



# Evangelism

Theology on the Go

*Jeffrey Stivason, editor*



ALLIANCE OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS



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Edited by Jeffrey Stivason



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OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS

Theology on the Go is a brief conversation on eternal truths with Jonathan Master and James Dolezal. Each program features a pastor/theologian discussing key biblical doctrines in thoughtful and accessible ways. Theology on the Go will help you better understand the finer points of theology, while showing how relevant and important theology truly is for Christians today.

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# WHY EVANGELIZE?

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*Michael Roberts<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Because Christ is Lord of all, there is no one throughout the world who is not obligated to render to Jesus the glory that belongs to Him as the crucified, risen, and ascended Savior and Judge. As Christians share the message of salvation, both near and far, the Lord uses their proclamation of the Gospel to save sinners. In the wake of these conversions, worship of the triune God occurs where it did not before.

Tertullian, writing around A.D. 200, described the situation in his own day: "We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum,—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods."<sup>2</sup> The Christian Church continues to do that. Like the small mustard seed, the kingdom of God grows as the Gospel is faithfully shared with others wherever Christians are found.

## Why Evangelize? And How?

In these attempts to communicate with others, however, the response is often hostile and indifferent. So why do it? Why go to all the trouble just to be mocked and rejected the vast majority of the time? Why not spend more of our money and efforts trying to disciple those who are already Christians? Or if we want to have at least something to do with evangelism, why not wait for interested people to come to the Church, rather than experience the persecution that awaits us in going outside it? We could perhaps come up with a number of reasons why we should care about sharing the Gospel

with others, but I will mention just two. The first is so simple that it might not be the first reason we give: we are to evangelize because Jesus commands it.

When R. C. Sproul was a seminary student, he took a class from Dr. John Gerstner, who was a professor of church history. There were about eighteen students in the room, sitting in a semicircle. They were discussing predestination, and Gerstner asked a question, beginning with the student at the opposite end of the semicircle as Sproul: "Now, sir, if predestination is true, why should we be involved in evangelism?" One student after the other did not know the answer to this question.

Meanwhile, as Sproul is watching all these failures, he is starting to feel the pressure as Gerstner is getting closer to Sproul's end of the room. "Well, Mr. Sproul," asked Gerstner, "if predestination is true, why should we be involved in evangelism?" Sproul felt himself sliding down in the chair and with all kinds of apologies and qualifiers threw out his answer: "Well, Dr. Gerstner, I know this isn't what you're looking for, and I know that you must be seeking for some profound, intellectual response which I am not prepared to give. But just in passing, one small point that I think we ought to notice here is that God does command us to be involved in evangelism."

Gerstner laughed and replied, "Yes, Mr. Sproul. God does command us to be involved in evangelism. And of course, Mr. Sproul, what could be more insignificant than the fact that the Lord of glory, the Savior of your soul, the Lord God omnipotent, has commanded you to be involved in evangelism?" Sproul concluded, "I got the point in a hurry!"<sup>3</sup>

The second reason we are to evangelize is the wrath of God. People worry about many things. They think about their family's health and safety, and whether their children will turn out alright. They worry about their job and whether it is secure. They ponder their financial situation and whether or not they can afford whatever the next major expense will be. They look ahead to retirement and question whether they have enough money put away to make it. They daily observe their own appearance, noticing with alarm that



they are older than they used to be, and there is nothing they can do to stop it.

But the one thing—the most important thing—that very few people pay any thought to is who God is, what He expects of them, where they learn about Him, and whether or not He just might be angry with them. People go along through life trying to dodge one problem after another, not realizing that not only is God angry with them as sinners, but also that this angry God is coming in judgment to deal with them. We are to evangelize to tell them of their only way of escape and how to prepare for this God's arrival.

At the end of Matthew 28, verses 18-20, not only does Jesus tell us to evangelize, but He also tells us how. We are to make disciples. Those who believe the Gospel and repent of their sins are to follow Jesus as Lord. This command is marked by two items. The first is baptism, which here is seen as a public act of identification with Christ before other Christians and the world. The second is that our evangelism is to include teaching others all that Jesus has commanded, what we might call discipleship.

This brings out an important point about witnessing. According to Matthew 28, evangelism is not strictly sharing the gospel in the hope of simply making converts and then moving on to other people. One cannot isolate evangelism as merely telling others about the message of salvation without also teaching them all that Jesus commands. Thus, evangelism is not really evangelism if it is not involving discipleship so that new Christians can grow in their knowledge of God and what the Christian life entails.

