

A Case for Personal Evangelism

A Three-Part Bible Study on Evangelism

Study Bible Studies Family Camp retreat, c. 2012

(see full study)

Part One

It has been rightly said that mission is the heartbeat of Jesus, and it must also be the heartbeat of every believer. This is a short series of three messages on the mandate given to believers, under the overall theme of the Mission of the Church.

Here is a brief outline of what to expect in each of these sessions. In this first session, we shall deal with the mandate itself, examining what the Bible says on the subject. Believers accept Jesus into their hearts, and He becomes their personal, living Saviour; it becomes incumbent upon them to go out and help others save themselves. Some of the principles governing personal evangelism will also be dealt with, in the second part of this session. In the next session, we shall deliberate on the principles of personal evangelism. In the final session, we shall examine different approaches to personal evangelism.

As Christians, our faith rests on a clear progression in the history of humankind's relationship with God. In brief, it runs thus: God created everything that exists, including mankind; mankind disobeyed God, resulting in separation from Him; sin and death became the order of human life; Jesus, God incarnate, took our sins upon His sinless self and died for us on the Cross; His resurrection on the third day paved the way for the rebirth of believers and their salvation; and, through the grace of God, believers are entitled to forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus.

Those who have received salvation by the redemptive power of the blood of Christ are expected to be instruments in the hands of Christ, to carry this good news to the rest of the world. It is necessary for us to understand the critical stages in Christian salvation in their right perspective. Let us begin by looking at a few insightful statements and Scripture references on these aspects, before we proceed further.

Let us pause to consider a few questions. How many of us have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour? How many of us have gone through the baptism, the spiritual rebirth described in John 3:7? How many of us feel that others, too, should be saved? And how many of us have done anything about it? If we agree that we have been saved by the blood of Christ and have accepted Him as our Saviour and Lord, we

may well wonder why we are not in Heaven yet. As we proceed, we shall see that we remain on earth because we still have work to do for Jesus.

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter two, verses one to ten, throws light on this subject:

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:1-10)

In verses one to three, Paul reminds believers that they were dead, leading lives in sin. Here is the scene: you go to the doctor, and you know that something is not quite right with you, but you don't know what it is. So you say to the doctor, "Give it to me straight. Tell me what is wrong with me without any sugar-coating." And let us imagine the doctor says, "It is worse than I thought. The problem is that you are dead." That is Paul's diagnosis of the human problem. Paul says that we are dead in our transgressions and our sins, and so our condition is more serious than we might think. When Paul says, "You are dead," he is not talking about being physically dead; he is talking about being spiritually dead — which, in simple terms, means we are separated from God.

When we read verses four to seven, we find that verse four begins with two redeeming words: "But God..." ("But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,"). These two words change the situation entirely, from death to life in Christ. Paul affirms that God is rich in mercy, and loves us even when we are sinners; and since His character is such, God does something to bring us back from this state of spiritual death. Paul says that God "made us alive together with Christ." It is not that we come back to life all by ourselves, but we come back to life together with Christ, because of Christ, because of the blood He shed for us on the Cross. We were distant from God because of our sins and trespasses. But God sent His own Son into the world and into our lives, and through Christ, God brings us back into relationship

with Him.

When a person is spiritually reborn, they are saved by the grace of God. In Mark 16:16 it is stated: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" Here is another profound statement of Jesus, recorded in John 11:25-26: "*Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*"

That brings us to the subject of baptism. In general parlance, baptism is understood as the ceremony of baptism, whether in infancy or as an adult; some Christians, not satisfied with the infant baptism they received, opt for adult baptism as well. One may argue that this is wholly unnecessary if we understand the true meaning of baptism. My focus, therefore, is on baptism as described by Jesus. In John 3:5-7 we read: "*Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*" Christ's emphasis on baptism is more on the spiritual nature of the event. The ordinance of baptism symbolises the rebirth of a Christian; it depicts natural man, washed in the blood of Christ, becoming a spiritual man.

Moving on to verses eight and nine, I get a sense that Paul is, for good reason, concerned that we may assume we are ourselves responsible for our salvation, because of our good deeds, and may begin to boast about it. He is afraid that we might start to think that being a Christian means we are better than other people, instead of realising that being a Christian means we have received a gift — the grace of God. If we are saved because of our own works, we will soon be bargaining with Christ, demanding privileges and benefits on a quid pro quo basis. If we are proud about our salvation, or boastful about our identity in Christ, thinking ourselves better than others, then we have not really understood Christianity.

No matter what we do, salvation is available to believers only by Faith — Forsaking All I Trust Him — through the grace of God — God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

It is important to appreciate that Paul uses a rich range of images to illuminate what benefits Christ secures for believers. One such term is "salvation." Paul sees salvation as having a past dimension (Romans 8:24: "*For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?*"), a present dimension (1 Corinthians 1:18: "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*"), and a future dimension (Romans 13:11: "*And that, knowing the time, that now*

it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."). This has important implications for the eschatological understanding of salvation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines eschatology as the department of theological science concerned with the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Our salvation is shaped by Jesus, and the state of salvation in our lives will determine our future in eternity.

