

The Effect

The biblical gospel and the principles of modern church evangelism are incompatible. What can be done about it?

Evangelicals have long since been aware of the dilemma, and some have bitten the bullet and have adjusted their preaching to cope with it. Dwight L. Moody, for one, omitted 'difficult' aspects of the gospel so as not to put his hearers off. As Alister McGrath observed:

Dwight L. Moody (1837-99)... chose not to mention the idea [of eternal punishment] in his revivalist preaching campaigns. He knew that an increasingly sophisticated culture simply would not accept such an idea.¹

Replace 'Dwight L. Moody (1837-99)' with 'modern evangelical', 'sophisticated' with 'comfort-seeking', and 'eternal punishment' with 'anything that unbelievers don't like', and you have my point in one!

Moving on a hundred years, Peter Masters, writing in 1976 (note the date; with the passage of nearly fifty years since then, things have got no better, but far worse), observed:

The tendencies in evangelism today are to play down sin and repentance, and to emphasise only the benefits of the gospel. We hear of people being brought to what is called 'a Christian commitment' [the buzz phrase today is 'have a relationship with God', or, perhaps, become 'a follower of Jesus'],² but they have not been brought the way of

¹ Alister McGrath: *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, Doubleday, 2004, pp104-105.

² Innocent phrases, yes, good, even biblical, phrases, but as a definition of a believer woefully inadequate when set in the context of a modern evangelical church. To be a 'follower of Jesus' in the early days of this age meant facing virulent hostility from the surrounding culture, whether Jewish or pagan. These phrases, today, however, can smack of cosiness, especially in churches where the sharpness of the gospel is grievously blunted.

The Effect

repentance. We hear of preachers... who speak of man's need without mentioning his sinfulness; who speak of God without mentioning his holiness and justice; who speak of Christ being the Saviour without mentioning the atonement; who speak of conversion without mentioning repentance or conveying any sense of justification by faith.

As he went on to ask rhetorically:

How is it possible to preach the gospel when the essential soul-saving facts are left out?³

Iain H. Murray addressed the motive behind this adjustment of the gospel message:

The preacher aims to be popular in order to gain acceptance for his message. The right response, he thinks, will depend on his hearers not being offended. The Bible presents the truth very differently. It announces what God has done, and describes man without God as 'fools', 'ignorant', and deservedly under wrath – 'none righteous, no, not one' (Rom. 3:10). 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked' (Jer. 17:9). But it came to be thought that the church would only lose people if they addressed men in such a fashion.

Quite right! This is my point. Pagans don't want the biblical gospel. It will put them off. So, let's drop the offensive...

³ Peter Masters: *Physician of Souls*, Wakeman Publishers Ltd., London, 1976, p10. Although, in this book, I am concerned with the modern evangelical, the traditional and Reformed are not exempt; nor are the churches which occupy the unstable ground in between. Inclusivism increasingly rules the roost across the board. As for the omission of key words, I have heard a sermon by a Reformed Baptist minister in which he did not mention Christ once. Not once! The gospel was not remotely preached on that occasion. It was not even broached. In fact the sermon amounted to salvation by works. If it had not been for some excellent hymns, we were close to experiencing the complaint before the Great Awakening: in those days it was often impossible to tell whether an Anglican preacher was 'Confucian, or Moslem, or Christian'. And it was said there were three degrees of preaching – 'dull, duller, dullest'.

The Effect

Murray showed that it has always been thus:

The idea came directly from a wrong standpoint; and it was not modern, for the very same thinking was in Simon Peter when he advised Christ that his speaking of the corruption of man was offending hearers (Matt. 15:12).

Murray quoted Lloyd-Jones:

Some of us would be much more popular in the church, as well as in the world, if we did not say certain things. If a preacher wants to be popular he must never offend.⁴

Matthew 15:12 is worth a closer look in this connection. Although Peter was disturbed to think that the Lord would put his hearers off by his preaching, Christ never flinched:

And he called the people to him and said to them: 'Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person'. Then the disciples came and said to him: 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?' He answered: 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit'. But Peter said to him: 'Explain the parable to us'. And he said: 'Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone (Matt. 15:10-20).