## Two Promises

From this passage, not only does Jesus command us to evangelize and tell us how to do it, but He also gives two promises to provide strength along the way. The first promise is that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. He is the resurrected Lord, and there is no place where His sovereign authority does not reach. He is the Savior of the world and the Judge of all the earth. One can respond to this in a number of ways. One can deny it and

conclude that it is all just a lot of religious nonsense, useful only for those who are too weak and insecure to get through a hard life on their own. One can ignore His claim of universal dominion, believing that while not necessarily irrelevant, still there are more important priorities and interests. Or one can bow before Him, acknowledging His claim on them and pursuing the salvation that He graciously offers as one relentlessly seeks priceless treasure buried in a field.

The second promise is Jesus' continuing presence, even to the end of the age. If you are a Christian, no matter where you are, Jesus promises to be with you. He will never leave you because this promise of His abiding presence has been enacted by His own blood shed for your sins, with His Holy Spirit given to you as a seal that will never break away. This gives us confidence and joy in our witness, regardless of the rejection and persecution we might face. And as the Spirit of Christ empowers us to share the Gospel with others, we must do it with the compassion that Jesus Himself showed in His lament over Jerusalem for her rejection and unbelief (Matthew 23:37).

When D. L. Moody was evangelizing in various cities throughout Great Britain, some clergymen were jealous of his powerful preaching and wanted to know his secret. They said to him, "Mr. Moody, we would like to have a word with you. You come here to London, you have a sixth grade education, you speak horrible English, your sermons are simple, and yet thousands of people are converted. We want to know, how do you do it?"

Moody proceeded to invite them in and asked them to look out the window and tell him what they saw. They mentioned some things going on outside, such as some children playing in a park, and some couples walking. Then they asked Moody what he saw.

According to the account, as Moody looked outside, tears began to roll down his cheeks and onto his gray beard. One of the ministers, very curious to know what caught Moody's eye that would so affect him, asked, "Mr. Moody, what are you looking at? What do you see?"

Moody replied, "When I look out the window, I see countless

thousands of souls that will one day spend eternity in Hell if they do not find the Savior."<sup>4</sup>

Christians ought never to be smug, but always to speak and act as the beggars that they are, fully convinced that the only difference between them and the rest of the perishing world is that by God's sovereign mercy they have come to learn where their bread is found, and they want others to know it too. Christians have received the greatest message there is, the best news that anyone can ever hear. How will you share it with others before it is too late?



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## THE GREAT MISSIONARY PRESUPPOSITION

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*Jeffery Stivason<sup>5</sup>*

Several years ago, I was doing some street evangelism. Cruising around the park and hanging out in the empty city lots was a weekend ritual for the young. So, for several years I made it a practice of engaging these weekend warriors in conversations about the Gospel. It was during those days that a teaching in the Word hit me with all the force of a truck. It was a verse that I knew. But on that evening it took on a greater sense of meaning. To this day I think of it as the 'Great Missionary Presupposition' for evangelists at home or abroad.

What is it, you ask? In Matthew 9, Jesus had been going through all the cities and villages proclaiming the Gospel and healing every kind of disease. And then, in verse 36 we read, "Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd." That's it. The Great Missionary Presupposition is that the unbeliever is like a sheep without a shepherd. I know, I know, simple, right? Sure it is. And I'd read it I don't know how many times, but on that night it all came together in a way it hadn't before.

Here is how it happened. I had gotten into a conversation with a girl and her boyfriend. After a little while I learned that she was pregnant. The two of them were not married and they did not have any plans for the future. The young man was a tough-guy who had little time for religious peddlers. The young lady, by contrast, was very friendly and free spirited. A conversation broke out.

The conversation soon turned spiritual, and she informed me in no uncertain terms that she was a spiritualist who did not believe in

sin, judgment, or hell. So, I said to her, "For the sake of argument, let's take the veracity of the Bible for granted. Let's assume that it means what it says and that what it says is true." She conceded, and I spelled out the Gospel. I started with sin and ended with grace. There were a few interruptions, not the least of which was a small group of homosexuals who were attempting to send me packing, but all in all I laid it all out. She simply stared at me. I was a bit taken aback, and so I gave her a verbal nudge to which she replied, "But... I don't want to go to Hell."

Well, I was almost as speechless as she was.

Here stood a girl who just minutes prior defiantly protested to any belief in a Hell. But after assuming, for the sake of argument, that the Bible is what it claims to be and hearing the Gospel, she looked scared and deflated and confessed that Hell was the last place she wanted to go. It was at that moment it hit me. She was a sheep without a shepherd. She was supposed to look this way!

I had just led her to green pasture. I had led her to the well of living water. And she realized at that moment that there were two, and only two, paths. Whether she would eat the greens or drink from the well was for God to decide. But God had taught me a valuable lesson about sharing the Gospel that night. Whether we are in the home or the foreign mission field, the primary picture we are to carry in our mind is that of a shepherd gathering up wandering and lost sheep.

