



The Chief of Sinners

- By Kirk Cameron

A good friend recently asked me, "How do you keep Christians interested in evangelism?" The question saddened me. I know it's a fact that many within the professing body of Christ seem to be enthusiastic about many other things, but not about sharing the gospel. Why is that? After all, what could be more important for us to do than to reach people with the message that has the power to save them from Hell?

The Apostle Paul came to my mind. He was a model Christian, fired up to reach not just the Jewish people but the whole world for Christ. He seems to need no outside encouragement or inspiration to go into all the world and preach the gospel. While so many in the modern church today seem to have to be inspired, encouraged, pleaded with, and begged to take time to reach the lost, Paul had

some sort of internal combustion engine that drove him to almost lose his life many times for the simple reward of being able to preach the message of the gospel. Instead of having to be pushed and helped along in his zeal for the lost, Paul willingly dove into trials, persecution and near death experiences in order to seek and save the lost. Many church-goers have pastors and friends (not to mention the Word of God), endlessly encouraging them to share their faith -- to no avail. Paul, on the other hand, didn't have as many people encouraging him as he had *discouraging* him from sharing the gospel. But instead of backing down, he counted all things loss to him, abandoned his worldly pleasures and suffered shipwreck, stoning, beatings, angry mobs, insults, hunger, other unpleasant things just so that he could continue to preach. Why on earth was he on such a mission? What compelled him, drove, him, motivated him to "stay interested in evangelism"?

I believe the answer is in how he viewed himself. In his letter to the Romans, Paul said he was compelled to preach the gospel. He couldn't stand the thought of himself not doing so. "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel!" He said that the love of God compelled him. That he was obligated to both the Jews and the Greeks to share the good news with them. He had been reconciled to God and had been appointed as a representative of God to reconcile others to the Savior. He made the task of re-uniting sinners to the Savior his life's mission. Why? I believe it all comes down to gratitude and compassion.

Paul said that he was the "chief of sinners." He was very aware of his wickedly sinful heart. The Law of God showed him what a sinner he was. Among other things, he blasphemed the name of God; he was a covetous idolater, and a murderer of Christians. He knew that he deserved death but God had given him mercy. Instead of giving Paul what he deserved, God showed him kindness and patience, which led to Paul's repentance and faith in Christ. Paul loved God much because he knew he was forgiven much. And that love for God, cast out his fears of man, and compelled him to obey his Master, no matter what the cost. Other Christians didn't need to follow Paul around to keep him "interested in evangelism." Paul was internally driven by the Holy Spirit to seek and save the lost. He knew that in light of his own undeserved salvation, the measure of his love for his Savior would be evidenced by his willingness to obey His Commands.

Also, because one of the fruits of a genuinely converted Christian is "love," the Apostle naturally had a great concern for the unsaved. Like Paul before his conversion, every non-Christian he saw was hell-bound, and his basic love for people compelled him to reach out to them. Jesus said we must love others as much as we love ourselves. Paul simply understood those words to mean that he didn't want to spend eternity in Hell so he made a point to rescue others from that terrible fate.

His motives and his secret for evangelistic zeal seem so simple, so basic. Gratitude for his own salvation made him want to obey his Lord and Savior. Compassion for his fellow man compelled him to rescue him or her from the fires of Hell. Aren't those still the reasons we should be fired up about evangelism today? How can we be casual about sharing the gospel when Hell is still burning and its mouth is open wide ready to receive our neighbors who don't know Christ? What does our lack of urgency say about our love for people? If my gratitude toward God for my own salvation is so shallow that I will not get "interested in saving others," what does that say about who I'm really serving? Can I really call Jesus my "Lord", if I refuse to obey his commands to love people and stay interested in saving others from the flames?

I am not ashamed of the gospel, but I am often ashamed at my own failures to make the most of every opportunity to share it with those around me. This bothers me a great deal. I want to be as Paul, who even in the face of trials, humiliation, and death, will count it a privilege and an honor to obey my Lord and love my neighbor enough to show them the way to eternal life. We shouldn't have to do anything to "keep Christians interested in evangelism." It should be the natural conviction of every follower of Christ to seek and save the lost, and persevere in the work of the Lord until the end.

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