In exploring the function of grace, Augustine — a Latin philosopher and theologian from the African province of the Roman Empire, and generally considered one of the greatest Christian thinkers of all time — developed three main notions of grace. I tend to agree with this school of thought, that the grace of God is not a one-time endowment; there are three distinct notions to it, all emanating from the same grace of God.

Prevenient grace: this Latin term literally means "going ahead" — that God's grace is active in human lives before conversion. Grace "goes ahead" of humanity, preparing the human will for conversion; it does not become operational in a person's life only at conversion, but the process leading up to conversion is itself one of preparation, in which the prevenient grace of God is at work. This is critical for us to understand: God's grace is not a gift to Christians alone, but is operational in all human beings. There is, then, something we can do so that the prevenient grace already at work in others might turn into operative grace.

Operative grace: God effects the conversion of sinners without any assistance on their part. Conversion is a purely divine process, in which God works upon the sinner; the term "operative grace" refers to the manner in which prevenient grace does not rely upon human cooperation for its effect.

Now let us return to verse ten of Ephesians chapter two. Paul says: *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."* Notice the phrase "unto good works" — it almost sounds like a contradiction of what Paul argued in the preceding verses, that nothing we do would earn us salvation. The mission of the Church is, in reality, a continuation of Christ's earthly ministry: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."* (John 14:12)

Jesus regarded the redeeming of souls as His sole purpose in coming to earth: *"For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."* (Matthew 18:11). In turn, He imparted this same objective to His disciples, and through them to all of us. He said to them, *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"* (Matthew 4:19). Paul later

confirmed that the ministry of bringing people to God has been given to all who have been brought to Jesus, writing: *"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation."* (2 Corinthians 5:18). It is the purpose of every believer, not only pastors and clergy, to win the lost for Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, wholly divine and wholly human, has reconciled humanity and divinity in Himself, opening the way for believers to become the children of God.

We spoke of prevenient grace and operative grace. The third notion of grace is cooperative grace, which fits well with what has gone before. Cooperative grace: having achieved the conversion of the sinner, God now works together with the renewed human will in achieving regeneration and growth in holiness. Having liberated the human will from its bondage to sin, God is now able to cooperate with that liberated will; the term "cooperative grace" refers to the manner in which grace operates within human nature after conversion, in continuing to win others for Christ.

We were spiritually dead because of our sinful nature, but received salvation through the grace of God, who, through the blood of Christ, cleansed and redeemed us. God now wishes to use us as His instruments to win others for Christ. We are called to partner with Jesus in this important task.

The mandate given to us by Jesus is unambiguous, and He gave it to us directly in the form of the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said: *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."* This is truly a great commission for all believers, and we are not left alone in the task, for He will be with us always, until the end of time.

The mandate for us from Jesus is to continue the work He began on this earth — to partner with Him, and personally evangelise all who are yet to know Him. The question before us is whether we are ready to take on this task: to be fruit-bearing branches of the Vine.

Jesus said: *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."* (John 15:5-8). And again: *"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."* (John 15:16)

The takeaway from these passages is this: as members of the Church, the body of Christ, we are intrinsically joined with Jesus, and apart from Him we die a spiritual death. We are so united with Jesus that our love for Him ought to be intense, and our faith absolute; He desires us to be in that state. When He spoke of the regrettable fate of those not abiding in Him, He was perhaps pointing to those non-serious Christians who, while members of the Church in name, are not fruit-bearing.

Remaining in Christ means believing that Jesus is God the Son (1 John 4:15), receiving Him as Saviour and Lord (John 1:12), doing what God says (1 John 3:24), continuing to believe the gospel (1 John 2:24), and relating in love to the community of believers, Christ's body (John 15:12). He expects us to love one another as He loved us — unconditionally, even to the giving up of His own life for us — and to extend such love, in turn, to our neighbours.

Jesus goes on to say that if we abide in Him, His words will abide in us; that is a privilege He confers on us. When His word, the gospel, remains in us, we acquire a fuller knowledge of Him, and come to realise that, to be preserved in this union, our lives must be regulated by the doctrine of Christ. This, in turn, gives us conviction when we speak of Him to those who have not yet heard.

Jesus then confers another great privilege on those who remain in Him. When a vine bears "much fruit," God is glorified, for daily He sends the sunshine and rain to make the crops grow, and constantly nurtures each tiny plant, preparing it to blossom — what a moment of glory for the Lord of the harvest, when the harvest is brought into the barns, mature and ready for use! This farming analogy shows how God is glorified when people come into right relationship with Him and begin to "bear much fruit" in their lives; bearing much fruit also makes the believer fruitful in good works — faithful, zealous, humble, devoted, always abounding in the work of the Lord — and this honours God.

It prompts one to wonder exactly what fruit the believer is meant to produce. One line of thinking holds that this fruit is obedience, which fits the context: those who love Christ will obey His commandments. Others have thought this fruit is to reproduce other believers; yet others, that it is the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I would say all of the above, for when a believer matures in Christ, they become fruit-bearing in every respect; but for the limited purpose of our discussion, I am looking at "fruit" as the believer's act of winning others for Christ.