John Calvin commented:

As the scribes were presumptuous and rebellious, Christ did not take great pains to pacify them, but satisfied himself with repelling their hypocrisy and pride. The offence which they had formerly taken up was doubled when they perceived that – not through oversight, but seemingly on

⁴ Iain H. Murray: *Lloyd-Jones: Messenger of Grace*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2008, pp12-13.

The Effect

purpose – Christ despised their washings as trifles. Now when Christ did not hesitate to inflame still more, by keen provocation, wicked and malicious persons, let us learn from his example that we ought not to be exceedingly solicitous to please everyone by what we say and do. His disciples, however – as is usually the case with ignorant and unlearned people – no sooner perceive the result to be unfavourable, than they conclude that Christ’s reply had been out of place, unfortunate.⁵ For the object of their advice was to persuade Christ to soothe the rage of the Pharisees by softening the harsh expression which he had employed.

It almost always happens with weak persons that they form an unfavourable judgment about a doctrine as soon as they find that it is regarded with doubt or meets with opposition. And certainly it were to be wished that it should give no offence, but receive the calm approbation of all; but, as the minds of many are blinded, and even their hearts are kindled into rage, by Satan, and as many souls are held under the benumbing influence of brutal stupidity, it is impossible that all should relish the true doctrine of salvation. Above all, we ought not to be surprised to behold the rage of those who inwardly nourish the venom of malice and obstinacy. Yet we ought to take care that, so far as may be in our power, our manner of teaching shall give no [needless] offence; but it would be the height of madness to think of exercising greater moderation than we have been taught to do by our heavenly Master. We see how his discourse was made an occasion of offence by wicked and obstinate men; and we see at the same time how that kind of offence which arose from malignity was treated by him with contempt.

As for the modern evangelical church avoiding anything which might put attenders off, it is not just the preaching that receives their calculated attention. Nothing must offend. Nothing is left to chance in the modern system. At the FIEC (Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches) conference in 2001, Alistair Begg told the congregation that he knew of a church in the States where the young people

⁵ Calvin had ‘unseasonable and improper’.

The Effect

were told – told, mark you – not to bring their Bible to a certain meeting on such a date because it was an evangelistic event. Seeing people with the Bible in hand would put unbelievers off!⁶

Offend unbelievers? Quite the opposite! Consider this recent example:

This month we will be starting Sunday evening music services in the church with the hope that unchurched people will have a chance to hear the word of God in an environment and setting they are more comfortable in. Please pray that music and worship will form a bridge to draw them closer to God.⁷

Note the key words: ‘unchurched’, ‘comfortable’, with the notion that a musical evening might ‘bridge’ the (unbridgeable in human terms) gap between the carnal and the spiritual. The only ‘bridge’ between the sinner and God is regeneration followed by conversion.

And what about the evangelical church that has introduced cards – playing cards – to attract unbelievers! Think of that! A church setting up a system which might encourage somebody into gambling, and all in the name of Christ! I am not suggesting that the church in question allows betting, but the bewitching principle of card playing can so easily lead to an addiction, and, in some cases, thence to gambling. Oh, yes it can! When he was a boy, my father, with other lads, was playing cards. They were caught by a policeman. On being told that they ‘were only playing for matches’, the officer astutely retorted that ‘cards without money is like potatoes without salt!’

⁶ I know of an evangelical church that opened a bookshop but would not put anything on display which might offend Moslems.

⁷ Report of a church in Greece (European Mission Fellowship Prayer Letter Nov. 2019).

The Effect

I understand that Bingo is the latest attraction which that church has introduced! What next? I have heard of a ‘Christian clown’ and a conjuror/comedian.

