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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

Chapter Thirty-Three Secrets of Evangelism

When Abraham proved his willingness to offer up his beloved son, Isaac, God made a promise to him:

In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice (Gen. 22:18).

The apostle Paul points out that this promise was made to Abraham and to his *seed*, singular, not *seeds*, plural, and that the singular seed was Christ (see Gal. 3:16). In Christ all the nations, or more accurately, all the ethnic groups of the earth would be blessed. This promise to Abraham foretold the inclusion of the thousands of Gentile ethnic groups around the globe into the blessings of being in Christ. Those ethnic groups are distinct from each other in that they live in different geographical areas, are of different races, conform to different cultures and speak different languages. God wants them all to be blessed in Christ, which is why Jesus died for the sins of the entire world (see 1 John 2:2).

Although Jesus said that the way is narrow that leads to life, and few find it (see Matt. 7:14), the apostle John left us with good reason to believe that there will be representatives from all of the world's ethnic groups in the future kingdom of God:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, *from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9-10, emphasis added).

So it is with great anticipation that the children of God look forward to joining a multi-ethnic multitude before God's throne one day!

Many contemporary missionary strategists have placed great emphasis on reaching the remaining thousands of "hidden" ethnic groups around the world, with the hopes of planting a viable church in every one of them. This is certainly commendable, as Jesus commanded us to go into the whole world and "make disciples of all the nations (or literally, *ethnic groups*)" (Matt. 28:19). The plans of men, however, no matter how well-intentioned, especially when void of the Holy Spirit's guidance, can often do more harm

than good. It is vital that we follow the wisdom of God as we seek to build His kingdom. He gave us more information and instruction regarding how we are to make disciples around the world than what is found in Matthew 28:19.

Perhaps the most overlooked fact by those who strive to fulfill the Great Commission is that *God* is the greatest evangelist of all, and we are supposed to be working *with* Him, not *for* Him. He cares much more about reaching the world with the gospel than anyone, and He is working to that end much more diligently than anyone. He was, and is, so devoted to the cause that He died for it, and was thinking about it before He even created anyone, and still is! That is commitment!

“Wining the World For Christ”

It is interesting that when we read the New Testament epistles, we don’t find any impassioned pleas (as we often do today) for the believers to “get out there and reach the world for Christ!” The early Christians and Christian leaders realized that *God* was working with great effort to redeem the world, and their job was to cooperate with Him as He led them. If anyone knew this, it was the apostle Paul, whom no one “led to the Lord.” Rather, he was converted by a direct act of God as he journeyed to Damascus. And throughout the book of Acts, we find the church expanding because Spirit-anointed and Spirit-led people cooperated with the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts, although often referred to as “The Acts of the Apostles,” should really be referred to as “The Acts of God.” In Luke’s introduction to Acts, he stated that his first account (the Gospel that bears his name) was a record of “all that Jesus *began* to do and teach” (Acts 1:1, emphasis added). Luke obviously believed that the book of Acts was an account of what Jesus *continued* to do and teach. He worked through Spirit-anointed and Spirit-led servants who cooperated with Him.

If the early Christians were not encouraged to “get out there and witness to their neighbors and help win the world for Christ,” what was their responsibility in regard to building God’s kingdom? Those who were not specifically called and gifted to proclaim the gospel publicly (apostles and evangelists) were called to live obedient and holy lives, and to be ready to make a defense to anyone who reviled or questioned them. Peter wrote, for example,

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame (1 Pet. 3:14-16).

Note that the Christians Peter wrote to were enduring persecution. Unless Christians are different than the world, however, the world (of course) won’t persecute them. This is one reason there is so little persecution of Christians in many places today—because the so-called Christians act no differently than anyone else. They aren’t really Christians at all, and so no one persecutes them. Yet many of these kinds of “Christians” are being exhorted on Sundays to “share their faith with their neighbors.” When they do witness to their neighbors, those neighbors are surprised to learn that they are (supposedly) born-again Christians. Worse, the “gospel” they share amounts to little more than telling their neighbors the “good news” that they are mistaken if they think that good works or obedience to God has anything to do with salvation. All that matters is that they just “accept Jesus as their personal Savior.”