With that picture in mind, let's think about Matthew 9:36–38 for a few minutes. Jesus addressed a large crowd of disciples that day using two metaphors. The first is that of sheep without a shepherd. Jesus is obviously drawing from the Old Testament as He describes those of the Jewish nation standing before Him (Numbers 27:17; 2 Chronicles 18:16). But the sheep metaphor extends beyond the Jewish nation. Using a similar sheep metaphor from Isaiah, the Apostle Peter describes his readers as straying sheep who have returned to the Shepherd of their souls (1 Peter 2:25). The metaphor communicates the reality of the situation as Jesus observed it. Those who are outside of Him have no shepherd or guardian. They are a

harassed and confused bunch. They are unable to save themselves from spiritual harm, whether Jew or Gentile. Consequently, the first metaphor says something about those to whom we are to go.

However, the second metaphor is found in verses 37–38 and it says a bit more. Jesus said to the disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into the harvest.” There are a number of ideas in these verses but let me point out what is salient. First, notice to whom the harvest belongs. It is the Lord’s harvest. But notice, second, we are to pray that the Lord of the Harvest will cast laborers out into the field. The striking feature is that the Lord expects us to be concerned for His harvest! The whole thing reminds me of the watchmen on the wall of Jerusalem who are to pray and give the Lord no rest until He brings about His promises to Jerusalem. Brothers and sisters, I must ask, do you have an interest in the Lord’s field? Then, third, we must pray with urgency for the Lord to bring laborers because the harvest is plentiful. Here is a practical lesson in all of this that we must not miss. All of these things can be boiled down to one idea: we ought to go into the field not intimidated but with great confidence. The people we meet, even the most intelligent, are shepherd-less sheep. So, when we meet them in the field we should not let the fact that they are nuclear engineers or doctors or lawyers trouble us. When it comes to their souls, they are harried and harassed. They need rest and living water, and the humblest with the Gospel is able to lead them to the Shepherd who is more than able fill their deepest need.





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## MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

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*Mark Johnston*<sup>6</sup>

If we are to believe many of the proponents and purveyors of mission and evangelism in today's Church, we simply have to get the 'right' message, packaged in the right way and conveyed to the right demographic to see people rushing through our doors, seeking salvation. To them, it is something simply waiting to happen, if only we can get the right ingredients. If we read what Jesus has to say, however, we would see how He would beg to differ.

Long before we get to the 'Great Commission' in the Gospel record (Matthew 28:18–20), we see at least two mini versions of what it would eventually entail. The first is when Jesus sends out the Twelve "with power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases...preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick" (Luke 9:1–6). This was, according to Luke's record, an extraordinary success. The impact of the disciples' ministry caused people everywhere to wonder if John the Baptist had been raised from the dead, Elijah or some other Old Testament prophet had returned to life. And even Herod the Tetrarch—clearly still haunted by his execution of the Baptist—asked "Who, then, is this?" (Luke 9:9). That first foray into the world of mission for the disciples was unexpectedly exciting.

The second mini version of what would eventually become the mission of Christ to the world through the Church throughout the ages was a little different. We find it a chapter later in Luke, and this time it involves 72 missionaries sent out in pairs (Luke 10:1–24). Although, like its predecessor, this missionary venture met with unusual success—witnessed, not least by Jesus' comment, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18)—the pre-briefing Jesus

gave these disciples was more than a little ominous.

He gives a clue to the challenge that lay before them in the very first words He addresses to them by way of preparation: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2). The 72 may well have thought, "But surely we know this will work—the Twelve have proved that already." Why the need to pray? Certainly in all-too-many contemporary manuals on evangelism, prayer is the one thing that is glaringly absent in the mix of "right" ingredients needed for successful mission. But Jesus barely gives them time to wonder about the answer, because He immediately tells them why prayer is so necessary: "Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves."

Jesus had already begun to feel the teeth of opposition to His ministry and message. And the fact it was being encouraged most by the religious authorities made it all the more worrying. Now He was sending mere disciples into the fray. There was every reason to be afraid and balk at the very notion of "going" anywhere near it. So Jesus' choice of words in terms of what to pray for was in no sense accidental. The 'sending' He had in mind was more akin to 'thrusting' His workers out—somewhat against their natural instinct of self-preservation.

Since those same natural instincts have lurked in almost every disciple of Jesus ever since then, it is not hard to see why praying for God to quell those instincts in His would-be servants is a hugely important component of the task.

If that was not enough, Jesus deliberately sends these people out with nothing—no "purse or bag or sandals" (Luke 10:4). The very manner of their going was intended to make a statement: "We have no resources in ourselves." There was no sense of their giving the impression that this was their way to make a living or that it was no great inconvenience to them. Rather, they were to venture forth with a conscious reliance on the God who had sent them, to put it into the hearts of others to feed and house them. The only thing the disciples had to offer was the message of the kingdom and the evidence of its King's power to deliver from the curse of a fallen existence.

