

**Romans (62):
What the Law teaches about Faith and Works (2)**

Today we will continue to examine the nature of saving faith which will also lead us to consider the practice of biblical evangelism and what it entails. The context of the paragraph before us today, which is **Romans 10:5-13**, is Paul showing the scriptural (i.e. Old Testament) reason and evidence for God bestowing salvation upon the Gentiles but not upon Israel. Here is our passage:

⁵For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that “the person who does the commandments shall live by them.” ⁶But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ or “‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. ¹³For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

In **verses 5 and 6** Paul described the two ways that God has ordained by which a state of righteousness may be obtained before Him. By righteousness we are speaking of a quality of being right with God, even to be like God in holiness. A righteous man is one who is able to dwell with God, for He is holy as God Himself is holy. The two possible ways in which a man may attain to this righteous standing before God are (1) through behaving righteously, that is, by obeying all of God’s commandments fully without committing any transgression, or (2) through receiving the gift of righteousness that God bestows freely by His grace upon true believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through good works or through faith, these are the only two possible ways that a man may stand before God. The first way, righteous standing before God by means of obedience to God’s law, is required of all human beings born into this world. God had established with Adam, our common father, a covenant based on attaining righteousness through works; he was to earn God’s blessing through keeping the law of God. When Adam sinned, however, righteousness for him and his descendants was no longer attainable through works, for the transgression of the one law by Adam broke the covenant of works that God had made with mankind through Adam. But though the way of righteousness was no longer possible through keeping the law, the covenant of works has continued to be in force with all people everywhere, with everyone born into God’s world. The only way for people to attain righteousness since the fall of Adam, therefore, is through God’s grace of granting the gift of righteousness through faith alone. The one exception, of course, is the Lord Jesus. He merited eternal life for Himself and all His people through keeping the covenant of works on their behalf. He was born to a virgin, thereby not incurring the guilt of Adam’s transgression. He was born without sin or its guilt and throughout His life He kept God’s law perfectly as a covenant of works; therefore, death could not hold Him. The Father raised Him on the third day for He was righteous, undeserving of death.

Now some tend to esteem the righteousness that is based upon keeping God’s law is a terrible thing. They speak of the law of God in a derogatory manner. They think little of God’s law. But that is not how we should view the righteousness of God attained through the works of the law. As we just stated, the righteousness of the law is the very righteousness that our Lord Jesus attained through His active obedience to the law of God throughout his life and His passive obedience to God’s law onto death. We should have high regard for the righteousness based on the law. The problem lies with us, not God’s law. For sinners to attempt to gain righteousness through the works of the law is great error. To do so when one has the knowledge of the gift of righteousness through faith alone, is heresy, even foolishness (cf. Gal. 3:1, 3). But

the righteousness which is based upon the law is not evil. “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). The righteousness based upon the law is impossible for sinners to attain, but it was the righteousness that the Lord Jesus attained for Himself and for all His people. The righteousness that Jesus acquired through the works of the law is bestowed as a gift upon all who believe on Him.

Verses 6 and 7 show that the attaining of righteousness through faith alone is an easy matter to see realized in one’s life. It does not require great effort, even fighting your way into heaven or struggling to escape death.

Here too the truth to be emphasized is that *the really difficult task is not for us to undertake. It has been accomplished for us by Christ.* It is he who came down from heaven, dwelt among us as in a tent (John 1:14), suffered the agonies of hell for us, died, was buried, rose again, ascended into heaven. *The hard work was accomplished by him!* Therefore, any attempt on our part to ascend to heaven to bring Christ down would amount to a most ungracious denial of the reality and value of Christ’s incarnation. Similarly, any attempt to descend into the realm of the dead in order to bring Christ up from the dead would be a disavowal of the genuine character and meaning of Christ’s glorious resurrection from the dead and triumph over the grave.¹

The matter is as easy and attainable as expressing faith in Christ with one’s mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in one’s heart that God did indeed raise Jesus from the dead. The righteousness based on faith says, “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.” As we read in **verse 8ff.**

⁸But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Rom. 10:8-10)

