

CHAPTER I

FALSE FORCES IN EVANGELISM

THE Lord Jesus described His mission by the words: "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10), and this concise statement included both His finished work upon the cross (John xix. 30), and His unfinished work in the world (Acts i. 1). While the work of *saving* the lost must ever be a divine undertaking accomplished only through His finished work on the cross, there are aspects of the work of *seeking* them which were committed to His followers, and which are a part of His unfinished work in the world.

The work of seeking the lost, like the work of saving them, is in reality a divine undertaking. It is distinctly stated that the *Son of Man* is come to seek. Thus He is again pictured in the Parable of the Lost Sheep: "When he hath found it, he layeth it upon his shoulders, rejoicing." It is the "goodness of God that leadeth to repentance," and the whole undertaking of finding lost men is but "the power of God unto salvation"; for no human effort or service can be effectual apart from the power of God. Seeking the lost is more than a mere attempt to locate unsaved men, for they

are present on every hand. The term "seeking the lost," therefore, suggests a divine preparation of the unsaved that will bring them into adjustment with the necessary conditions of salvation.

It will be found, in the course of these studies, that there are successive aspects of the divine seeking of the lost to be traced in the Scriptures, and every phase of this work, is undertaken and wholly accomplished by God the Holy Spirit. To recognize these divine movements and to be willing humbly to co-operate with them is the true basis of all soul-saving work.

While it has pleased God to appoint to His saints (not as a corporate body, but as individuals) a portion in the work of seeking, the human part in that work is not worthy to be compared with the divine. Yet man, who by nature comprehends and measures only visible things, is ever prone to disregard the invisible working of the Spirit, and to place an undue emphasis upon the comparatively small human share in those undertakings.

It is under these distorted estimates of the factors in the work of salvation that those things which may be called "false forces" in evangelism are substituted for the true. What are here termed "false forces" are, in some measure, God-appointed means in true evangelism. They become false forces only when they receive too much emphasis, or are strained to perform a function beyond that assigned to them in the purpose of God. Thus it may be seen that failure in evangelism is

not always due to an entire neglect of some part, or parts, of the divine appointments for the work; but may be due to an unbalanced estimate of the relative values of these forces.

This discussion of false forces in evangelism will be limited to three general aspects—viz., Men, Methods, and Messages.

MEN.—By this term reference is made to a class of men in the ministry called “evangelists,” and on whom the church has come to depend so largely for her activity in evangelism.

The word “evangelist” is used but three times in the Scriptures, and but one of these passages is to any extent descriptive. It is as follows: “Wherefore he saith, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” . . . “And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. iv. 8, 11-13, R.V.).

Here the evangelist is seen, with the apostle, prophet, pastor and teacher, to be a gift of the ascended Christ to His church in the world. This ministry gift of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor and teacher should be distinguished from the enduement for service bestowed upon the

individual believer (I Cor. xii. 4-31; Rom. xii. 3-8). In the one case the servant of God who has been endued for ministry is Christ's gift to the whole church; while in the other case a special enablement for service is given to the individual believer by the sovereign Spirit "as he will." In this same connection still another distinction should be made, in that the believer, in addition to the exercise of gifts, is appointed to the ministry of the priestly office; and since evangelism will be found to depend so largely upon the exercise of the believer's gifts and his ministry in the priestly office, a violation has been done to the plan of God, as revealed in His Word, insomuch as the work of evangelism has been taken from the whole company of believers and entrusted to a few.

The evangelist of the Scriptures is, without question, the messenger to the unevangelized, preparing the way for the pastor and teacher in his more constant ministry in the church. The evangelist, therefore, finds his fullest divine mission as a pioneer missionary to the hitherto unevangelized.

The modern "revival"—the work of the "revivalist" who comes under the title of an evangelist, but works as a religious promoter in the organized church—is unexpected in the Scriptures, except as the word "revival" is used to denote a forward movement in the spiritual life of the church, without including the idea of attempting to regain some spiritual position once held, but now lost. The use of the word usually means, however, a getting up after having fallen down, or a waking after

sleeping, or a coming to strength after a period of weakness; while, on the other hand, the Scriptures pre-suppose a continual erect, wakeful and aggressive position for service on the part of every Christian (Eph. vi. 10-17). A "revival" is abnormal rather than normal. It may have a function when needed, but in no way should become a habit, much less a sanctioned method of work. Having regained vitality, believers are not warranted in returning habitually to an anæmic state.

The re-adjustment of a powerless church into a normal position of fruit-bearing fellowship with God is, without question, an undertaking that is warranted in the Scriptures. Such a transformation, however, can be accomplished only through a ministry of teaching and pastoral care. Thus it falls naturally within the sphere of service committed to the pastor and teacher whose ministry is not necessarily located in one place, since he is a gift to the whole body of believers. Such a ministry may be undertaken by a pastor and teacher who is a specialist in such work, and who may visit the field to assist temporarily the resident pastor in his work. If this adjustment of the church is accomplished, the pastor or special assistant may then "do the work of an evangelist." There is an important distinction, however, between being an evangelist by calling, and doing the work of an evangelist as occasion may arise in the pastoral office.