With such goings-on in evangelical churches, it is a wonder the heavens stay in place above our heads!⁸

Paul would never countenance such devices:

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery (1 Thess. 2:1-5).

How unlike many modern evangelicals! They act towards their hearers as though they were customers in the mall who have to be consulted and coddled, like learners in a crammer establishment who have to be coached, clients of a business house whose demands have to be satisfied. As a result, ‘the unchurched’ have to be smoothed, stroked and satisfied; they have to be schooled. We know that the world is locked in a *culture* of comfort, so the modern church, it seems, thinks it right to offer the world a *religion* of comfort.⁹ The upshot is that the church becomes expert in offering the world a ‘spirituality’ of wellbeing and pleasant pursuits – all with a Jesus-topping, of course; ‘gospelised yoga’ dispensed by ‘gospel therapists’. Yes, the attenders will be gently instructed in the rudiments of Christianity – to get them thinking aright; or, at least, to be able to learn the script and

⁸ For more examples, see my *New-Covenant Articles Volume 12; Battle*.

⁹ Nietzsche got it right after all. See my ‘Atheists & Evangelicals Awake! Nietzsche Being Dead Still Speaks’ in my *New-Covenant Articles Volume 12*.

repeat the jargon¹⁰ – but such evangelism ends up with a growing number of church attenders who have been given a plentiful supply of soft-centred religion to churchify them. The biblical concept of conversion is replaced by a process which is nurtured by a cloying inclusivism, leading, it is hoped, to some kind of spiritual osmosis or absorption of certain propositions by the unregenerate. Far more often than is realised, such people are encouraged to exercise a Sandemanian ‘faith’, in which saving faith is reduced to mere or bare assent to the truth.¹¹

The process – and modern evangelism *is* a process – is horizontal, not vertical and, above all, not downward, from God to man. Yet the New Testament shows us that conversion is a crisis, not a process, and that it starts in man’s experience with regeneration, which is the sovereign act of God in power. This needs to be clear to all right from the start. Today, alas, it is anything but.

Writing in 2008, David F.Wells gave a potted history of the ‘pursuit of the self’ in the evangelical churches in the previous two or three decades:

In sermon after sermon... preachers of an evangelical kind have latched onto this cultural way of thinking. Self-talk, it seemed, would be a natural springboard into salvation-talk. Even if it never actually got to salvation, there was enormous benefit to be had along the way. So, why not venture along this path? Imagining themselves to be speaking the language of their congregations, and being quite *au courant* [that is, up-to-the minute], these preachers actually ended up buying into a worldview that is deeply hostile to Christian faith [both the objective and subjective, I would add – DG] . They seemed not to notice that feeling good about yourself is not the same thing as actually being

¹⁰ See ‘Beware of Parrots’ in my *New-Covenant Articles Volume 12; To Confront*.

¹¹ For my reasons behind this paragraph, see my *Infant; Conversion; Hinge; Seeking; Saving*. Incipient Sandemanianism is rampant (what an oxymoron!). See my *Secret*.

The Effect

good... Sin... is not simply feeling bad about ourselves. It is violating what is right in God's law and character. Those who inhabit this self-world look only for therapy, not for forgiveness and regeneration. Recovery, in fact, is their way of speaking about regeneration. It is all about human technique and not about miraculous intervention. All of this was apparently lost on evangelicals who stumbled after one another in their earnest pursuit to recast their faith in this new language from the culture.¹²

In short, the very language that believers use is adjusted to make the message palatable to pagans; modern evangelicals would rather talk – certainly talk openly – about the unchurched, the not-yet-Christian, the unreached, rather than sinners, sinners dead, lost or unconverted, spelling out what these words mean. A new vocabulary gives the game away: a new vocabulary is necessary to cope with a new gospel – not merely a new method, but a new message.