The antecedent of the pronoun “it” in verse 8 is “the righteousness based on faith.”² “It” says that faith is seen in a public confession, which speaks forth from a heart with the conviction of what God has done in Jesus Christ. God was in Christ reconciling the world onto Himself. God exonerated all people of true faith when He raised Jesus from the dead, proving by that act that He had accepted Christ’s death as a satisfaction for the guilt of their sins. The faith that justifies the guilty sinner is of the heart, a deep-settled conviction of the truth of what God did in Christ. That faith is manifest in the believer’s open confession of his faith in Jesus Christ. He is thereby saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

We then read in **verses 11 through 13:**

For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Once again we see the apostle quote Scripture to validate his teaching. Here he quotes two Old Testament Scripture verses. He quoted from **Isaiah 28:16** which reads, “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’” He also quoted from **Joel 2:32**, which reads, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

Verses 11 through 13 are not describing what happens at the initial point when faith is placed in Jesus Christ for salvation; rather, it looks forward to what will happen on the Day of Judgment for the one who has faith in Jesus Christ. He “will not be put to shame.” And although it is speaking of a confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, it is describing a life that is characterized by calling upon the Lord. The point is this, the

¹ William Hendriksen, *Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1980, 1981), p. 344.

² Notice how Paul personified this doctrines as though it were a person instructing how and what a person is to believe.

description of saving faith in these verses is not to a one time decision for Christ, and accepting of Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior, it is describing the life of a true believer. He knows and believes and confesses that Jesus is Lord and is the only hope of salvation. He calls upon the Lord throughout his life; he is a believer. That one will not be put to shame on the day of judgment; rather, he will be exonerated of all guilt, for he will stand in the righteousness of Jesus Christ that was freely credited to him through his faith alone. He will be saved on the Day of Judgment (as Paul then proves from citing Joel 2:23), for "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" on that Day.

Now this passage is commonly cited in evangelistic crusades and employed in personal evangelism in order to lead people to believe on Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. There several important matters that arise that we would do well to discuss and understand. First, we should be aware of the common errant belief in "**decisional regeneration.**" This is the common but erroneous doctrine that people are born again through faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, it is believed that if the sinner decides to believe on Jesus as Lord and Savior, *the result* of that decision is that he becomes born again. The new birth, or being born again, is also known as regeneration. It is wrongly assumed that regeneration is the result of faith, when the Bible makes it very clear that regeneration, or the new birth, is the result of and due to the sovereign work of God; it is not due to the will of man. In other words, faith does not result in regeneration; regeneration results in faith.

Let us consider this important matter. First, we affirm that the Scriptures clearly teach that the new birth is essential to salvation. Our Lord Jesus made this very clear to Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel. We read in **John 3:3ff** these words:

³Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

⁵Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:3-7)

Here the Lord Jesus teaches of the necessity for the new birth, but He never gave instruction to Nicodemus how to be born again. In fact, Jesus taught directly that the new birth was due to a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit, not due to the will of man. Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8). The Holy Spirit is sovereign in bringing about the new birth in the experience of a sinner who is spiritually dead.

John's Gospel declares forthrightly that the new birth is a result of God's grace, not man's decision. We read in John 1:11ff: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, *nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*" God is sovereign in the ones that He creates spiritual life. People are born again due to the supernatural power of God in the soul which God wills to occur, not man. One of the manifestations of this new birth is saving faith in Jesus Christ.

But it is wrongly assumed by many that faith in Jesus Christ brings about the new birth. Their assumptions lead them to develop evangelistic methods and a message based upon their erroneous views of regeneration. Here is an assessment of the problem by **James Adams** in his book, *Decisional Regeneration*. Now this is a very lengthy quote, but it gives a good description of the problem.

We have an illustration of "Decisional Regeneration" when a popular present-day preacher prescribes a counseling procedure. He directs "Mr. Soul Winner" to ask an unconverted "Mr. Blank" a series of questions. If "Mr. Blank" says "yes" to all the questions, he is asked to pray a prescribed prayer and is then pronounced saved. For the most part this counseling results in an individual being

“regenerated” through a decision. This is essentially the same counseling method used in large evangelistic crusades across the world. These campaigns are like huge factories turning out as many as ten thousand “decisions” in a week.

