camp. Because this man did not give altar calls, some pastors were much distressed, others were not at all disturbed. The division was not so much over methodology, rather it was dictated by basic theological positions.

While the Bible does not give us a detailed methodology of outreach, it does give us a theology which should guide our methods. If evangelization consists of an evangelist (anyone who evangelizes) outwitting, our arguing, out reasoning his hearer, or so playing upon his emotions that he succumbs to his feelings, or so gaining mastery over his volitions that he wills to do as the evangelist suggests, then one's methodology will be dictated by his duty and his goal, namely, to save men by one's cunning, ability, the pragmatic resources at his disposal in this generation.

If, on the other hand, salvation is the work of a sovereign God, brought about through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit working upon God's elect which are known to Him but not to us, then evangelism, while certain of effecting God's purpose, still remains the task of the evangelist, and may be successful whether or not men believe.

But since it is God who works salvation, not warm personalities, not congenial atmosphere, not powers of persuasion or carefully contrived appeals, then our methodology will be determined by our concept of God and His way of working.

In short, does not the methodology of much of today's evangelism arise from a false theology; and is it not directed at producing a humanly achieved response?

3. What is the relation of "revivalism" to "evangelism"?

If one means by "revivalism" a yearly series of evangelistic meetings for the unchurched and sinners, the connotation of the word and answer to question eight will be one thing.

If, however, by "revivalism" we mean the work of the Holy Spirit in reviving His people, of convicting them of sin, of indifference, of worldliness, and the like, then the connotation of the word and answer to question eight will be another thing. Just what does "revivalism" mean? What, if any, distinction is there between "revivalism" and "evangelism" as used today?

What is the relation of "revivalism" to mass evangelism of today?

Just how effective is popular mass evangelism today?

Suggestions

1. Have an annual retreat for Official Board members to train them in theology and evangelism.
2. Identify, isolate and remove any obstacles within the Bible Fellowship Church that hinder world outreach.

List some of these.

3. Develop a Christian world and life view.

This is especially necessary for meeting today's youth and tomorrow's leaders in the Christian church.

4. Make better use of our church paper as a means for inculcating our theological position.

Book reviews, letters to the editor, friendly discussions on important issues, etc.

5. Inaugurate an annual lecturship to which ministers and laymen will be invited. Have qualified men address the group.

6. Reevaluate our methodology.

We are not the only group which feels dissatisfied with present methods and results. Is God trying to show us something?

7. Return to doctrinal preaching. Seek to indoctrinate.

In conclusion let it be said that the opinions expressed herein are the work of this committee and are not necessarily agreed to be each member thereof. It can be said, however, that there was genuine interaction, an attempt at a meeting of minds and an unanimous desire for a world outreach that would be biblical in methodology and personal in practise.