Contrasted with that, the early Christians (whose Lord truly was Jesus) stood out like lights in darkness, and so they didn’t need to take classes on witnessing or get up the

courage to tell their neighbors that they were followers of Christ. They had plenty of opportunities to share the gospel as they were questioned or reviled for their righteousness. They only needed to set apart Jesus as Lord in their hearts and be ready to make a defense, just as Peter said.

Perhaps the primary difference between modern Christians and the early Christians is this: Modern Christians tend to think that a Christian is characterized by what he knows and believes—we call it “doctrine,” and we thus focus on learning it. In contrast, the early Christians believed that a Christian was characterized by what he did—and thus they focused on obedience to Christ’s commandments. It is interesting to realize that practically no Christian for the first fourteen centuries owned a personal Bible, thus making it impossible for him to “read his Bible every day,” what has become one of the cardinal rules of a contemporary Christian responsibility. I am certainly not saying that modern Christians shouldn’t read their Bibles every day. I’m only saying that too many Christians have made studying the Bible more important than obeying it. We ultimately pride ourselves for having correct doctrine (as opposed to those members of the other 29,999 denominations who aren’t quite up to our level) yet still gossip, lie and lay up earthly treasures.

If we hope to soften people’s hearts so that they become more receptive to the gospel, we are more likely to do it by our deeds than our doctrines.

God, the Greatest Evangelist

Let’s consider in more detail God’s work in building His kingdom. The better we understand His working, the better we can cooperate with Him.

When people believe in Jesus, it is something they do with their hearts (see Rom. 10:9-10). They believe in the Lord Jesus and thus they repent. They dethrone their own will and put Jesus on the throne of their will. *Believing involves a change of heart.*

Similarly, when people *don’t* believe in Jesus, it is something they do with their hearts. They *resist* God, so they don’t repent. By a conscious decision, they keep Jesus off the throne of their heart. *Unbelief involves a continual decision not to change one’s heart.*

Jesus indicated that all people’s hearts are so hard that no one would come to Him unless they were drawn by the Father (see John 6:44). God is mercifully and continually drawing everyone to Jesus by various means, all of which touch their hearts, and through which they must continually decide either to soften or harden their hearts.

What means does God use to touch people’s hearts in hopes of drawing them to Jesus? First, He uses His creation. Paul wrote,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse* (Rom. 1:18-20, emphasis added).

Notice Paul said that people “suppress the truth” that is “evident within them.” That is, the truth rises up within them and confronts them, yet they push it back down and resist that inward conviction.

What exactly is the truth that is inwardly evident to every person? Paul said they are the truths of God’s “invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature,” revealed through “what has been made.” People inwardly know from looking at God’s creation that

He obviously exists,¹ that He is extremely powerful, amazingly creative and incredibly intelligent and wise, to name a few.

Paul's conclusion is that such people "are without excuse," and he is right. God is continually shouting at everyone, revealing Himself and trying to get them to soften their hearts, but most close their ears. God, however, never stops shouting throughout all of their lives, with a constant display of miracles—through flowers, birds, babies, snowflakes, bananas, apples, and a million other things.

If God exists and He is as great as His creation reveals, then obviously He should be obeyed. That inward revelation shouts one overriding message: *Repent!* For this reason, Paul maintains that everyone has already heard God's call to repent:

But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world" (Rom. 10:18).

Paul was actually quoting a well-known verse from Psalm 19, of which the fuller text says,

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. *Their line [voice] has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world* (Psalm 19:1-4a, emphasis added).

This again indicates that God is speaking to everyone, day and night, through His creation. If people reacted rightly to God's creation message, they would fall on their faces and cry out something like, "Great Creator, you have created me, and obviously you have created me to do Your will. So I submit to You!"

Another Means by Which God Speaks

Related to this outward/inward revelation is another inward revelation, one that is also God-given, and one that is not dependent upon one's exposure to the miracles of creation. That inward revelation is each person's conscience, a voice that continually reveals God's law. Paul wrote,

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus (Rom. 2:14-16).

Thus, everyone knows right from wrong. Or to say it more strongly, everyone knows what pleases God and what does not please Him, and He will hold each person accountable on the day of judgment for doing what he or she knows displeases Him. As people grow older, they certainly become more adept at justifying their sin and ignoring the voice of their conscience, but God never stops speaking His law within them.

¹ That is why Scripture declares, "The fool has said in his *heart*, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1, emphasis added). Only fools suppress such obvious truth.