Mr. Iain Murray, in his timely book *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, points out that this same type of counseling is used in youth work: “For example, a booklet, which is much circulated in student evangelism at the present time, lays down ‘Three simple steps’ to becoming a Christian first, personal acknowledgment of sin, and second, personal belief in Christ's substitutionary work. These two are described as preliminary, but 'the third so final that to take it will make me a Christian. . . I must come to Christ and claim my personal share in what He did for everybody. This all-decisive third step rests with me; Christ ‘waits patiently until I open the door. Then He will come in....’ Once I have done this I may immediately regard myself as a Christian. The advice follows ‘Tell somebody today what you have done.’”

There are many variations of this type of counseling, but they all have in common a mechanical element such as the repeating of a prayer or signing of a card upon the performance of which the individual is assured of his salvation. Regeneration has thereby been reduced to a procedure which man performs. How differently did Jesus Christ deal with sinners. He did not have any instant salvation process. He did not speak to people with a stereotyped presentation. He dealt with every individual on a personal basis. Never in the New Testament do we find Christ dealing with any two persons in the same manner. It is enlightening to compare how differently He dealt with Nicodemus in John 3, and then with the woman at the well in John 4. Counseling needs to be personal.

There are a number of other problems with a mechanical counseling. Mr. Murray has pointed out the fact that on the basis of this counseling “a man may make a profession without ever having his confidence in his own ability shattered; he has been told absolutely nothing of his need of a change of nature which is not within his own power, and consequently, if he does not experience such a radical change, he is not dismayed. He was never told it was essential so he sees no reason to doubt whether he is a Christian. Indeed, the teaching he has come under consistently militates against such doubts arising. It is frequently said that a man who has made a decision with little evidence of a change of life may be a ‘carnal’ Christian who needs instruction in holiness, or if the same individual should gradually lose his new-found interests, the fault is frequently attributed to lack of ‘follow-up,’ or prayer, or some other deficiency on the part of the Church. The possibility that these marks of worldliness and falling away are due to the absence of a saving experience at the outset is rarely considered; if this point were faced, then the whole system of appeals, decisions and counseling would collapse, because it would bring to the fore the fact that change of nature is not in man's power, and that it takes much longer than a few hours or days to establish whether a professed response to the gospel is genuine. But instead of facing this, it is protested that to doubt whether a man who has ‘accepted Christ’ is a Christian is tantamount to doubting the Word of God, and that to abandon ‘appeals’ and their adjuncts is to give up evangelism altogether.”

The counseling of “Decisional Regeneration” produces statistics that would encourage any Christian—until he follows up the so-called converts. In one heartbreaking experience forty “converts” of such counseling were contacted and only one person of these forty was found who appeared to be a Christian. One lady may have been reached, but what were the effects of the encounter on the other thirty-nine? Some of them may believe their eternal destinies were determined by their decisions, which is a fatal confidence if no change was wrought in their hearts and lives. The others may have concluded that they had experienced all that Christianity has to offer. Failing to feel or see any promised change in themselves, they have become convinced that Christianity is a fake and that those who hold it are either self-deluded fanatics or miserable hypocrites.

Robert Dabney, one of the great theologians of the nineteenth century, made some very penetrating observations concerning the disillusionment of people that have been counseled for a decision. Some of these individuals, he said, “feel that a cruel trick has been played upon their inexperience by the ministers and friends of Christianity in thus thrusting them, in the hour of their confusion, into false positions, whose duties they do not and cannot perform, and into sacred professions which they have been compelled shamefully to repudiate. Their self respect is therefore galled to the quick, and pride is indignant at the humiliating exposure. No wonder that they look on religion and its