"So shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8) — it is not by profession, but as Jesus said, that those who bear much fruit are shown to be His disciples. The design and tendency of His religion is to stir us to do much good, and to bring forth all our strength, time, and talents in the

work for which Christ laid down His life. A Christian does not remain a follower and disciple of Christ unless they are constantly at work for Jesus, using whatever talents and gifts the Holy Spirit has given them. Let us understand this clearly: no one is without some talent or another, and all of it needs to be deployed in strengthening the Church and advancing the work of the Lord. The apostles obeyed this mandate of Jesus, and went forth preaching the gospel everywhere, aiming to bring all people to the knowledge of the truth.

Further affirmation of this is found in John 15:16, where Jesus says: "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.*" It means that He has placed us, appointed us, set us apart, that we should be rich in good works, faithful and successful in spreading His gospel. This is the great business to which we are set apart as His followers; it is not to be idle, or useless, or simply to seek enjoyment, but to do good, and to spread as widely as possible the rich temporal and spiritual blessings which the gospel is fitted to confer on mankind.

Let us summarise the basic principles of Christianity and the mandate for Christians: sin separated humanity from God; baptism symbolises the rebirth of a Christian in Jesus Christ; God's grace alone redeems us from eternal condemnation; we are saved through the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross; God's grace is at work in the unsaved and the saved alike; Christians are mandated to carry on the evangelical work begun by Jesus Christ; God has chosen us for His work; and Christ is our role model for undertaking this task.

Let us turn, now, to the basics of evangelical work. The first principle of personal evangelism to be considered concerns the fitness of the believer. It may seem a contradiction to say that every Christian ought to be involved in personal evangelism, yet that not every Christian should attempt it without adequate preparation; any attempt at evangelism by those who lack the personal prerequisites for the task can become counter-productive.

These prerequisites include: personal repentance and faith; a thorough knowledge of the message of salvation; a foundation in the Christian life; and a life of perpetual prayer. Those who are not truly converted will give a distorted presentation of the message, for their own prejudices will falsify its heart. Those who are Christians but lack a thorough knowledge of the message will lack the discernment to address the real needs of the hearer. And those who lack a foundation in the Christian life will so intrude themselves into the presentation that the hearer's understanding of the message is blocked off. Finally, without constant communion with God through prayer, nothing can be achieved. God, in His sovereignty, may overrule in a given situation, but it honours God when only mature and committed Christians undertake this work. This is the first principle of personal evangelism.

At the risk of some disagreement, let me say that there are many types of Christians. There are those born into Christian families who take their faith for granted; to them, membership of the Church is rather like membership of an elite club. They may be regular in their giving, to keep the membership in good standing, and interested chiefly in the privileges the Church may offer; for them, the spiritual conduct of the Church is the responsibility of the clergy alone.

Then there are those on the periphery of their Christian faith: some have a measure of spiritual enlightenment, though their purpose may be clouded, without rejecting the truth outright; some desire to understand the Bible, yet are easily frustrated and distracted from it; some are tempted to follow their Christian leaders instead of the Bible and Jesus Christ, which can, at times, bring disastrous results. Some harbour motives that do originate in God and in love for God, yet there is an inner conflict, so that, despite a hatred of sin and a desire to please God, there is slowness in obeying Him. Some may possess a measure of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, mixed, however, with flashes of temper, discouragement, doubt and confusion, and points of one-sidedness and imbalance. Some are festive Christians, seen in church at Christmas, at Easter, and on days of special activity; some are regular in attendance and liberal in giving, and feel satisfied that their responsibilities as Christians have thereby been discharged. There are others who become entangled in the secular philosophy of the world around them, allowing their Christian beliefs to grow rusted; and new converts from other faiths may still harbour beliefs deeply rooted in them which conflict with what the Bible tells us.

There may be many other attributes of the not-fully-committed Christian that one might add to this list. My purpose in setting it out at length is not to condemn such Christians, but to provoke reflection on the depth of one's own faith, and to encourage course correction wherever it is needed. The Church and its elders, too, have an added responsibility to notice such Christians, and to help prepare them to take up the task of evangelism mandated by Jesus Christ.

A word of caution is due, too, to those convinced of their own faith and their personal understanding of the Scriptures: do not try to take on the job of the Holy Spirit. Knowledge alone will not save a person — even Satan knows that Jesus Christ is God, yet is not saved (James 2:19; Matthew 8:29; Mark 1:34, 5:7; Luke 4:34, 8:28). "*Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it*" (Psalm 127:1) — let the Lord use you. Do not try to be the convicting force in your effort to win people for Christ; use the Holy Scriptures and verifiable facts in your presentation to convince their minds, and then let the Holy Spirit do His perfect work of winning them to Christ through faith. When people do turn to the Lord, be careful that they realise it is the Lord who saved them, and not you. All you did was tell the truth; give the

glory to God, where it belongs.