Although there are still some Christian mission agencies that seek to model this through their being "faith" missions, it is more than likely that Jesus was impressing a deeper point on His followers. Their conscious dependence on Him to supply food and shelter was a pale reflection of their need to depend on Him for the even greater need: to faithfully communicate His Gospel to a lost world.

We could explore other "obstacles" to mission that are implicit in this passage. Although it was yet to be spelled out clearly in later New Testament revelation, the "harvest" into which these workers were being sent consisted of people who were spiritually dead. They were blind to God, deaf to His word, oblivious to their need, hardened in their ways through spiritual *rigor mortis*, and—humanly speaking—beyond hope. Yet they were to "go" and, when they went, they were utterly astonished by the outcome. They "returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name'" (Luke 10:17).

What does this say to our generation of disciples—especially those who at times may give the impression that evangelism is something Arminians do? It certainly tells us that the mission we face in our day—not least in the increasingly post-Christian West—is no different from what it was in the Middle East of Jesus' day. It really is 'Mission Impossible', if we see it through human eyes. But the Lord of the harvest is no different today than He was in their day. We are still to pray to Him and be prepared for His answer. Because the twist in this tale as we follow through Luke's record of events is that when the disciples obeyed the command to pray to "the Lord of the harvest" the very next thing they heard was to hear the Jesus who they had just learned to address as "Lord" saying to them, "Go! I am sending you out." And, at the end of their pre-mission brief He opens their eyes to see what this means: "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects you rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16).

The Church has indeed been sent on an impossible mission; but "with God, all things are possible" and, in Christ, "we can do all things" because He is the Strengthening One. 'Therefore, go and make disciples...!'



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## MISSIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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*Tim Bertolet<sup>7</sup>*

**I**t is very clear from the New Testament that God commands the Church to be concerned with missions. Missions flows from the heart of God. God's plan and purpose is to spread His glory through all creation so that people of every tongue, tribe, and nation experience the glory of God through salvation that is found in Jesus Christ. However, God's plan for missions in the New Testament is not a "plan B" as if an Old Testament "plan A" has failed. God has always had a desire to bring His glory to the nations.

It can be of no doubt that in the Old Testament, God called the nation of Israel to be His special and chosen people. God did not call them because they were better than other nations; on the contrary, they were just as wicked and sinful as all the nations (Deuteronomy 9:4-5). The nation of Israel was called to bear the name of the LORD before a watching world. She had been chosen by God's grace to be a treasured possession (Exodus 19:5). Her role, as called by God, was to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). Priests, in their functions, are mediators. The role of the nation of Israel was to mediate the knowledge of God to the rest of the earth. In other words, when Israel was following the Lord, other nations would see it. This would bring judgment to other nations who rejected but it would also bring Gospel witness.

Consider for example the story of Rahab. When the spies come to her house to hide, she has already heard of the name of the Lord. There is a fear in her heart for the Lord. She confesses: "I know that the LORD has given you the land...for we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea..." Her confession is of

the divine name and includes the LORD's exclusivity: "for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above on the earth beneath." She then requests for mercy from the LORD's judgment through the spies. Rahab is the example of a Gentile who is converted because she hears of the glory and might of the living and true God through what He has done in saving Israel.

The purpose of God calling Israel was not an end in itself for Israel but a means by which God would reveal His name and glory to the nations. While Israel was blessed with the covenants, it was so that God might through her bless the nations with salvation and the revelation of His glory. God's promise to Abraham and his seed was that "in you all the nations will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

In Jeremiah 2:3 we read "Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest. All who ate of it incurred guilt; disaster came upon them, declares the LORD." The second half of this verse reminds us that those nations that attacked and cursed Israel would themselves be judged (Genesis 12:1-3). However, the first lines of this verse point to Israel being a firstfruits of a harvest. Israel had the privilege of being a people called by God but was the first of a harvest of people to be called by the grace of God. God's plan has always been to spread salvation to the nations. God goes on to tell us through Jeremiah that if Israel repented and walked as the true people of God the nations shall come to the LORD: "and if you swear, 'As the LORD lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.'" (Jeremiah 4:2).

As we read through the Psalms or major sections of Isaiah, we should note the number of times the nations are addressed. God's Word calls them to worship the Lord, to see His glory, to praise His name.<sup>8</sup> God has always been intent on spreading His name through all of creation and redeeming people from every tongue, tribe, and nation. His plan has been to send His eternal Son into this world to effect reconciliation between God and man. Through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the glory of God would spread to the nations so that they might come to know Him and worship Him.