advocates henceforward with suspicion and anger. Often their feelings do not stop here. They are conscious that they were thoroughly in earnest in their religious anxieties and resolves at the time, and that they felt strange and profound exercises. Yet bitter and mortifying experience has taught them that their new birth and experimental religion at least was a delusion. How natural to conclude that those of all others are delusions also? They say 'the only difference between myself and these earnest Christians is, that they have not yet detected the cheat as I have. They are now not a whit more convinced of their sincerity and of the reality of their exercises than I once was of mine. Yet I know there was no change in my soul; I do not believe that there is in theirs.' Such is the fatal process of thought through which thousands have passed; until the country is sprinkled all over with infidels, who have been made such by their own experience of spurious religious excitements. They may keep their hostility to themselves in the main; because Christianity now 'walks in her silver slippers'; but they are not the less steeled against all saving impressions of the truth." Dabney penned these words a hundred years ago, long before the days of the "mass evangelism" and highly organized campaigns. If a hundred years ago the country was "sprinkled all over with infidels, who had been made such by their own experience of spurious religious excitements," what must be the situation today? This is a serious question for every Christian. To have led men, even sincerely, into false hope will be an awful condemnation for a Christian when he stands before Almighty God.

The point is this. We want to assure true converts of salvation. But we should be loathe to bolster the delusions of unconverted people that they are saved from God's judgment. Let us not be guilty of the same sin of the false prophets in the days of Jeremiah who assured the people of Jerusalem that the wrath of God was upon them, saying, "Peace, peace", when there was no peace.

Tied up with this errant belief in decisional regeneration, is the errant practice of **decisionism**. This is the effort to secure decisions for Jesus Christ by leading the sinner to pray to "receive" Christ. It is assumed that if the sinner prays the sinner's prayer, *then he has exercised saving faith through that sinner's prayer* and that the new "believer" should then be affirmed that he has received salvation. The problem is that we cannot know if those who prayed the sinner's prayer truly are born again and whether or not they are exercising true faith. The one who is "leading" this sinner in this confession simply cannot know if God has truly performed a work of regeneration in the soul.

Please do not misunderstand. There are some people genuinely converted through the gospel witness that was in the form that we have been describing. I recall recently an event years ago in Sacramento. A lady who had been visiting our church for some weeks asked me to call upon her close friend for she was concerned for her health and her spiritual well-being. I visited with this woman who went by the name, "Flo." She was very distraught and clearly not in good health. I learned that she was a drunk, who hit the bars night after night. I witnessed to her, telling her of sin and the Savior. She did not look at me but rather appeared quite afraid of me. I asked her if she desired to ask God to forgive her of her sins and for her to ask Jesus Christ to have mercy upon her and save her from her sins. She immediately dropped on her knees in front of me and began praying out loud. I led her in prayer. She increasingly became exercised in her emotions and she began to hyperventilate. She laid back on her couch attempting to calm down. I was concerned for her well-being so I called 911 for her. The ambulance came and the medics treated her and then took her to the hospital. The emergency worker assured me that she was okay although her health was not good. That was a Saturday morning. The next day, Sunday morning, her friend again came to church. I asked her how her friend, Flo, was doing. She told me that Flo had come home from the hospital in the late afternoon, but she died later at home that night. The Lord does save some people when they sincerely exercise saving faith as expressed in a prayer of repentance and faith.

But although some people may be converted through such means, it is a problem when well meaning Christian workers assure people they are saved simply because they have prayed a sinner's prayer. Perhaps the best evangelism program available is called "**Evangelism Explosion.**" **D. James Kennedy** who put together the program was a reformed Presbyterian pastor. But the evangelistic method promotes leading people in the sinner's prayer. But here are his words on **page 112** of his book, *Evangelism Explosion*:

Do be conservative in your estimation of what happens on your visit. You may see a profession of faith. Only time will tell if your prospect was born again, accepted the Lord, and was converted.”³

I believe that he is absolutely right in his statement. But since that it is a true statement, it has implications. This is what I wrote in the margin of my book: “If this is so (and it is), then who has the authority to tell those professors they have eternal life?” You see, if we cannot know, then we are wrong to make such pronouncements to these people who pray the sinner’s prayer that they have become saved. People are saved through faith, not through prayer (although true faith will find expression in true prayer). Much prayer may be offered but true faith may not be present. Asking God to do something (“Please save me!”) is different than trusting that God has already made provision in Christ for sinners. True faith is an unseen thing to us until it begins to betray itself in a person’s attitudes, convictions, and actions.