The tendency to avoid words like sin, wickedness, idolatry, rebellion, and so on, is glaring: preachers would prefer to talk about the hurts, pains, loneliness, sense of injustice, abuse, lack of fulfilment, sense of isolation, dissatisfaction, emptiness, and the like, of their hearers: in short, that we have 'messed up'.¹³

¹² David F.Wells: *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2008, pp137-138.

¹³ As I write, Simon Rowell's Christmas Day address at Kempston Grace Community Church (a church in the van of the new method of evangelism in the UK) has just been posted on the website. After a bright and breezy welcome, followed by a Trivial Pursuit style quiz on Christmas traditions peppered with amusing comments, Rowell had soon produced a relaxed – not to say, jokey – atmosphere. In his address (nominally – very nominally) on Matt. 2:1-12, Rowell spoke of the beauty of Christ who came to save us from our selfishness, self-centredness, pride and love of competition; he spoke of the Christ who unsettles us to win us to allegiance to himself as Lord, Saviour and King. In his conclusion, based on the way to interpret a certain papist painting, he pointed

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

Far too often evangelism takes the form of saying: ‘Are you in trouble, are you unhappy, are you failing somewhere, do you need some help? Very well, come to Christ and you will get all you need’. Thank God, it is very true, if you come to Christ, you will derive many benefits; but I do not find the gospel presented in that way in the New Testament itself.¹⁴

Again:

There is a tendency to regard man’s essential trouble as being a sickness... a kind of mental and moral and spiritual sickness. It is not that; that is not man’s real need, not his real trouble. I would say the same about his misery and unhappiness, and also about his being a victim of circumstances. [But] these are [often] the things that are given prominence today... [Many] come to the conclusion that man is sick, man is unhappy, man is the victim of circumstances. They believe therefore that his primary need is to have these things dealt with, that he must be delivered from them... That is too superficial a diagnosis of the condition of man... Man’s real trouble is that he is a rebel against God, and consequently under the wrath of God.¹⁵

Iain H.Murray spoke of the casualty of the modern method:

When Christianity ceases to be God-centred, a superficial understanding of sin will always follow; sin is treated as mere unhappiness or dissatisfaction instead of rebellion

out that to see all this in Jesus we need a proper sense of adoration. The professional, polished performance was, throughout, devoid of the gospel both in spirit and content. And all this on the day which, in that church’s thinking, marks the pinnacle of evangelistic opportunity. For another example from the same stable, see Appendix 2.

¹⁴ See Iain H.Murray: *Lloyd-Jones: Messenger of Grace*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2008, p218.

¹⁵ D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Preaching and Preachers*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1971, p27.

The Effect

against God. Consequently the wrath of God passes out of sight.¹⁶

Even when searching biblical words – sin, sinner, wrath, condemnation, judgment, and such like – are used (if all of them are!), they are increasingly used in a shallow way, in a context that is at once sanitised and gentle. Take sin: while the modern evangelical is prepared to talk about sin in the sense of sins, faults, failure and bad behaviour (especially to other people), the concept of sin (the root) as opposed to sins (the effect) is muted.¹⁷ The horizontal (man/man) is stressed at the expense of the vertical (man/God). It is as though a dentist, extracting a tooth, concerns himself with the crown while ignoring the root.¹⁸

Murray again:

¹⁶ Iain H. Murray: *Lloyd-Jones: Messenger of Grace*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2008, p8.

¹⁷ Yes, Christ died for his people's sins, but, when preaching, it is essential to stress the root sin and not only actual sins.