A Third Means

But that is not all. God, the great evangelist who is working to bring everyone to repentance, speaks to people through yet another means. Once again, we read the words of Paul:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18, emphasis added).

Notice Paul said God's wrath *is* revealed, not *is going to be revealed* someday. God's wrath is evident to everyone in the many sorrowful and tragic events, large and small, that plague humanity. If God is all-powerful, able to do anything and prevent anything, then such things, when they strike those who ignore Him, can only be a manifestation of His wrath. Only senseless theologians and foolish philosophers can't see this. Yet even in His wrath God's mercy and love are revealed, as the objects of His wrath often receive much less wrath than they deserve, and are thus lovingly warned of the eternal wrath that awaits the unrepentant after death. This is another means that God uses to get the attention of people who need to repent.

A Fourth Means

Finally, God not only attempts to draw people through creation, conscience and calamity, but also through the calling of the gospel. As His servants obey Him and proclaim the good news, the same message of creation, conscience and calamity is reaffirmed once again: *Repent!*

You can see that what we do in evangelization in comparison to what God does is of no comparison. He is continually evangelizing *every* person *every* moment of *every* day of his or her life, whereas even the greatest human evangelists might speak to a few hundred thousand people over the process of decades. And those evangelists generally preach to any given group of people only once for just a short period of time. In fact, that single opportunity is all such evangelists are really permitted to offer people in light of Jesus' command to wipe the dust from their feet whenever a city, village or house does not receive them (see Matt. 10:14). All of this is to say that when we compare God's never ceasing, universal, dramatic, inwardly-convicting evangelism with our very limited evangelism, there is really no comparison.

This perspective helps us to understand better our responsibility in evangelization and in building God's kingdom. However, before we consider our role more specifically, there is one other important factor that we must not overlook.

As stated previously, repenting and believing are things people do with their hearts. God desires that everyone humble himself, soften his heart, repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. Toward that end, God continually works on people's hearts in the numerous ways just described.

God also knows of course, the condition of every person's heart. He knows whose hearts are softening and whose are hardening. He knows who is listening to His never-ceasing messages and who is ignoring them. He knows whose hearts are such that a certain calamity in their life will cause them to open their hearts and repent. He knows whose hearts are so hard that there is no hope of their repentance. (He told Jeremiah three times, for example, not even to pray for Israel because their hearts were beyond repentance; see Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11.)² He knows whose hearts are softening to the point that just a little

² Beyond this, Scripture teaches that God may even actively further harden the hearts of those who continually harden their hearts against Him (like Pharaoh). It would seem unlikely that there is any hope of such people repenting.

more conviction by His Spirit will result in their repenting.

Keeping all of this in mind, what can we learn about the churches' responsibility to proclaim the gospel and build God's kingdom?

Principle #1

First, does it not seem reasonable that God, the Great Evangelist who is doing 95% of the overall work and who has already been relentlessly shouting at everyone every day, would probably send His servants to proclaim the gospel to those whose hearts are the most receptive rather than those who are least receptive? I would think so.

Does it not also seem possible that God, the Great Evangelist who has already been preaching to all people every moment of their lives, might chose *not* even to bother sending the gospel to those who are completely ignoring everything else He has been saying to them for years? Why should He waste His efforts telling people the last 5% of what He would like them to know if they have been completely ignoring the first 95% of what he is trying to say to them? I would think that it is more likely that God would send judgment upon such people hoping that they would soften their hearts. If and when they did, then it would seem logical to think that He would send His servants to proclaim the gospel.

Some might say that God will send His servants to those He knows will not repent so that they will be without excuse when they stand in judgment before Him. Keep in mind, however, that according to Scripture, such people are already without excuse before God because of His never-ceasing revelation of Himself through His creation (see Rom. 1:20). Thus if God does send one of His servants to such people, it is not so they will become accountable, but so that they will become all the more accountable.

If it is in fact true that God would more likely lead His servants to receptive people, then we, His servants, should prayerfully ask for His wisdom so we might be led to those He knows are ripe for harvest.

A Scriptural Example

This principle is beautifully demonstrated in the ministry of Philip the evangelist as recorded in the book of Acts. Philip had preached to receptive crowds in Samaria, but was later directed by an angel to journey to a specific road. There he was led to an incredibly receptive seeker:

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:

He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He does not open his mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth.

The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the

road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing (Acts. 8:26-39).