This problem of shallow or superficial evangelism is seen in many evangelical churches in their use of the invitation system that they employ at the conclusion of their church services. Here is an assessment of a Reformed Baptist, **Fred Zaspel**:

It would be all but impossible to give an accurate description of the modern evangelical church without mention of the invitation system, or the “altar call,” as it is called. The altar call is a custom in virtually all Evangelical, Fundamentalist, Wesleyan, Pentecostal, and Charismatic circles. Immediately following the sermon the congregation will sing a hymn during which the preacher calls men and women to walk to the front of the auditorium (the “altar”) to make a public decision to “accept Christ.” Salvation is offered to all who will but come to the front and take it. Those who come receive the personal attention of a counselor and are instructed what to pray, and so on. They may be taken to a private “inquiry room,” or they may kneel together at the front of the auditorium and speak together softly while the congregation is singing.

I say this is the custom. Indeed, it is all but universal in the evangelical world, and it is considered to be an essential part of evangelism. In fact, those who do not observe the custom are generally held to be “liberal” or at least “unconcerned” about evangelism. The invitation system is an essential feature of the modern evangelical church...

What is often shocking to many who use the modern invitation system is that the altar call is just that modern. The practice, although widespread, is a very new phenomenon in the Christian church. For nearly nineteen centuries no one had ever heard of the practice. Such well known evangelists as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and even John Wesley had never even heard of such a custom. And Charles Spurgeon, that passionate winner of souls par excellence, although well acquainted with the practice, firmly refused to adopt it and even criticized it severely.

Ironically, “the old fashioned altar call” was unheard of until the nineteenth century. It first came into being by the influence of Charles Finney, the pioneer of modern evangelistic methods. In Finney’s crusades (c. 1830) seats at the front were reserved for those who, after the sermon, would respond to the challenge to come to the Lord’s side. Those who were thus “anxious” for their souls were invited to walk forward to the “anxious seat” where counsel and prayer would be given them. The following quote from Finney’s *Lectures on Revival* explains his view well.

“Preach to him, and at the moment he thinks he is willing to do anything. . . bring him to the test; call on him to do one thing, to make one step that shall identify him with the people of God. . . . If you say to him, “there is the anxious seat, come out and avow your determination to be on the Lord’s side,” and if he is not willing to do a small thing as that, then he is not willing to do anything for Christ.”

The practice was designed to force decisions, to get results. So it did, and with slight variations the new method spread with increasing popularity through Finney and, later, Dwight L. Moody, and finally into virtually all of nineteenth and twentieth century evangelicalism. Peter Cartwright, Sam Jones, R. A.

³ D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion* (Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), p. 112.

Torrey, Billy Sunday, Bob Jones, Gipsy Smith, Mordacai Ham, John R. Rice, Billy Graham all employed the method with impressive success. The invitation system had come to stay.⁴

Charles Spurgeon addressed the invitation system and the effort to gain professions of faith from people who seemed to be concerned for their souls. In his book entitled *The Soul Winner*, Spurgeon wrote:

But, still, all hurry to get members into the church is most mischievous, both to the church and to the supposed converts. I remember very well several young men, who were of good moral character, and religiously hopeful; but instead of searching their hearts, and aiming at their real conversion, the pastor never gave them any rest till he had persuaded them to make a profession. He thought that they would be under more bonds to holy things if they professed religion, and he felt quite safe in pressing them, for “they were so hopeful.” He imagined that to discourage them by vigilant examination might drive them away, and so, to secure them, he made them hypocrites. These young men are, at the present time, much further off from the Church of God than they would have been if they had been affronted by being kept in their proper places, and warned that they were not converted to God. It is a serious injury to a person to receive him into the number of the faithful unless there is good reason to believe that he is really regenerate. I am sure it is so, for I speak after careful observation. Some of the most glaring sinners known to me were once members of a church; and were, as I believe, led to make a profession by undue pressure, well-meant but ill-judged. Do not, therefore, consider that soul-winning is or can be secured by the multiplication of baptisms, and the swelling of the size of your church. What mean these dispatches from the battle-field? “Last night, fourteen souls were under conviction, fifteen were justified, and eight received full sanctification.” I am weary of this public bragging, this counting of unhatched chickens, this exhibition of doubtful spoils. Lay aside such numberings of the people, such idle pretence of certifying in half a minute that which will need the testing of a lifetime. Hope for the best, but in your highest excitements be reasonable. Enquiry-rooms are all very well; but if they lead to idle boastings, they will grieve the Holy Spirit, and work abounding evil.”⁵