As a last matter for this session, let us consider how to train ourselves for this important task. One could attend an institution or workshop that trains people for evangelistic work, and yet find, when it comes time to put it into practice, that little of what was taught has stayed with one — rather like the television advertisement in which a girl seeks a dentist's advice on how to protect her teeth, and the dentist tells her, "What is the use of telling you, when you will soon forget it?" The question, in the end, is how many of us have actually ventured out and undertaken personal evangelism? I raise this not to point a finger at anyone, but to suggest that we ought to look at practical ways of learning the nuances of personal evangelism, and I firmly believe the Church itself is the best training ground for this.

When Jesus began His earthly ministry and was ready to recruit disciples, He did not try to poach trained men from the Jewish priesthood; rather, He chose fishermen and others like them, from the marketplace — ordinary people, much like you and me, though we may have more education than they did. Jesus then put them through what might be called a "sandwich" programme, lasting some three years, in which theoretical foundation and hands-on experience were given together. The best place to prepare oneself for evangelism remains the local church, provided the church is alive to this need, and plans studies, seminars, workshops and feedback sessions on an ongoing basis, holding the hand of members who desire to serve in this way until they gain the confidence to go on alone.

Let us summarise our deliberations in this session. First, the basic principles of Christianity and the mandate for Christians: sin separated humanity from God; baptism symbolises the rebirth of a Christian in Jesus Christ; God's grace alone redeems us from eternal condemnation; we are saved through the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross; God's grace is at work in the unsaved and the saved alike; Christians are mandated to carry on the evangelical work begun by Jesus Christ; God has chosen us for His work; and Christ is our role model for undertaking this task. Second, the basics of evangelical work: the prerequisites before we embark; a caution to those Christians with a skewed attitude; a caution to those who are ready for Christ's work; and the basics of training for evangelism.

In the next session, we shall deliberate on further aspects of personal evangelism. May Jesus bless you all. Amen.

Part Two

To the traditional Jewish interpretation of the Bible, Israel's character as the chosen people is unconditional, as it is written: *"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to*

be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth." (Deuteronomy 14:2). Speaking of the nation of Israel, we read further: *"The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people."* (Deuteronomy 7:7). While God knew that there were other communities and nations with more people, He chose Israel to be His special people. God did not, however, say that He is the God of the Israelites alone; He had a purpose, to reconcile humanity with Himself, and, *"when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons"* (Galatians 4:4-5). God's choice of time is beyond our comprehension; one possible reason is the complete failure of the Jews to make God known to other communities. Jesus abolished their possessiveness towards God and towards the Law, and established that God is God of all creation, initiating the Church with the mandate that its members should spread the good news to every corner of the world. Can we, as devoted Christians, afford to fail as the Jews did? Can we fail Jesus?

If we cannot, the question we need to answer is this: why aren't more Christians involved in the work of the Lord?

Moses said to God, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant, but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue"; and God responded, *"Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."* (Exodus 4:10-12). Jeremiah, too, pleaded with God, *"Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child"* (Jeremiah 1:6). We, like Moses and Jeremiah, may harbour many inhibitions that keep us from undertaking work for Jesus; but God's assurance was enough for both of them to shed their fear and go forward, and their examples should encourage us to shed our own inhibitions and proclaim the word of God to the rest of the world. Jesus is by our side at all times.

Those deeply concerned for the salvation of souls and the progress of the Church often face discouragement, and the greatest discouragement can be a lack of involvement on the part of fellow Christians, together with the absence of specific plans by the local church to draw believers into this work. Let us look at some of the main reasons why more Christians are not involved in the work of Jesus.

Jesus Christ is a difficult topic to talk about. Almost everyone enjoys a good, lively conversation; strangers can warm to a lengthy discussion on almost any subject, from the weather to the great problems of the world. Jesus Christ, though, is a special topic of conversation. In an age of anxiety, when hearts fail for fear of what is to come, and secular ideologies are everywhere promoted, very few people are neutral about Jesus Christ. Almost everyone who has heard of Him has an opinion:

some are against Him, and resist any discussion of Him; some are frightened of Him, yet would like to find a way to establish a right relationship with Him and thereby secure their eternal peace; others are openly seeking knowledge of who He is and the nature of His coming. Most who discuss Christ realise that the implications of His existence carry far-reaching responsibility for each person, and with a subject of such magnitude, people do not want mere opinions.

Opinions alone become wearisome, and add to the unease of uncertainty; people are seeking, instead, factual data that will help them reach meaningful conclusions and find practical answers to the problems of life. Mankind is seeking evidence that there is hope for the eternity ahead, and a true purpose for life; mankind is also searching for people who have experienced the truth, and can demonstrate through their own lives that there is an answer in Christ Jesus. Anyone can become a source of valued information about Christ in conversation, though information and argument alone will not convince people on spiritual matters; we must remain spiritually sensitive to the topic, and to the inner conflicts of the people we are speaking with.