If God has saved you, He has done so for the praise of His glorious

grace (Ephesians 1:6). He accomplishes salvation in such a way that He gets all the praise, honor, and glory. But much like Israel's call in the Old Testament, He has called to you and me into salvation so that others might see the wonder and glory of God. He has saved us to be a kingdom of priests in order that we might proclaim His excellencies (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:5-6).





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# JOHN CALVIN ON MISSIONS

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*Michael Haykin*<sup>9</sup>

It has often been maintained that the sixteenth-century Reformers had a poorly developed missiology, that missions was an area to which they gave little thought. Yes, this argument runs, they rediscovered the apostolic Gospel, but they had no vision to spread it to the uttermost parts of the earth. But such a characterization is far from the truth. One reformer in particular, the Frenchman John Calvin (1509-1564), shows the error of this perspective.

## The Victorious Advance of Christ's Kingdom

A frequent theme in Calvin's writings and sermons is that of the victorious advance of Christ's kingdom in the world.<sup>10</sup> God the Father, Calvin says in his prefatory address to Francis I in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, has appointed Christ to "rule from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth." In a sermon on 1 Timothy 2:5–6, Calvin notes that Jesus came, not simply to save a few, but "to extend his grace over all the world." Similarly, Calvin declares in a sermon on Acts 2 that the reason for the Spirit's descent at Pentecost was in order for the Gospel to "reach all the ends and extremities of the world."

It was this global perspective on the significance of the gospel that also gave Calvin's theology a genuine dynamism and forward movement. It has been said that if it had not been for the so-called Calvinist wing of the Reformation, many of the great gains of that era would have died on the vine. While this may be an exaggeration to some degree, it does illustrate the importance of the Reformed perspective.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin, moreover, was not satisfied to be involved in simply reforming

the Church. He was tireless in seeking to make the influence of the Church felt in the affairs of the surrounding society and thus make God's rule a reality in that area of human life as well. It was this conviction that led Calvin to be critical of the Anabaptists, the radical left-wing of the Reformation. From his perspective, the Anabaptist creation of communities that were totally separate from the surrounding culture was really a misguided attempt to flee the world. Their spiritual forbears were medieval monks, not the early Christians who had been obedient to Christ's words in Matthew 28:19-20. In Calvin's view, they should be seeking positive ways in which they could be used by the indwelling Spirit to impact society in general and reform it, and so advance the kingdom of Christ.

### **Means for the Extension of Christ's Kingdom**

Calvin is quite certain that the extension of Christ's kingdom is first of all God's work. Commenting on Matthew 24:30, he asserts that it is not "by human means but by heavenly power ... that the Lord will gather His Church."<sup>12</sup> Or consider his comments on the phrase "a door having also been opened to me" in 2 Corinthians 2:12:

[The meaning of this metaphor] is, that an opportunity of promoting the gospel had presented itself. For as an opportunity of entering is furnished when the door is opened, so the servants of the Lord make advances when an opportunity is presented. The door is shut, when no prospect of usefulness is held out... so where an opportunity presents itself of edifying, let us consider that by the hand of God a door is opened to us for introducing Christ there, and let us not withhold compliance with so kind an indication from God.<sup>13</sup>

For Calvin, the metaphor of an "open door" spoke volumes about the way in which the advance of the Church is utterly dependent on the mercy of a Sovereign God.

Now, this does not mean that Christians are to be passive in their efforts to reach the lost and can sit back and wait for God to do all. In his comments on Isaiah 12:5, Calvin deals with this common misinterpretation of God's divine sovereignty:

[Isaiah] shows that it is our duty to proclaim the goodness of God to

every nation. While we exhort and encourage others, we must not at the same time sit down in indolence, but it is proper that we set an example before others; for nothing can be more absurd than to see lazy and slothful men who are exciting other men to praise God.<sup>14</sup>

As David Calhoun rightly observes: "The power to save [souls] rests with God but He displays and unfolds His salvation in our preaching of the gospel."<sup>15</sup> While missions and evangelism are indeed God's work, He delights to use His people as His instruments.

The first major way in which God uses His people for the conversion of others is through prayer—our prayers for the conversion of unbelievers. We see this conviction at work in Calvin's own prayers, a good number of which have been recorded for us at the end of his sermons. Each of his sermons on Deuteronomy, for instance, ends with a prayer that runs something like this: "may it please him [i.e. God] to grant this [saving] grace, not only to us, but also to all peoples and nations of the earth."<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, Calvin would admonish believers not to be discouraged if they do not see fruit immediately issuing as a result of their prayers. As he states in his comments on Genesis 17:23:

So, at this day, God seems to enjoin a thing impossible to be done, when he requires his gospel to be preached every where in the whole world, for the purpose of restoring it from death to life. For we see how great is the obstinacy of nearly all men, and what numerous and powerful methods of resistance Satan employs; so that, in short, all the ways of access to these principles are obstructed. Yet it behooves individuals to do their duty, and not to yield to impediments; and, finally, our endeavours and our labours shall by no means fail of that success, which is not yet apparent.<sup>17</sup>