The problem really lies here: **What is biblical evangelism?** Biblical evangelism, in contrast to what is commonly assumed today, is always seen to be *the faithful proclamation of the message* of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Evangelism is not to be defined as the securing of results, in other words, professions of faith. If we faithfully proclaim the gospel to our community, we will have evangelized this community, even if no one appears to have been converted.

J. I. Packer once wrote a book some years back entitled *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, which is an excellent book on the subject. The first subject he addressed was the definition of evangelism. Here are some of his words:

What is evangelism? It might be expected that evangelical Christians would not need to spend time discussing this question. In view of the emphasis that Evangelicals always, and rightly, lay on the primacy of evangelism, it would be natural to assume that we were all perfectly unanimous as to what evangelism is. Yet in fact much of the confusion in present-day debates about evangelism arises from a lack of agreement about this point. The root of the confusion can be stated in a sentence. It is our widespread and persistent habit of defining evangelism in terms, not of a message delivered, but an effect produced in our hearers. . . .⁶

The point is this: when evangelism becomes defined as winning people to Christ, a shift takes place. The emphasis is no longer on the *message*, but on the *method*. Again, J. I. Packer set the issue forward quite clearly.

⁴ Fred Zaspel, *The Altar Call: Is It Harmful or Helpful?*

⁵ Charles Spurgeon *The Soul Winner* (Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 18f.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1961, p. 37).

While we must always remember that it is our responsibility to proclaim salvation, we must never forget that it is God Who saves. It is God Who brings men and women under the sound of the gospel, and it is God who brings them faith in Christ. Our evangelistic work is the instrument that He uses for this purpose, but the power that saves is not the instrument: it is in the hand of the One who uses the instrument. . . And if we forget that only God can bring faith, we shall start to think that the making of converts depends, in the last analysis, not on God, but on us, and that the decisive factor is the way in which we evangelize. And this line of thought, consistently followed through, will lead us far astray.

Let us work this out. If we regard it as our job, not simply to present Christ, but actually to produce converts--to evangelize, not only faithfully, but also successfully--our approach to evangelism would become pragmatic and calculating. We should conclude that our basic equipment, both for personal dealing and for public preaching, must be twofold. We must have not merely a clear grasp of the meaning and application of the gospel, but also an irresistible technique for inducing a response. We should, therefore, make it our business to try and develop such a technique. And we should evaluate all evangelism, our own and other people's, by the criterion, not only of the message preached, but also of visible results. If our own efforts were not bearing fruit, we should conclude that our technique still needed improving. If they were bearing fruit, we should conclude that this justified the technique we had been using. We should regard evangelism as an activity involving a battle of wills between ourselves and those to whom we go, a battle in which victory depends on our firing off a heavy enough barrage of calculated effects. Thus our philosophy of evangelism would become terrifyingly similar to the philosophy of brainwashing. And we would no longer be able to argue, when such a similarity is asserted to be a fact, that this is not a proper conception of evangelism. For it would be a proper conception of evangelism, if the production of converts was really our responsibility.⁷

The point is this: when evangelism becomes defined as winning people to Christ, a shift takes place. The emphasis is no longer on the *message*, but on the *method*.