Philip was divinely directed to minister to a man who was so spiritually hungry that he had journeyed from Africa to Jerusalem to worship God and had purchased at least a portion of a copy of the scrolls of Isaiah's prophecies. As he was reading the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, the most explicit scripture in the Old Testament that details the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and wondering whom Isaiah was writing about, there was Philip, ready to explain what he was reading! There was a man ripe for conversion! God knew his heart and sent Philip.

A Better Way

How much more rewarding it is to be led by the Spirit to receptive people than to randomly or systematically approach people who are unreceptive because we guiltily think they won't be evangelized otherwise. Don't forget—every person you encounter is being relentlessly evangelized by God. We would do better to ask people how their conscience is treating them to determine first if they are receptive to God or not, because everyone is dealing with guilt by some means.

Another example of this same principle is the conversion of the household of Cornelius under the ministry of Peter, who was supernaturally led to preach the gospel to this very receptive group of Gentiles. Cornelius was certainly a man who was listening to his conscience and seeking God, as illustrated by his alms-giving and prayer life (see Acts 10:2). God connected him with Peter, and he listened to Peter's message with an open heart and was gloriously saved.

How much wiser we would be to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us to those whose hearts are open rather than formulating extensive and time-wasting plans to divide our cities into quadrants and organize witnessing teams to visit every home and apartment. If Peter had been attending a meeting on missionary strategies in Jerusalem or if Philip had continued preaching in Samaria, the household of Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch would have remained unreached.

Evangelists and apostles, of course, will be led to proclaim the gospel before mixed crowds of receptive and unreceptive people. But even they should seek the Lord regarding where He wants them to preach. Again, the record found in the book of Acts is one of Spirit-led and Spirit-anointed people cooperating with the Holy Spirit as He built the kingdom of God. How different were the methods of the early church compared to the modern church. How different are the results! Why not imitate what was so successful?

Principle #2

How else do the biblical principles considered in the first part of this chapter help us understand our role in evangelization and building God's kingdom?

If God has so designed that creation, conscience and calamity are all calling humanity to repentance, then those who preach the gospel need to be certain they aren't proclaiming a contradictory message. Yet so many are! *Their preaching directly contradicts everything that God is already trying to say to sinners!* Their message of unbiblical grace promotes the idea that holiness and obedience are unimportant for ultimately obtaining eternal life. By not mentioning the necessity of repentance for salvation, by emphasizing that salvation is not

of works (in a way that Paul never meant it to be understood), they actually work against God, leading people into a deeper deception that often seals their eternal doom, because they are now certain they are saved when they in fact are not. What a tragedy, when God's messengers actually work against the God they claim to represent!

Jesus commanded us to preach "repentance for forgiveness of sins" (Luke 24:47). That message reaffirms what God has been saying to the sinner all of his life. The preaching of the gospel cuts people to their hearts and offends those whose hearts are hard. Yet the soft modern gospel that informs people how much God loves them (something no apostle ever mentioned when preaching the gospel in the book of Acts), misleads them to think that God is not angry or offended at them. They are often told that they simply need to "accept Jesus." But the King of kings and Lord of lords does not need our acceptance. The question is not, "Do you accept Jesus?" The question is, "Does Jesus accept you?" The answer is, unless you repent and begin to follow Him, you are abhorrent to Him, and only His mercy forestalls your destiny in hell.

In light of the modern gospel that so cheapens God's grace, I cannot help but wonder why so many nations, ruled by leaders who have been given their authority to rule by God (and this is not debatable; see Dan. 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21; John 19:11; Acts 12:23; Rom. 13:1), have closed their nations completely to Western missionaries. Could it be because God is trying to keep the false gospel out of those countries?

Principle #3

The principles considered earlier in this chapter also help us to understand better how God views people who are following false religions. Are they ignorant people to be pitied because they've never heard the truth? Does all the blame lie at the feet of the church for not having effectively evangelized them?

No, such people are not ignorant of the truth. They may not know everything that a Bible-believing Christian knows, but they know all that God is revealing about Himself through creation, conscience and calamity. They are people whom God has been calling to repentance all of their lives, even if they have never seen a Christian or heard the gospel. Furthermore, they have either been softening their hearts toward God or hardening them.

Paul wrote of the ignorance of unbelievers and revealed the reason for their ignorance:

This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, *because of the hardness of their heart*; and they, having become *callous*, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (Eph. 4:17-19).