Then, believers must actively employ their strength to bring God's salvation to others. In his sermon on Deuteronomy 33:18-19, Calvin can thus argue that it is not enough to be involved in God's service; Christians need to be drawing others to serve and adore God.<sup>18</sup>

Specifically, how does God use the strength of Christians? Calvin's answer is that it is by their words and by their deeds. Given Calvin's

high appreciation of the Word of God, one would naturally expect that this would be seen as a major means of witness. Thus, Calvin can state that whenever the Old Testament prophets foretold "the renewal of the Church or its extension over the whole globe", they always assigned "the first place to the Word."<sup>19</sup> Acting on this conviction, Calvin encouraged the translation and printing of the Scriptures in Geneva. This also explains his own devotion to regular expository preaching and his penning of commentaries on all of the books of the New Testament (except for 2 and 3 John, and Revelation), and on a goodly number of Old Testament books.

But witness is borne not only by the Word, but also by our deeds. Calvin had established an academy in Geneva to train men to be missionaries for his native land, France. A large number of these men did indeed go back as missionaries and some died as martyrs. To five such missionaries who had been arrested at Lyons and were facing martyrdom, Calvin wrote on May 15, 1553:

Since it pleases him [i.e. God] to employ you to the death in maintaining his quarrel [with the world], he will strengthen your hands in the fight, and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain. And though the fruit may not all at once appear, yet in time it shall spring up more abundantly than we can express... For let enemies do their utmost, they never shall be able to bury out of sight that light which God has made to shine in you, in order to be contemplated from afar.<sup>20</sup>

Calvin sees the act of martyrdom as a powerful witness for the Gospel, though it is one without words.

Calvin is convinced that each and every Christian must be prepared to witness, by both word and deed, about God's grace and mercy in Christ and that to all whom they can. When it comes to the spreading of the Gospel, it is noteworthy that he makes no distinction between the responsibility of pastors and of other Christians. All believers must be involved.<sup>21</sup>

There is one means that Calvin expected God to use in the spread of the Gospel that we today in the West probably do not expect: evangelism through Christian rulers and magistrates. For example, when Elizabeth I came to the throne of England, he saw it as a hopeful

sign for the advance of the Gospel in England. Over the years he also corresponded extensively with a number of French noblewomen, especially Jeanne d'Albret (1528-1572), queen of Navarre. This French noblewoman played a significant role in the French Reformation, and Calvin recognized his need of her support, and that of other nobility, if new territories were to be opened up to the spread of the evangelical faith.

## Motivations for Extending Christ's Kingdom

What was to motivate the believer in bearing witness to the faith? First and foremost was the glory of God. As Calvin stated in his sermon on Deuteronomy 33:18-19:

When we know God to be our Father, should we not desire that he be known as such by all? And if we do not have this passion, that all creatures do him homage, is it not a sign that his glory means little to us?<sup>22</sup>

In other word, if we are truly passionate about God's glory, this passion will result in witness.

Moreover, bearing witness to the faith is pleasing to God. Consider in this regard Calvin's letter to a Christian landowner on island of Jersey that was written around the year 1553:

We praise God for having inclined your heart to try if it will be possible to erect, by your means, a small church on the place where you reside... And you know that it is a sacrifice well pleasing to God, to advance the spread of the Gospel by which we are enlightened in the way of salvation, to dedicate our life to the honour of him who has ransomed us at so costly a price in order to bear rule in the midst of us.<sup>23</sup>

Then, we are to evangelize because we have been commanded to do so by Christ. Compassion for the lost condition of people also should drive Christians to witness. "If we have any humanity in us," he declared in a sermon on Deuteronomy 33, "seeing men going to perdition, ...ought we not be moved by pity, to rescue the poor souls from hell, and teach them the way of salvation?"<sup>24</sup> In fact, a Christian who is not involved in witness is really a contradiction in terms. As Calvin remarks in his commentary on Isaiah 2:3:

... the godly will be filled with such an ardent desire to spread the doctrines of religion, that every one not satisfied with his own calling and his personal knowledge will desire to draw others along with him. And indeed nothing could be more inconsistent with the nature of faith than that deadness which would lead a man to disregard his brethren, and to keep the light of knowledge choked up within his own breast.<sup>25</sup>

## Geneva as a Missionary Center

Geneva was not a large city. During Calvin's lifetime it reached a peak of slightly more than 21,000 by 1560, of whom a goodly number were religious refugees.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it became the missionary center of Europe in this period of the Reformation. Calvin sought to harness the energies and gifts of many of the religious refugees so as to make Geneva central to the expansion of Reformation thought and piety throughout Europe. This meant training and preparing many of these refugees to go back to their native lands as evangelists and reformers.