I speak from personal experience about this. Years ago I began my ministry as quite a young associate pastor in a very aggressive "soul-winning" church. I was trained in a method of witnessing that was designed to obtain professions of faith through praying the "sinner's prayer." I became quite competent in gaining "converts" through this means and was before long given the responsibility to be the staff soul-winner. Each week through visiting door-to-door I was able to obtain about six professions of faith through personal soul-winning. On the weekends working in a bus ministry and junior church anywhere from one to two dozen professions of faith would be obtained. Over time my technique became more refined until I was able to lead about 50% of people in the sinner's prayer in those instances where an entire presentation could be given. However, over time it became quite apparent even to me in those days of my naiveté that the lives of these people were not reflecting the true life in Christ that is depicted in the Scriptures or what the Lord Himself had brought to bear in my life. There were reasons offered for the poor response and dismal return of these "converts" to church. "What was needed was a follow-up program." But after one had been devised and implemented, no difference was seen. Eventually I came to see the flawed methodology of decisionism and became more intent on making known a true and full message of salvation through my witness. The numbers of people who have come to Christ have been far fewer than the several thousands of early professions, but now they seem to go on in the faith giving evidence of a sound work of grace in their lives. The point again is this: Although I thought that I was evangelizing in those early days, because I was not proclaiming a true gospel message, I was not evangelizing at all. Only after I came to bear witness to the biblical message of salvation did I really begin to do biblical evangelism.

Now in contrast to J. I. Packer's position that was set forward above (and mine in this study), consider the book by George Barna, *Evangelism that Works*. The title itself suggests that Barna views evangelism not principally as a message to be proclaimed faithfully regardless of the kind of response that may come; rather, for Barna evangelism is a method to be employed that he assures gets results. This book was written by an author who has been significantly shaping the way that evangelical pastors and churches do ministry. Amazingly, if you scanned this book you would not find one section devoted to the content of the message. There are references to the "gospel" throughout, but there is no substance of teaching respecting its content.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 27f.

So here is a book on evangelism in which the content of the gospel is not defined, but claims it is a book setting forth a strategy for a kind of “evangelism that works.” Barna published this book in 1995 setting forth a view of evangelism that Packer sought to correct in his book in 1961. It would seem that evangelicals have not heeded the voice of warning and correction. It is not my intention to take shots at Barna; rather, I mention his book because it reflects so clearly the outlook of evangelicals in general including many evangelical leaders. The issue is this, stated first positively: ***The true biblical gospel is a message that is contained in the Scriptures that is to be proclaimed fully and faithfully to every generation. It has been the same message since the first days of Christianity. It needs to be understood fully by Christians and made known fully to every creature possible.*** Stated negatively, ***the gospel is not a method by which decisions for Christ are secured. The nature or content of the Gospel is not to be shaped by the hearers of any individual societal setting.***

Since the gospel is a message that is contained in the Bible and is to be proclaimed faithfully, then the content of that gospel must be understood clearly. This means that Christians, who desire to be soul-winners, must be avid students of doctrine. For the gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of doctrines, that is, biblical teachings about subjects of God’s Triune and holy nature, God’s Law, His justice, and His wrath, as well as an understanding of His love, His mercy and grace. In addition, there must be understanding of who Christ is, His deity and humanity, redemption through His blood, His resurrection, His present ministry of mediation as Prophet, Priest, and King. Furthermore, there must be an understanding of doctrines of repentance, faith, perseverance, as well as an understanding of the Kingdom of God, of Christ’s coming and the Day of Judgment. These are doctrines that are part of the gospel. To neglect doctrine drains the gospel of substance. Strip the gospel of substantive doctrine and you end up with another gospel. Departure from the biblical gospel can occur quite easily and quickly. Paul could write to the churches of Galatia, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.” They had departed from the gospel to a substitute because they had departed from the doctrine that Paul had left with them.

This brings us to our final word, then we will close. We affirm that ***the Bible alone is the rule by which all matters of faith and practice are to be assessed, and that we are always to be assessing the content of our message as to whether or not it is a balanced Bible-based message.*** The concern that I have respecting the message of evangelicals is that it does not fully reflect what the Bible sets forth as the way of salvation. May the Lord help us to understand the gospel of salvation better so that God may bless our efforts of proclaiming the gospel to the salvation of souls, for it is “the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). Let us faithfully proclaim the gospel and pray and trust God to convert sinners unto Himself.