Notice that the reason that the Gentiles are ignorant is "because of the hardness of their heart." Paul also declared that they have "become callous." He was obviously speaking of the condition of their hearts. Calluses develop on people's hands from continual contact with what is abrasive against soft skin. Calloused skin becomes less sensitive. Likewise, as people continually resist God's call through creation, conscience and calamity, their hearts become calloused, making them progressively less sensitive to that divine call. This is why statistics indicate that people generally become less receptive as they grow older. The older a person is, the less likely it is that he will repent. *Wise evangelists mostly target younger people.*

The Guilt of the Unbelieving

Further proof that God holds people guilty even if they have never heard a Christian

evangelist is the fact that He actively judges them. If God wasn't holding them accountable for their sins He would not punish them. Because He does punish them, however, we can be sure that He holds them accountable, and if He holds them accountable, they must know that what they are doing is displeasing to Him.

One manner by which God punishes those who resist His call to repentance is through "giving them over" to their sinful desires so that they become slaves to even deeper degradation. Paul wrote:

For even though *they knew God*, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Therefore *God gave them over* in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason *God gave them over* to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, *God gave them over* to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Rom. 1:21-32, emphasis added).

Notice how Paul stressed the facts of human guilt and accountability before God. The unregenerate "knew God," but "they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks." They "exchanged the truth of God for a lie," so they must have encountered God's truth. Thus God "gave them over" to ever-increasing degradation, to the point where people do the most bizarre, unnatural and perverted things as they become more deeply enslaved to sin. In effect God says, "So you want to serve sin as you should serve Me? Then go ahead. I won't stop you, and you'll become progressively more enslaved to the god you love."

I suppose one could even consider this form of judgment to be an indication of God's mercy, in that it would be reasonable to think that as people became more perverse and sinful, they would realize it and wake up. One wonders why more homosexuals don't ask themselves the question, "Why do I find myself sexually attracted to people of the same sex with whom I can't actually have a full sexual relation? This is bizarre!" In a sense it can be argued that God indeed did "make them that way" (as they themselves often argue to justify their perversion), but only in a permissive sense, and only because He hopes to wake them up in order that they might repent and experience His amazing mercy.

It is not only homosexuals who should be asking themselves such questions. Paul listed numerous enslaving sins that are the evidence of God's judgment on those who refuse to serve Him. Billions of people should question themselves about their bizarre behavior. "Why do I hate my own family?" "Why do I find satisfaction in spreading gossip?" "Why

am I never content with what I own?" "Why am I compelled to look at increasingly more explicit pornography?" God has given them all over to be enslaved to their god.

Of course, anyone at any point can soften his heart, repent and believe in Jesus. Some of the most hardened sinners on earth have done just that, and God has cleansed and freed them from their sins! As long as people are still breathing, God is still giving them an opportunity to repent.

No Excuses

According to Paul sinners have no excuse. They reveal that they know what is right and what is wrong as they condemn others, and thus they are worthy of God's condemnation:

Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:1-4).

Paul said the reason for God's forbearance and patience is to give people opportunity to repent. Furthermore, as Paul continued, he revealed that only those who repent and live holy lives will inherit God's kingdom:

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom. 2:5-10).

Clearly, Paul would not agree with those who teach that people who just "accept Jesus as Savior" are guaranteed eternal life. Rather, it is those who repent and "who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality."

But does this not indicate that people can continue to practice religions other than Christianity and be saved as long as they repent and obey God?

No, there is no salvation apart from Jesus for a number of reasons, one of which is that only Jesus can set people free from their enslavement to sin.

But if they want to repent, how will they know to call on Jesus if they have never heard of Him?

God, who knows the hearts of all people, will reveal Himself to anyone who is sincerely seeking. Jesus promised, "Seek and you will find" (Matt. 7:7), and God expects everyone to seek Him (see Acts 17:26-27). When He sees a person whose heart is responding to His relentless evangelization, He will send the gospel to that person, just as He did for the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius' household. God is not even limited by the church's participation, as He proved in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. If there is no one to take the gospel to a sincere seeker, God will go Himself! I've heard numerous contemporary instances where people in closed countries have been converted by visions they had of Jesus.