Understandably Calvin was vitally concerned about the evangelization of his native land, France, and his countrymen, the French. Estimates show that by 1562 some 2,150 congregations had been established in France with around 3 million members, many of them converted through the witness of men trained in Geneva.<sup>27</sup> But Calvin was concerned for not only France, but also for the reformation of churches in places like Scotland, England, Spain, Poland, Hungary and the Netherlands. He even encouraged a mission to Brazil in 1555, though this turned out to be a failure.<sup>28</sup>

To further this work of Reformation evangelism, there was also need for Christian literature and the Scriptures. In fact, by Calvin's death, his interest in Christian publishing meant that there were no less than 34 printing-houses in Geneva, whose production included Bibles in various European languages, like the Geneva Bible, the bedrock of early English Puritanism.

Geneva's missionary vision for Europe thus had a deep impact on the European continent. Little wonder Calvin could write: "When I consider how very important this corner [i.e. Geneva] is for the propagation of the kingdom of Christ, I have good reason to be anxious that it should be carefully watched over."<sup>29</sup>

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## OLD PRINCETON: HER MISSIONARY OUTREACH

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*David Calhoun*<sup>31</sup>

According to Kenneth Scott Latourette the 19th century was the “great century” of missions. He, therefore, devoted three of the seven volumes of his *History of the Expansion of Christianity* to the nineteenth century.

Princeton Seminary’s history began during the early part of the “great century” of missions. From its beginning the seminary supported and promoted the world-wide missionary cause. The first professors—Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, and Charles Hodge—were early and strong advocates of world missions.

John C. Lowrie, who became a missionary to China, remembered how often Drs. Alexander and Miller moved the hearts of the students “by their impassioned appeals for the heathen.” Among Samuel Miller’s New Years resolutions for 1832 was this: “I will direct more attention than I have ever yet done to the precious cause of missions, foreign and domestic.” Student Daniel McGilvary thought that Charles Hodge “never spoke more impressively than when he was pleading the cause of foreign missions.”

The Princeton faculty supported the missionary movement, but it was even more the students who made Princeton Seminary a center of missionary zeal and activity. The stated purpose of the student Society of Inquiry on Missions was to investigate the whole subject of missions “with a view of ascertaining our personal duty.” The society was open to all those who were considering foreign and home missions, as well as those preparing to be “settled pastors of congregations” in the United States (asking only that they have

a heartfelt concern for world missions). In its early years, virtually every student at the seminary was a member of the Society of Inquiry. Over eighty per cent of the students became members during its fifty—year history at Princeton.

As the "great century" of missions unfolded, Princeton Seminary students began to take their places in missionary work at home—on the frontier, among the African American slaves, and the Native Americans (the latter curiously viewed as foreign missions, and the former as home missions). Soon Princeton graduates were serving overseas as well. Some went to India, including the son of Charles Hodge, Archibald Alexander Hodge. Others went to Africa, soon to be known as "the white man's grave." Because of the dangers, the mission boards sent to Africa only those candidates who felt a strong call to serve there. The Princeton connection with Africa was especially poignant.

In 1832 the newly formed Western Foreign Missionary Society (organized by the Presbyterian Synod of Pittsburgh) wrote to the Society of Missionary Inquiry at Princeton Seminary asking for missionaries for western Africa. John Pinney, a native of Baltimore and a graduate of the University of Georgia, volunteered. Joseph Barr, who had transferred to Princeton from Andover Seminary to please his Presbyterian father, cut short his studies to accompany Pinney. Barr wrote to his father: "After seeking divine guidance, and consulting my professors, who were unanimous in the opinion that I had better go, I have written to the board that I will go." On October 12, 1832, Joseph Barr and John Pinney were ordained by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Archibald Alexander preached on "the last command" of Christ to make disciples of all nations, and Samuel Miller delivered the charge to the missionaries. Before their ship sailed for Africa, however, Barr was suddenly stricken with cholera and died. His death deeply stirred the seminary community. The student Society of Missionary Inquiry asked Samuel Miller to preach a memorial sermon. Miller, who just days before had lost his own nineteen-year-old son, challenged the Princeton students to receive Joseph Barr's death as a personal call to missions. Miller said:



O, if we could see 120, or 130 heroic youths here assembled, all of them burning with the same love and zeal that burned in ... the beloved Barr, what impression under God, might not be expected speedily to be made on this community; and ultimately on the world?<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Miller concluded a sermon he preached on the twenty-sixth anniversary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions with these moving words:

What more worthy object can we seek, than contributing to fill the earth with the glory of the Lord? [Let us] pray that [we] may not be found wanting in the payment of that mighty debt [we] owe to [our] Divine Master and to a perishing world. And let us all, more and more, aspire to the honor of being "workers together with God" in hastening the triumphs of Immanuel's universal reign. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly; and let the whole earth be filled with thy glory! Amen! and Amen!<sup>33</sup>

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# NOTES

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1. Michael Roberts (D.Th., University of South Africa) is the Alliance editor of ThinkandActBiblically.org.
2. Tertullian, "Apology XXXVII," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 3: 45. Original publication, *Christian Literature*, 1885.
3. R.C. Sproul, "Prayer and God's Sovereignty," in *Our Sovereign God*, ed. James M. Boice (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), 127-128.
4. Recounted in Lane T. Dennis, "What Do You See?" *Share the Good News* (September/October 1999), 3. Quoted in Philip G. Ryken, *The Message of Salvation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 293-294.
5. Jeffrey Stivason (Ph.D., Westminster Theological Seminary) is the pastor of Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church in Gibsonia, PA, and editor at Place for Truth. He has been serving the Lord as a minister of the Gospel since 1995 and has planted two churches during that time.
6. Mark Johnston (M.Div., Westminster Theological Seminary) is the Minister of Bethel Presbyterian Church (EPCEW) in Cardiff, Wales. He was previously senior pastor of Proclamation Presbyterian Church Bryn Mawr, PA and of Grove Chapel in Camberwell, London. He began his ministry as a church planter in Ireland. He serves on the Board of Banner of Truth Trust and has authored several books including three titles in Banner's *Let's Study* series, *You in Your Small Corner*, and *Our Creed*.
7. Tim Bertolet is a graduate of Lancaster Bible College and Westminster Theological Seminary. He is an ordained pastor in the Bible Fellowship Church, currently serving as Interim Pastor of Faith Bible Fellowship Church in York, Pa. He is a husband and father of four daughters.

8. For a brief compilation of verses addressing this Old Testament hope, see John Piper's *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003) 167-175.

9. Michael Haykin (Th.D., Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto) is professor of church history and biblical spirituality, as well as director of The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies. Born in England of Irish and Kurdish parents, Dr. Haykin is the author of a number of books, including *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church*. Dr. Haykin and his wife Alison have two grown children, Victoria and Nigel.

10. The following three quotes are cited by David B. Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure", *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review*, 5, No.1 (Spring 1979), 17.

11. Jean-Marc Berthoud, "John Calvin and the Spread of the Gospel in France" in *Fulfilling the Great Commission* (London: Westminster Conference, 1992), 44-46.

12. Calhoun, "John Calvin," 18.

13. Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, 2:12.

14. Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 12:5.

15. Calhoun, "John Calvin," 18.

16. *Ibid.*, 19, n.23.

17. Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 17:23.

18. "Sermon 196", *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 57, eds. William Baum, Edward Cunitz, and Edward Reuss (1885 ed.; repr. New York/London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1964), 29:175.

19. Calhoun, "John Calvin," 22.

20. "Letter 318," *Letters of John Calvin*, Jules Bonnet, ed., tr. Mr. Constable (1858 ed.; repr. New York: Lenox Hill Pub. & Dist. Co., 1972), II, 406.

21. Calhoun, "John Calvin", 22.
22. "Sermon 196," *Corpus Reformatorum*, 29:175.
23. "Letter 339," Letters, II, 453.
24. "Sermon 196," *Corpus Reformatorum*, 29:175.
25. Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 2:3.
26. Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford, UK/Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 121.
27. W. Stanford Reid, "Calvin's Geneva: A Missionary Centre", *The Reformed Theological Review*, 42, No.3 (Sept.-Dec., 1983), 69.
28. See the story of this important mission in Amy Glassner Gordon, "The First Protestant Missionary Effort: Why Did It Fail?", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 8, No.1 (January 1984), 12-18.
29. Letters, II, 227.
30. David Calhoun (Ph.D., Princeton Theological Seminary) is Emeritus Professor of Church History at Covenant Theological Seminary, St Louis, Missouri. He has taught at Covenant College and Columbia Bible College (now Columbia International University) and served as principal of Jamaica Bible College. Prior to his appointment to Covenant Seminary in 1978, he was the overseas director of Ministries in Action. He is the author of a two-volume history of Princeton Seminary—*Princeton Seminary, Faith & Learning 1812–1868*, and *The Majestic Testimony 1869–1929*.
31. E. P. Swift, ed., *A Memoir of the Rev. Joseph W. Barr* (Pittsburgh, PA: R. Patterson, 1833), 188–189.
32. Austin Dickinson, ed., *The National Preacher: Original Monthly Sermons From Living Ministers of the United States*, vol. 9-11 (New York: West and Trow, 1831), 303.



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