¹⁸ Although I disagree with N.T. Wright on major biblical doctrines (see my *Conversion; Hinge*), he has well expressed what I am criticising at this point. Speaking of 'the sacrifice of Jesus', he declared: 'Now at last true human life is possible. Now at last consciences can be washed clean... [In the letter to the Hebrews,] we find the news that millions in our society are desperate to hear: the news that the things which trouble us most deeply can be washed away through the blood of Christ... Hebrews... explains that the moral deficit is already dealt with... Hebrews offers us, quite simply, Jesus. It offers us the Jesus who is there to help, because he's one of us, and has trodden the path before us... And it offers us, above all, Jesus the final sacrifice; the one who has done for us what we could not do for ourselves, who has lived our life and died our death, and now ever lives to make intercession for us' (N.T. Wright: *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, SPCK, London, 1994, p9). Wright went on to equate coming to Christ, coming to God's throne of grace, with partaking of the Lord's supper. I am not saying that modern evangelicals go that far (though see Appendix 2), or that they hold the New Perspective; it is simply that in the above Wright has captured the horizontal view of sin.

The Effect

Sin must never be preached as though it were primarily a matter of actions. Sinfulness is a graver problem than sins. ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God’ (Rom. 8:7).¹⁹

Let me tease this out from Scripture. Too often, modern talk about sin is to do with bad behaviour, with the wrath of God – if it is mentioned at all – coming late in the proceedings. But this is to invert the biblical way of thinking about sin – the biblical way being shown by Peter in Acts 10:42-43, and especially set out by Paul in Romans 1:18-31. Paul did not end with the wrath of God; he started with it. And he said why the wrath of God is being revealed – even now – upon sinners: it is because natural men stifle – suppress – the evidence of the existence of God – ‘his eternal power and divine nature’ – they have in the natural world all around them (and, even more clearly, in Scripture), and instead of glorifying the true God, make gods for themselves; in short, natural men, by their suppression of the knowledge of the true God, are idolaters.²⁰ This is their root sin. And because of this, the wrath of God is upon them even now, in that God gives them up and gives them over. The evidence and outcome of this is that sinners commit sins. So said Paul. Sinners, because they are sinners, commit sins, sins such as:

...the lusts of their hearts... impurity... the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves... dishonourable passions. For their women [exchange] natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise [give up] natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error... ...a debased mind to do what ought not to be done... ...filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice... ...full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness... ...gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to

¹⁹ Iain H. Murray: *Lloyd-Jones: Messenger of Grace*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2008, p74.

²⁰ Modern idolatry in the west, no doubt, is far more sophisticated than in previous times, but it is still idolatry.

The Effect

parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless (Rom. 1:25-31).

It is not that every man is guilty of each and every sin in the list, nor that men sin to the same extent, nor that this is all the sins there are, but that this sort of behaviour is the outcome of the fall, the result of man's root sin against God. As Christ said:

From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person (Mark 7:21-23).

It is the heart, the heart of natural man, that is the ground or fount of man's sinful life-style. And it is this fundamental point which has to be made clear in preaching the gospel.

The modern evangelical often inverts this, concentrating on actual sins, and that, as I have said, in a sanitised, mollified, non-confrontational way. This grievously misses the point; leaving men with the impression that sin is a man/man problem – a 'defect' – a personal, human issue, one which makes 'me' (and, perhaps, others) unhappy, when the fact is it is a man/God plight. Alas, today, the Godward aspect of sin is often at best played down, if not omitted altogether.

Concentrating on the human side, it goes without saying, is far from offensive. Indeed, it is most comforting to hear such understanding and sympathy coming from the pulpit. And yet pity should not be our first emotion when approaching the unbeliever. True, Paul told us that the love of Christ was the driving force behind his actions:

The love of Christ controls us (2 Cor. 5:14)...

...but he only came to that after he had made something else very clear:

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Since, then, we know

The Effect

what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

Notice how Paul was making the same point as Peter in Acts 10:42-43; namely, that judgment leads to mercy.

Consequently, the note of judgment must not be muted; it must be a principal part of the believer's motive in wanting to see sinners converted:

It is a fearful or terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31).