Another barrier is a wrong view of the local church. Some view the church as an agency that will affect the world simply through its numerical strength, the size of its buildings, and the wealth it accumulates, holding that "if I join up, and support its expansion and its wealth, I am a Christian." This outlook destroys involvement, for it turns the church into an agency: one that allows a member to hire someone else to do their work, so that the preacher does the teaching, the elders the administration, and the rest of the congregation looks merely to be served — attended to, visited, called upon, and applauded — while the church exists for them chiefly on the occasions it assembles. Collective responsibilities are reduced to ushering, leading singing, and making announcements, and there is complaint if one is not given enough public exposure.

A further barrier is a lack of understanding of individual responsibility. A common expression one hears is, "I don't want to get involved" — yet being a Christian means getting involved. *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."* (1 Corinthians 15:58). To be successful, one must involve the believers of the local body; and Paul gives explicit direction in this regard, writing: *"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in*

love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:12-16). In describing the mature Christian, Paul speaks of "speaking the truth in love" — simple to say, but hard to practise. Some of us are good at speaking the truth but forget to love; some are good at love, but lack the courage to be honest when the truth is painful. The instruction is to do both together: think of the trouble we would spare ourselves if we followed this in the Church, going directly to a fellow believer with whom we have a problem, and speaking the truth to them in love.

Some Christians fear that any mistake they make will destroy their witness for the Lord; they see their own weaknesses, and know that many non-Christians seem to possess stronger character than they do. Christ, however, forms us into a body — a group of individuals united in purpose and in love for one another and for the Lord — so that if one stumbles, the rest of the group is there to lift them up and help them walk with God again, and restoration may be found through the Church even as the rest of the body continues to witness to God's truth. Recall the incident recorded in Mark's Gospel: *"And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay."* (Mark 2:3-4). The paralytic's need moved his friends to action; without the teamwork of those four unnamed friends, he could not have been brought before Jesus. As the body of believers, it falls to us, likewise, to team up when needed to carry on the work of the Lord — and, when we recognise another's need, to ask ourselves whether we act on it, or are too preoccupied with our own relationships and concerns to notice those who are trying to find their way to Jesus. As part of Christ's body, do we reflect His character, and carry out our own part in His work?

Let us now turn to the barriers before us in undertaking evangelism. Paul was in prison; he could no longer preach the good news of Christ in freedom, nor minister openly to people's needs, chained as he was to a stock — yet he was able to say that the word of God is not bound (2 Timothy 2:9), and wrote a substantial part of his epistles from within prison walls. There are many roadblocks we may meet in trying to share the good news of Christ, differing from one country and culture to the next, and we cannot ignore them if we are to bring men and women to Christ; yet, having witnessed Christ's saving power, I believe no barrier is strong enough to prevent the spreading of the gospel, which knows neither border nor nationality. The more we know of these barriers, the better we may overcome them, remembering always that with God the impossible becomes possible. Let us look at four: barriers of identity, of

religion, of language, and of society.

On identity: in many countries today, there is a great desire in the hearts of men and women to find their true identity, to be recognised by their country of birth, proud of who they are. This is natural; but as Christian workers, we should look at people as God sees them — for the love of God covers all, whatever the nation, race, language, or colour. When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples to give them power to witness of Christ, people of every nation of the earth were present in Jerusalem, and all heard the disciples glorifying God, each in their own tongue (Acts 2:1-12). Israel, in Bible times, occupied a central position in the known world, a crossroads of communication where ships of many nations passed; God surely had all nations in mind when He sent Jesus there, putting the gospel within reach of the whole earth. In heaven, there will be people of every nation, singing and praising God in every language, as John saw in his vision (Revelation 7:9); the same Jesus who saves one of us saves us all, however different we may be from one another in food, speech, or dress, for the Holy Spirit unites us. Taking a Christian name upon conversion, as is the practice in some countries, does not itself change a life; Christ has not sent us to change people's names or their ways, but to share our Christian life and faith with them, that their lives may be changed by it. The same Spirit that led Philip to the Ethiopian in the desert (Acts 8:26) also led Paul to Europe (Acts 16:6-9), and, by tradition, the apostle Thomas to India, and is the same Spirit that came upon the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), and that is at work among us today. If we are aware that God treats all people alike, we shall be able to overcome barriers of race, colour, religion, and caste, and God can use us not only in our own home and country, but among people very different from ourselves.

