

# Where Does Evangelism Fit In?

By Craig Cooper

I believe that over the next decade we will see the start of a harvest of souls that we have all been praying for. As we talk about the harvest what place in the big puzzle does the piece of evangelism play?

Some denominations that have reformed (calvanism) theology believe that there should be very little emphasis on evangelism. They believe that in God's sovereignty He takes care of who gets saved and who does not. At the other end of the theological spectrum you have denominations that believe evangelism is the highest priority of the church.

Let's look at some scriptures and see if we can determine what priority evangelism is in the Bible. Whatever we find there should then be how we order our lives.

Let's look at a situation in the book of Matthew where the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him what was the most important thing to do. Let's read these familiar passages again because here Jesus is setting once and for all the priority of our lives.

*Matt. 22:34-40 (NIV) <sup>34</sup>Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. <sup>35</sup>One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup>"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup>Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

We see from this the order of priorities that we are to have in our lives. First, we ought to be lovers of God, then second, lovers of others. From this fairly definitive statement we come to realize that our highest priority is our vertical relationships with God. After that comes our horizontal relationships with others – which includes evangelism.

Well, what about the Great Commission? Doesn't that mean that evangelism should be the highest priority?

*Matt. 28:17-20 (NIV) <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* No, the great commission was given after the two great commandments were given. The great commission is simply a practical application of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. Jesus is saying you have known me (1<sup>st</sup> commandment), now I give you authority to go to your neighbors and tell them about your relationship with me. The Great Commission is *commissioning* them to go and do the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. Evangelism flows out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment to love your neighbors by giving them the good news.

It is very important in the days ahead that we keep our priorities straight. We can win all of the people in the world but if we lose our first love we will be getting our priorities out of order.

*Rev. 2:2-4 (NIV) <sup>2</sup>I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. <sup>3</sup>You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup>Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.*

In this passage we find the church working very hard, even to the point of weariness, but Jesus rebuked the church not because of their hard work but because they lost their focus. In the midst of all their hard work they forgot to follow the first commandment. They were busily doing the second commandment of loving their neighbors but this did not impress God.

There are some things to remember as we go forward – love the people – but don't stop loving the Lord more. Everything is to flow out of our love for God.

*John 5:19 (NIV) <sup>19</sup>Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.*

If we don't keep things in the right order then our works (even salvations) will become our identity instead of having our identity in Jesus. But this I know, as we love on the Father that very love will spill over out of our lives onto others. This is the best evangelism possible. It will be a natural act not one that we do out of obligation or legalism.

When we love people after first loving God then our love will be pure. There will be nothing in us to try and manipulate people into coming to God for some wrong reason. We just love people as God loves us. When our lives overflow with love by being in God's presence it will naturally draw people.

True love is like the love shown to the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. There was nothing to gain by showing compassion to the abused man on the side of the road. But Jesus was saying that is who our neighbor is. We are to minister unselfishly to them. But we can only do this over time by first being ministered to by the Lord Himself. Our love that we receive from being in the Father's presence will be the vehicle that sweeps people into the kingdom. I love what Bob Sorge says in *The Fire of God's Love*, Oasis House Ministries, 1996:

*We are to love the sinners whom God is calling to Himself just as much as we love those who already believe. God is reserving a baptism of love for His last-days Church that will transform her into a fire blaze of passionate concern for the lost. No amount of rejection will be able to extinguish this fire for the lost because the intensity of the fire is in no way regulated by people's response, but by the love of God being shed abroad in the heart. You can pour as much water on a burning oil well as you might want; you're not going to extinguish the flame because it's being fed by an underground supply. The only way to stop the flame is to cut off the inner supply. Evangelistic efforts fueled by people's responses are sure to fizzle out; evangelistic fervor that is fueled by God's love from within can face any human or demonic obstacle without diminishment.*

Many people don't desire to evangelize. The reason is simple. We don't love others when we don't spend enough time loving God. At the other extreme, people often get burned out doing evangelism. The reason is simple, they haven't spent enough time in God's presence. They are working out of the wrong priorities. If you put the second commandment first you always get burned out. We get burned out because we are doing what we are doing for results instead of a love for God.

So in the days ahead make your priority to be a lover of God. As you love Him He will fill you up and that love will overflow to others and draw them in. Pure love is one thing the devil can never counterfeit! Pure love is the strongest evangelism tool there is!