The failure, too often, of modern evangelism unequivocally to spell this out is cruel; it is an act of mercy to be frank, upfront and honest with sinners. Withholding the wrath of God from preaching is criminal. Indeed, it is more than likely to prove fatal to the sinner. And all the time, although the natural man resents being told he must face God's wrath, and, consequently, it is tempting for preachers to play it down, deep down every natural man knows 'God's righteous decree that those who practice such things [as listed in Romans 1:18-31] deserve to die' (Rom. 1:32).

* * *

Let me bring this chapter to a close by, in our imagination, visiting a modern evangelical church. Although I say 'in our imagination', as I have indicated there is plenty of solid evidence freely available to all which confirms the reality of what follows.

Picture the scene. You are an 'unchurched' visitor at a modern evangelical church, one which has polished its programme to a very high degree of professionalism. The monitor has kindly supervised the parking of your car in the parking lot. The greeter has welcomed you in the foyer with an appropriate smile and a warm handshake as he or she has handed you your welcome pack. You have been gently conducted to the refreshment bar where you have made your selection from the range of coffee, nibbles, bacon-butties and/or doughnuts on offer, and, possibly, picked up your

The Effect

copy of a Sunday newspaper, all for free. You have settled comfortably in your seat, coffee in hand. The ambience of the hall has ‘welcome’ written all over it, that welcome being sympathetically supported by the background music from the band and singing group at the front. You take the opportunity to glance through the list of free activities which are on offer during the week – from hill-walking, to cream teas; from coping with debt, to courses in Christianity; from lunches, to coach trips; from craft afternoons, to five-a-side-football; and so on. And then the service – the performance – proper begins. It opens with a breezy welcome from the platform, including a hearty ‘thank-you’ for coming, followed by a bright ‘warm-up’ session to get everybody in the mood and at ease. From then on, the songs, the readings, the prayers, and all the rest, keep assuring you that you are included in it all, that you are the centre of attention, everything reinforcing the welcome, abolishing the slightest suggestion of any discomfort, let alone any hint of threat. And then the preacher stands to preach.

I break off. So far, bearing in mind what I said about the church and its highly-polished professionalism, I put it to you that I have given a fair representation of what goes on in the ‘best’ of a growing number of evangelical churches today.²¹

But now you have to use your imagination. And how!

The preacher stands – uncluttered – to preach; that is, he does not grind out a boring lecture, or read an essay or magazine article, but, opening his Bible and arguing closely from the text – preaching the text, not merely smothering the text with a clever template – he solemnly declares, proclaims, testifies, seeks to persuade you of what God is saying to you in Scripture, and what he,²² arguing that Scripture, wants you to do, and – not being tethered to

²¹ As I say, for evidence see my *Relationship; Attracting; New-Covenant Articles Volume 12*.

²² That is, both God and the preacher.

The Effect

exhaustive notes, iPad and mouse for PowerPoint – doing it with authority, gravity, penetrating power and grip. Rising to the climax of his address, to which he has been driving throughout, he warns you that you are in a desperate plight: your great need – whatever you think it is – is to be saved from your sin, and for that, you must know Christ, trust him as Saviour and Lord. For, the preacher goes on to say, the solemn fact is that very soon you will be meeting him; whether you like it or not, you will have to meet the Lord Christ as your Judge, since he is coming back to judge the world. That judgment will be universal, the preacher continues. It will include everybody. It will include everybody in this room. In particular, it will include you. And there is nobody – not even you – who can stave off this day and its fearful and final meeting with the Lord Christ. And there is nobody – not even you – who can say when that day will dawn. Why will Christ judge all men? Because we are all sinners, we have all turned away from God, suppressing all thought of him, rebelling against him and his law. I am a sinner; we all are; you are. We all originally fell into sin in Adam, and we have all added to our guilt by our actual sins. And we are all answerable to the Lord God. Answer we must, accountable we are – all of us, each of us. And there is nothing – nothing at all – that we can do to rescue ourselves. Even now, the unconverted are under God's wrath. You are no exception.