On religion: there are many religions in the world, and, in some places, each tribe or region has its own. This is one of the greatest barriers we shall meet in seeking to win people to Christ, and perhaps the very reason we should spread the good news as far and wide as we can. People will often say, "I cannot leave my ancestral religion; I must be loyal to my father's traditions; Christianity is foreign to my ancestors, a Western religion I cannot believe." What can be done when one is met with such a response? First, let such people see the change in your own life; tell them that God loves them, but do not argue, for little is gained by it. Remember Paul: he, too, was loyal to his father's religion and its traditions, and had taken men, women, and children who spoke of Jesus and put them in prison, consenting to the killing of some who bore witness to the good news (Acts 8:1-3) — for him, Christianity was wholly foreign to his culture and his father's religion — yet this same man met Christ, and was ready to set aside all he had been taught before. In Acts 8:9 we read of a man named Simon, who astonished people by his powers of magic; such figures, looked upon as men of great power, sometimes called "godmen," whose blessing was sought for every

celebration, sowing, marriage, or burial, and whose influence today extends even into politics and governance — yet some of these, too, have accepted Jesus as Saviour, their lives entirely changed, their idols burned and their practice of magic abandoned, of their own will, because they had found Christ. There is no barrier the power of the good news cannot break; do not be discouraged in your work of witnessing, nor afraid to share what Christ has done for you, for our Lord is forever the same: *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."* (Matthew 28:18-20). Not even death or hell can stop the spreading of the good news; the Roman Empire tried, and failed. We cannot do it alone, but the Holy Spirit working within us will help us.

On language: we know our own people, and their language, better than anyone else, and this makes it easier for us to follow Christ's pattern of personal evangelism by witnessing at home. When Christ saves us and sends us out to be witnesses of His love, He can also help us overcome language barriers, and to learn other tongues, if He so leads, so that we might share with people of other cultures what Christ has done for us; Paul himself needed no interpreter, knowing Hebrew and Greek, and perhaps other languages besides. A further language barrier is faced by the roughly one-fifth of the world's population who cannot read or write their own language, women making up two-thirds of that number, notwithstanding the many governmental and international efforts made towards education. We cannot hand a Bible or Christian literature to someone who cannot read it, but this need not stop us from seeking to win them for Christ. Consider the example of a church-run outreach that prepares children who have missed schooling, for various socio-economic reasons, to join mainstream schools and hold their heads high among other children; such programmes have, in some cases, brought about a marked change in the outlook and behaviour of those who pass through them. Have you found some way, beyond a financial contribution, to take part in such an outreach? Our Lord Himself overcame this barrier: to the educated Pharisees He appealed to the written word — "Have ye not read . . . ?" (Matthew 19:4) — but to the common people, He spoke of things from their daily life, describing the Kingdom of God through the sower, the wedding feast, the lost coin, so that the common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). Those who cannot read or write can likewise be taught to memorise Scripture, that the word, kept in the heart, might keep them from sin (Psalm 119:11).

On society: the way certain groups are ordered can itself be a barrier to personal evangelism. In some cultures, wisdom is closely associated with age, so that it is thought improper for a younger person to speak to

an elder on matters of faith, and a young person needs particular boldness and courage in such a case. We are not alone in facing such barriers: even Jesus, at twelve years old, spoke with the doctors of the Law, to their amazement, for it was unusual to see such wisdom in one so young (Luke 2:47); later in His ministry, those seeking to hinder His work pointed to His humble background, and even His own family began to question what He was doing (Mark 3:21). When the man born blind, healed by Jesus, tried to tell the Jewish religious leaders that Jesus must have come from God, they would not accept it, considering themselves too wise and too elevated to be taught by him (John 9:28-29, 34). Timothy, the young pastor whom Paul set over the church at Ephesus, faced this same barrier of youth, and Paul wrote to encourage and charge him before the Lord to take up his responsibility regardless (1 Timothy 4:11-12). We, too, may face opposition from those of higher standing, greater education, or greater wealth, who may think us unworthy to speak to them of God's love; but we should never stop sharing the good news, remembering that He who sent us is always with us, and will give us wisdom, just as He did for Timothy.

Finally, in this session, let us deal with some of the critical principles of witnessing. The Scriptures command us to witness: *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."* (Acts 1:8). Peter later declares, *"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses"* (Acts 2:32), and it is written that *"with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all"* (Acts 4:33). The apostles saw the proof of the Resurrection, and presented irrefutable facts to those they addressed. This concept of witnessing is not chiefly about how we feel concerning our faith; though it is true that knowing Christ has taken away our sins and given us eternal life "makes us feel good," this is not, of itself, a valid reason for others to accept Him. A witness in a court of law is not permitted to testify to how they feel about a case, but only to the historical facts — what was said, what was seen — for anything else is hearsay; and, just as a court's verdict rests on the facts and the statute, so salvation rests on the verdict the sinner reaches when they accept Christ as Saviour by faith, that faith proven effective by the historical fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead (Romans 4:25). To answer the doubts of those who do not know Christ, we must ground our reasons in the observable facts of history and the objective teaching of God's word concerning Jesus Christ, for theological discussion that fails to convince people of Christ leads only to the rejection of faith as superstitious folly; we have far more evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ than we do for that of Julius Caesar, whom no educated person doubts ever lived. Satan is active in the world, seeking to confuse people about salvation, so that they do not come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Corinthians

4:4); he does not want the gospel to be clear, nor us to be effective witnesses of it — the answer to his opposition lies in the facts of history and the authority of the word of God.

Knowledge alone of Christ will not save a person: even the demons know who Christ is, yet this knowledge does not save them, for they have chosen to rebel against Him (James 2:19); theological conviction without a genuine spiritual decision only perverts the truth, and we should always encourage others towards a proper commitment once they have encountered the facts concerning Christ.