Why People Are Religious

The fact is that most of those who practice false religions are not sincere seekers of truth. Rather, they are religious because they are only looking for a justification or a covering for their sins. As they continually violate their consciences, they hide behind the guise of religion. By their religiosity, they convince themselves that they are not worthy of hell. This is just as true for religious “Christians” (including cheap-grace evangelical Christians) as it is for Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus. Even as they practice their religion, their conscience condemns them.

When the Buddhist bows reverently before his idols or before monks who sit proudly before him, his conscience tells him he is doing wrong. When the Hindu justifies his lack of compassion for a diseased street beggar, believing that the beggar must be suffering for sins committed in a previous life, his conscience condemns him. When a Muslim extremist beheads an “infidel” in the name of Allah, his conscience is screaming at him for his own murderous hypocrisy. When the evangelical “Christian” lays up earthly treasure, regularly views sexually-explicit television, and gossips about fellow church members, trusting that he is saved by grace, his heart condemns him. All of these are examples of people who want to keep on sinning and who have found religious lies to believe by which they can continue sinning. The “righteousness” of unregenerate yet religious people falls far, far, far short of God’s expectations.

All of this is to say that God does not consider people who are following false religions to be ignorant people who are to be pitied because they’ve never heard the truth. Neither does the blame for their ignorance lie at the feet of the church for not having effectively evangelized them.

Again, although we know that God wants the church to preach the gospel all over the world, we should follow the leading of His Spirit to where “the fields are ripe for harvest” (see John 4:35), where people are receptive because they’ve been softening their hearts to God’s relentless effort to reach them.

Principle #4

One final principle that we can learn from the biblical truths considered earlier in this chapter is this: If God is actively judging sinners in hopes that they will soften their hearts, we should expect that some sinners, after enduring God’s judgment or observing others endure it, will be softening their hearts. Thus after calamities there are opportunities to reach people who were previously unreachable.

Christians should look for opportunities to share the gospel in places where people are suffering. Those who have recently lost loved ones, for example, may well be more open to what God wants them to hear. When I served as a pastor, I always seized the opportunity to proclaim the gospel at funerals, remembering that Scripture says, “It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, *and the living takes it to heart* (Eccl. 7:2, emphasis added).

When people suffer from sickness, financial loss, broken relationships, natural disasters and the many consequences of sin and judgments upon sin, they need to know that their sufferings are a wake up call. Through temporal sufferings God is trying to save sinners from eternal judgment.

In Summary

God does most of the work of building His kingdom. Our responsibility is to cooperate intelligently with Him.

All believers are to live holy and obedient lives that gain the attention of those in

darkness, and they should always be ready to make a defense for the hope within them.

God is always working to motivate all persons to soften their hearts and repent, continually speaking to them through creation, conscience and calamity, and sometimes through the call of the gospel.

Sinners know they are disobeying God, and are accountable to Him even if they never hear the gospel. Their sin is evidence of the hardness of their hearts. Their increasingly deeper degradation and slavery to sin is an indication of God's wrath towards them.

Religious people are not necessarily seeking for truth. They are more likely justifying their sin through believing the lies of their religion.

God knows the condition of every person's heart. Although He may lead us to share the gospel with those who are not receptive, He is more likely to lead us to those who are receptive to the gospel.

As God works to soften people's hearts through their sufferings, we should seize those opportunities to proclaim the gospel.

God wants us to take the gospel into the whole world, but He wants us to follow His Spirit as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission, as illustrated in the book of Acts.

God will reveal Himself to anyone who sincerely seeks to know Him.

God wants our message to agree with His message.

One day there will be representatives from every ethnic group worshipping before God's throne, and we should all do our part in cooperating with God to work to that end. Thus all of God's people should show Christ's love to every member of every ethnic group whom they encounter. God may lead some of His servants to specifically target people of different cultures, either by sending and supporting church planters, or by going themselves. Those who are sent should make disciples, proving themselves to be disciple-making ministers!

Final Words

I am so thankful that God has enabled us to print this book in your language and make it possible for you to have a copy to read. I hope it has been a blessing to you. If it has, would you be so kind to write and tell me? I can only read English, so you'll have to write me in English or have your letter translated into English before you send it to me!

The most certain way to reach me is to send an e-mail, and my e-mail address is: tdmm@shepherdserve.org. If you don't have access to e-mail, you can also write to me at my ministry address, but depending on when you received this book, that may have changed. In any case, in the year 2007 it is: Shepherd Serve, P.O. Box 12854, Pittsburgh, PA 15241 USA.