Nevertheless, the gospel is a message full of hope; it is good news, the best of all good news.

Good news? Yes, indeed! Let me explain, says the preacher. Listen to this! Since it is the inevitable and settled decree of God that Christ *is* coming to judge all men, then – in his great love and mercy to sinners – the Father sent his Son to come into the world to live as a man among sinners, to die and rise again for them, to ascend in glory to make continual intercession for them. The preacher continues: those sinners – and this includes you – those sinners who repent and turn from their sin, confessing their guilt, and call upon Christ to

The Effect

save them, trusting only in his blood and righteousness – trusting *only* in his blood and righteousness, I repeat – will most certainly be saved, saved forever, freed from condemnation the moment they rely upon the Saviour: the perfect righteousness of Christ will be accounted to them; their guilt and condemnation will no longer be theirs since it will have been laid on him. And this salvation can be yours – now!

But, I warn you, declares the preacher, it is not religion, it is not church attendance, it is not respectability, but Christ! No observance of any rite or ceremony, no amount of praying or Bible reading, can save you. Only Christ can do that.

So, I urge you, do not delay: call upon Christ now – right where you are – and you will be saved.

Too good to be true? Taste and see how gracious the Lord is! But if you refuse the Saviour, and die in your refusal, you will perish.

On what authority do I say all this?, the preacher asks. On the authority and command of Christ himself – your coming Judge. I tell you this in obedience to Christ, and out of compassion for you. I plead with you to trust the Saviour now, and so glorify the triune God. You *will* glorify God – either in your judgment or in your redemption. I beseech you to trust the Lord Jesus Christ at once and so glorify God in your salvation.

* * *

And now to come back to earth; that is, the contemporary scene.

If you would like to know more, the preacher says, please take one of the books on the table at the back.²³ And now we

²³ There seems to be an obsession today with urging ‘the interested’ to take literature. Compare the apostolic practice of urging sinners to repent and believe in Christ at once: ‘Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of

The Effect

will sing our last song, after which please feel free to go to the stall and get your coffee re-fill,²⁴ pick up a doughnut, relax and take time to have a chat. And, don't forget, go through the list and choose which activities you might like to come to, and enter the dates in your diary. We do hope to see you again next week, same time, same place.²⁵

* * *

What a clash!

How can the principle of modern evangelism be squared with such preaching as we see recorded in Acts 10:42-43, and elsewhere in Scripture? It can't! One or other has to go: either we will obey Christ and consequently jettison the techniques of contemporary church evangelism, or we will disobey Christ. Which?

your sins... Save yourselves from this crooked generation' (Acts 2:38,40); 'Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out' (Acts 3:19); 'Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you' (Acts 8:22); 'We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God' (Acts 14:15); 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31); 'God... commands all people everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30). I realise, of course, such literature was not available in those days, but the principle stands. The apostolic note of urgency is sadly lacking in much of today's evangelism. Sinners are bolstered in their view that time is on their side and at their disposal. Keep attending church!

²⁴ Actually, in some places, the coffee bar is open throughout the service so that people can have top-ups during the address. It won't be long before some evangelicals are addicted to coffee, if it is not the case already. The comment of one who used to attend such a church is worthy of note: the idea seems to be 'saved by cake, redeemed by coffee'. I cannot help asking these people the apostle's question to the Corinthians: 'Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?' (1 Cor. 11:22).

²⁵ For my justification for all this, as I say, see my *Relationship; Attracting; New-Covenant Articles Volume 12*.

The Effect

Reader, I have made my choice. What is yours?

* * *

‘What a characterisation of modern evangelical churches!’

Is it? The websites of many such churches, their discourses online, and their advertisements certainly give me the impression that what I have delineated is increasingly becoming the norm.²⁶ And I am not alone in my fears and criticisms.²⁷

²⁶ See my *New-Covenant Articles Volume 12*.

²⁷ See my *Attracting*.