We must also demonstrate that Christ works in our own lives, for there are consequences to witnessing to others before we apply the truth of Scripture to ourselves: "*For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written*" (Romans 2:24), Paul writes of those who taught God's truth while doing its opposite; and God said to David, through the prophet Nathan, "*Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme*" (2 Samuel 12:14). Part of our own growth lies in locating the flaws and weaknesses in our lives, and correcting or strengthening them, so that we might become, over a lifetime, all that we could be for Christ, and give Him our best.

There are many instances in Scripture of daily opportunities taken to speak to others of Christ and of salvation: Nicodemus, in John chapter three, sought Christ out to ask of eternal life; Philip, in Acts 8:26-38, interrupted a government official puzzling over a passage of Scripture; Paul and Silas, in Acts 16:13-15, sought out a group of pious people ready to hear the Scriptures proclaimed; and Paul speaks, in Acts 20:20-21, of witnessing daily, from house to house. People were reached in synagogues, on the streets, in prisons, at trials, and the gospel even reached into the household of Caesar. Perhaps the most striking of all is Christ's encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, in John chapter four: beginning with a simple, common request for water, Jesus turned the conversation swiftly to spiritual matters, so that the woman who first addressed Him as "Sir" came, by the end of their exchange, to wonder whether He might be the Messiah. There are many other such illustrations in Scripture of how people may be reached with the good news; let us actively seek such opportunities, speaking of Christ as part of our daily conversation, that interested people may hear and respond to the truth. And when the opportunity presents itself, and the person listening shows signs of taking in what we say, let us return them to the basics of Christianity we considered in the previous session.

To sum up this session: why aren't more Christians involved in the work of the Lord; the barriers before us; the basics of witnessing; and the opportunities for witnessing.

In our final session, we shall deliberate on the actual practice of

evangelism. Jesus bless you all. Amen.

Part Three

Jesus knew that He would not always be on earth in a physical sense. He knew, from the start, where He was headed — that rugged Cross upon the hill — but He also knew that the movement He had begun would continue after His return to His Father in Heaven; and He was right, as He always is. Who would have guessed that the body laid in the ground two thousand years ago would rise again, and that His resurrected body, His Church, would grow to include more than two billion people around the world today?

When Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, "*Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men*" (Mark 1:17), He was using imagery relevant to them, though His call applies to all of us: that we should join Him in the work He came to do, which He tells us, repeatedly, is to carry the good news to the four corners of the earth, and to bring sinners to repentance. When we join His company, the gospel becomes like a net, lifting us from dark waters into the light of day and transforming our lives, as it did the lives of His disciples; walking with Jesus teaches us, as it taught them, how He can use us to fish for people, and how we, in turn, may train new converts to cast their own nets into waters never fished before. The gospel makes missionaries of all God's people, for He knows each one of us well: "*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*" (Jeremiah 1:5). What right, then, have we not to be His followers? The question before us is: where are we casting our nets today?

The call to discipleship is on Christ's own terms, not ours. At the end of His ministry, on the day of His crucifixion, Jesus owned nothing but the clothes on His back; the cost to Him was His life, given up as though a criminal's, in obedience to the will of His Heavenly Father, obedient unto death, even death on a Cross. Discipleship of Jesus is radical, and we are often quick to join without counting the cost, called as we are to choose between worldly pleasure and compulsion on the one hand, and the taking-up of the Cross on the other. Jesus determines the conditions of discipleship, and since He is God, we owe Him total obedience and total self-surrender — radical, indeed, by the world's way of thinking, and perhaps the reason many enthusiastically join up, only to quietly quit.

This brings to mind the little donkey on which Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He asked His disciples to go into the village, find a colt on which no one had ever sat, untie it, and bring it to Him. The Lord needed that donkey to fulfil His mission on earth, and He is still using little donkeys to get His work done — the likes of you and me. That donkey had to be released — it was bound, and had to be set free

before the Lord could use it, just as the chains of our own sin must be broken before we, too, can be set free. That donkey had to be ruled — never before ridden, it nonetheless submitted itself to the Lord's control, unfrightened by the crowds or their noise. Our Lord could accomplish His work on earth well enough without us, and yet He chooses to use frail, human instruments for His glory; when we, like that donkey, are released and ruled, He can use us too.

What does it mean to go fishing with Jesus? First, that it should be something we enjoy, not something that fills us with fear or dread — for when we speak of going after other people, many are filled with dread rather than anticipation, yet the fishing analogy can help us see the joy of lives changed by the power of God's love, once we have gone out and landed a few. Another lesson from the analogy is that we must go where the fish are, rather than sitting in the boat, as it were, waiting for them to come to us — the greatest danger being to try to fish only from within the confines of our churches. There is an old illustration of a fishing club whose members did nothing but sit about swapping stories of the fish that got away, never once stepping into a boat or casting a line — what use is such a club, admiring trophies on the wall but never actually fishing? We must also use the right bait: the fishermen of Jesus's day generally used a net, catching many at once rather than one at a time, a valuable lesson in itself; but whatever means we use, we are not trying to trick people for our own purposes, but to find what genuinely interests them, and use it to draw them towards the Kingdom of God, meeting them at the point of their need.

