

Evangelism and Missions

Article XI

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 9:37-38; 10:5-15; 13:18-30, 37-43; 16:19; 22:9-10; 24:14; 28:18-20; Luke 10:1-18; 24:46-53; John 14:11-12; 15:7-8, 16; 17:15; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2; 8:26-40; 10:42-48; 13:2-3; Romans 10:13-15; Ephesians 3:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 2:13; 11:39-12:2; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 22:17.

Key Text:

Genesis 12:1-3: Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Matthew 9:37-38: Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly *is* plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Matthew 28:18-20: And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

Acts 1:8: But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Romans 10:13-15: For "*whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*"

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace who bring glad tidings of good things!”

2 Timothy 4:5: But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Observations

The major change in Article 11 in the *2000 BF&M* is in the final sentence of the article: “It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.”

The words “verbal witness” were added to the 2000 statement. These two words were absolutely needed, and they added a component to the mandate of missions and evangelism that was conspicuously absent in previous statements.

A lifestyle witness alone is insufficient. The Apostle Paul was clear on this issue when he wrote the church at Rome: “How then will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” (Rom 10:14a). As Paul admonished Timothy, we are to do the work of an evangelist, clearly speaking the good news of Christ.

The key changes in Article 11 of the *2000 BF&M* are the additions of “verbal witness” and “the preaching of the gospel to all nations.” Both changes rightly correct earlier statements’ omissions of any type of explicit verbal proclamation of Christ. And both changes are much more consistent with the biblical teachings which command us to tell the good news to everyone.

Theological Considerations

German theologian Martin Kahler once said, “Missions is the mother of theology.” I, however prefer the opposite expression: “Theology is the mother is missions.” Or to say it

another way, “missions and theology always go together.” Theology without missions is dead orthodoxy. Missions without theology is absent a gospel to be proclaimed.

History verifies the interconnection between theology and missions. On the one hand, individuals, churches, and denominations that abandon orthodox Christian truth do not engage in evangelism and mission. Liberal theology produces death and a neutered, impotent gospel. On the other hand, theological affirmations, such as, a biblical understanding of God’s holiness and love, the depravity and sinfulness of human beings, the atoning sacrifice of Christ’s death, and the exclusivity of salvation through personal faith in Christ produces healthy offspring.

Article 11 of *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* addresses and answers six important questions about evangelism and missions.

First, why does the *BF&M* bring together under one article the subjects of evangelism and missions? The *BF&M* does not answer this question explicitly; rather the document answers the question implicitly. The Bible presents evangelism and missions as one. Evangelism attempts to lead an individual to personal commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord. Missions describes the personal involvement of a Christian to confront all peoples with the Good News of Jesus Christ. God is a missionary God; the Son of God, who left the glory of heaven and became incarnate as a man, is the greatest missionary in all of history. The Bible is a missionary book. The culmination of the biblical message in Revelation reveals people from every tribe, tongue, and nation praising the name of God (Rev. 7:9-10).

Second, the *BF&M* answers the question, “Who is responsible for evangelism and missions?” Neither an elite group of individuals uniquely gifted in evangelism nor the ministerial church staff carry the responsibility of evangelism and missions. Rather the duty and privilege of evangelism belongs to every follower of Christ and every church. The term “duty” conveys to

some the idea of drudgery, boring responsibility, and joyless labor. The *BF&M* reminds believers that evangelism/missions is an honor and a privilege. In God's amazing grace, He grants believers the opportunity to bear glad tidings. Unfortunately, many Christians and churches fail to partake of the blessed privilege. Nearly one-fourth of the Southern Baptist churches baptized no one last year. Over ninety percent of Baptists have never led anyone to the Lord.

Third, the *BF&M* answers the question, "What is the goal of evangelism/missions?" The goal is not social service, feeding the hungry, building houses, or planting churches as good as all of these activities are. These actions may function as part of the process toward meeting the goal. Further, neither baptism nor church membership serves as the goal. The one goal of evangelism/missions is making disciples of all the nations, all the people groups of the world.

Fourth, the *BF&M* answers the question, "What is the scope of evangelism/missions?" According to the *BF&M*, the scope of evangelism/missions encompasses all nations. The term translated "nations" in the New Testament is the Greek word "*ethne*," a term descriptive of a people or language group. The International Mission Board estimates that over 6,500 unreached people groups remain in this world. 1.6 billion have never heard the name of Jesus.

Fifth, the *BF&M* answers the question, "What is the rationale or motivation for evangelism/missions?" The *BF&M* identifies three rationales for evangelism/missions involvement: love, the necessity of the new birth, and obedience to the command of Jesus. According to the *BF&M*, the new birth experience produces a love for others. Evangelism/missions is love in action rather than proselytizing, imperializing, or spiritual arrogance. A popular YouTube video expresses the response of famed atheist Penn Jillette (one half of the Penn and Teller comedy team) to an attempt by a Christian to witness to him through

the gift of a Gideon Bible after his Las Vegas show. In light of a Christian's affirmation of the reality of heaven and hell and the possibility of an individual going to hell, Penn Jillette, said, "How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them about that?"

Sixth, the *BF&M* answers the question, "What are the proper methods of evangelism?" Verbal witness is the primary method of evangelism/missions. Paul highlighted the importance of a verbal witness in Romans 10:14, "And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher?" Some individuals claim to witness by "living a Christian life." Yet, if a Christian never verbalizes the reason for the distinctive Christian lifestyle, then no one will believe because of that lifestyle. The verbal witness, however, loses credibility if not "undergirded by a Christian lifestyle." The importance of this truth can hardly be over emphasized!

As the Southern Baptist Convention focuses on a Great Commission Resurgence, we all need to pray that we as individuals will experience a personal resurgence about the Great Commission and reaching our neighbors and the nations. It must start with us. Parts of this article are from the writings of Thom Rainer and Mark Rathel.