Where, then, do we find people to evangelise? Christ's own encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well remains our best example and role model. The mandate Jesus gave us is explicit — "*unto the uttermost part of the earth*" (Acts 1:8) — and that is now a real possibility, given the technological advances the world has seen; Jesus surely foresaw where the world was moving when He gave us that charge. As for the choice of place for personal evangelism, we need only look to the ministry of our Lord: He preached from a hilltop, from a boat, walking on the water, from a burial place, even while nailed to the Cross. People are to be found everywhere — in schools, offices, the marketplace, our own neighbourhoods, on buses, in the metro, on aeroplanes, in hospitals, in banks, in shopping centres; all that is needed is the desire to speak of Jesus and the salvation He offers.

Consider, then, some pointers as to whom we might evangelise. An unbelieving family member is, perhaps, our first priority, being closest to us and best known to us; Jesus wants the whole family to be with Him, as He told Noah: "*Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.*" (Genesis 7:1). Relatives, friends, classmates, and co-workers are, likewise, accessible to us, and known well enough that we may understand how best to

reach them, as it is written: "*Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.*" (Ezekiel 3:17). Other Christians, too, may not yet have experienced the Holy Spirit's fuller work; we have already noted the many attributes of Christians who carry, so to speak, a chip on the shoulder, and it falls to their fellow believers to counsel them spiritually. It is not uncommon to come across a Christian, one seen quite regularly at Sunday worship, who makes the astonishing claim to be entirely without sin, and has never sinned, wondering aloud why Christians confess sin week after week, when, as they see it, no other religious community makes such a confession of itself. In Matthew 10:6, Jesus tells His disciples to go, likewise, to the "lost sheep" — much of the New Testament's epistles being written to first-generation churches and their members, amid the confusion and false teaching that beset them.

Other categories of people deserving our evangelical attention include: those who are suffering (Matthew 9:12; Luke 4:18-19); the sick and demon-possessed (Mark 1:32-34, 2:1-12; Acts 5:12-16); the poor, materially or spiritually (Luke 4:18; James 2:5; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31); orphans and widows (Exodus 22:22-24; Jeremiah 49:11); those in trial or tribulation (Isaiah 48:10; Exodus 2:23-25); those who are disappointed or in trouble (compare Psalm 50:15, 107:10-32); those bound by sin (1 Timothy 1:15; Luke 19:1-10, 7:36-50, 15:1-7); and those who sincerely hunger for righteousness (Matthew 5:6).

Such tools as the "wordless book," or coloured cards, may also be used, each colour denoting a stage in the history of mankind's relationship with God: black, for mankind's separation from God; red, for the death of Jesus on the Cross, and our redemption; white, for the resurrection of Jesus, and salvation; and gold, for the way to God opened through Jesus, and eternal life.

There is much, too, that can be done in collaboration with the local church. One might invite a non-Christian friend to accompany one to a church service — taking care not to make too much of it beforehand — and, afterwards, at a suitable moment, speak with them about it, letting their response guide any further invitations to services or other church programmes. One might invite non-Christian families to a cottage Bible study or prayer meeting; Lenten studies are a particularly good occasion for this, though it is wise to let other Christians present know beforehand that a non-Christian guest may be there, so that no one says anything that might give offence, and the guest is given the chance to hear something of others' personal testimony. If a non-Christian friend is under some stress, one might visit them together with another Christian friend — not to attempt to counsel them, but simply to engage them in everyday conversation, and to pray for them quietly when the visit ends.

One might participate, too, in as many of the church's own social outreach programmes as possible, looking for opportunities to speak with those taking part; and participating in a Bible-distribution ministry, such as the Gideons, is itself a fine way of doing evangelism, requiring only that one hand out the Scriptures to those one meets. There are, no doubt, many more such approaches, and we can be creative in how we go about the work of personal evangelism.

Let us conclude by summarising all that we have considered across these three sessions. In the first, we considered the basic principles of Christianity and the mandate given to Christians, and the basics of evangelical work — its prerequisites, its cautions, and its training. In the second, we asked why more Christians are not involved in the work of the Lord, and considered the barriers before us, the basics of witnessing, and our opportunities for it. And in this last session, we have considered what it means to be part of Jesus's team, what it means to go fishing with Him, the pleasures of discipleship, where we might find people to evangelise, and how we might go about it, in collaboration with the local church.

Let us pray. Merciful Master, Jesus Christ, we know that Your will is not for us to accept only well-defined tasks, and to work merely at the direction of others; Your wish, today, Lord, is that we be mingled with the masses. You desire us to plunge into a world that has wandered far from the path of truth. Lord, in complete forgetfulness of ourselves, may we become meeting places between You and our brothers and neighbours, that You may be for them no longer a distant and unknown God, but a Father close at hand. In Your precious name. Amen.