The efficiency of the whole company of believers must depend upon their proper adjustment to God

in the cleansing and fitting of their individual lives. Just here there is a grave danger lest the church shall ignore her God-appointed work, and the necessary individual preparation for it, and attempt to substitute the wholesale machinery and appeal of the modern "revival" in its place.

The fact that a "revival" is planned for is a confession on the part of a church of a condition which would render the normal movements of the Spirit in salvation impossible. The special help of a Scriptural evangelist might be imperative in gathering the abundant fruit produced by the faithful evangelizing efforts of a church. It will be admitted, however, that such conditions do not often exist. On the contrary, the sincere and intelligent evangelist, almost without exception, must first do the work of a pastor and teacher by seeking to revive the church itself.

The unfruitful condition of the church has created a great temptation for the evangelist to be superficial in his aim and undertakings. His reputation, and often his remuneration, are dependent upon apparent results. If the evangelist understands the divine program in soul-winning, and proposes to be thorough with unspiritual churches, he must do a teaching work that he may build the necessary Scriptural foundation for abiding fruit. In undertaking a thorough foundation work in the churches, the evangelist would thus be forsaking his own calling, and would be assuming the work of the pastor and teacher; and might be a disappointment to those who had called him and upon

whom he depends, humanly speaking, for his support. His temptation is to secure the apparent results that are expected. The work of the evangelist is a vital ministry in this age, but it, like all ministry, should be kept within the sphere divinely appointed for it.

The discussion of the fundamental error of the church, in unduly magnifying the work of the evangelist and neglecting her own God-appointed ministry in salvation, will be the theme of succeeding chapters.

METHODS.—Likewise, an undue emphasis upon methods in modern evangelism is almost universal. The erroneous impression exists that evangelistic efforts should be confined to stated times and seasons, and that impression has led to a far more serious one, namely, that God is only occasionally “on the giving hand”; whereas the Scriptural forces in true evangelism depend upon the unchanging promises of God, the constant abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and His continual working through the members of the body of Christ.

Frequent gatherings may be of unmeasured value in the life of any company of believers; but such meetings should not become the only time of soul-winning expectation. The conditions are most unreasonable when the unbelievers of any locality have come to realize that to avoid the spasmodic solicitude of the church for a period of a few days is to be free from such appeals for the rest of the

year, or for, perhaps, a term of years. This unreality is one of the fruits of an evangelism that depends upon times and seasons.

Again, the false or undue emphasis on methods is disclosed by the imperative demand for some public action in connection with conversion, such as standing or going forward in a meeting. Great confusion has been wrought by the intrusion of such public acts into the condition for salvation; thereby making salvation seem to be by faith in Christ, plus a supposedly meritorious public act.

These required public acts are usually justified from one or two passages of Scripture, which are here quoted: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. x. 32), and, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 9, 10).

A careful study of the whole context of the former passage will reveal that the passage occurs in a body of Scripture which is primarily applicable to the yet future Kingdom age, and it, like all that truth, bears only a moral or secondary application to the age of the church. From this particular passage, therefore, confession cannot be made a present condition of salvation.

The second passage quoted above (Rom. x. 9, 10), is perhaps more important, since it falls within

the teachings and conditions which belong primarily to the soul under grace.

The force of the positive statement in verse 9, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," is explained in verse 10: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." In the latter verse the true meaning and use of the word "confess" is suggested. Of this word in this same passage the late Dr. Arthur T. Pierson wrote: "That word means to speak out of a like nature to one another. I believe and receive the love of God. In receiving His love I receive His life, in receiving His life I receive His nature, and His nature in me naturally expresses itself according to His will. That is confession. Dr. McLaren has said: 'Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, because the candle would either go out or burn the bushel.' You must have vent for life, light and love, or how can they abide? And a confession of Christ Jesus as Lord is the answer of the new life of God received. In receiving love, you are born of God, and, being born of God, you cry, 'Abba, Father,' which is but the Aramaic word for 'Papa'—syllables which can be pronounced before there are any teeth, because they are made with the gums and lips—the first word of a new-born soul, born of God, knowing God, and out of a like nature with God speaking in the language of a child."

Confession, then, does not provide a *reason* for salvation, but rather proves its *reality*. It is clearly the *believer's* privilege, and is of no value until Christ has been received and the new life begun.

So with the heart, or inner consciousness, man believes unto righteousness, which is the one condition of acceptance before God; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation, which is but the normal answer of the new-born soul to God.

That these passages do not *demand* a public act as a condition of salvation is obvious for at least two other reasons. First, such an interpretation would disagree with all other passages of Scripture on salvation, since it would cause grace to be no more grace, inasmuch as there was saving merit in a human deed; and it is difficult to *demand* confession in connection with conversion without making it seem to be meritorious, and, to that extent, a frustrating of the whole doctrine of grace. And second, a public confession cannot be a necessity in salvation, since an innumerable company have found fullest peace with God through Christ Jesus who were deprived of the supposed value of any such action.

In coming to a positive decision, the human mind is undoubtedly aided by some physical action which serves to strengthen the impression. This psychological fact usually underlies the demands that are made for public acts in connection with the acceptance of Christ. The only issue which is raised

here concerning the combining of public acts with the acceptance of Christ, is that such acts, if urged at all, should be so presented that they could not be thought of by any individual as forming a part of the one condition of salvation. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is the very opposite of doing anything: it is resting in the work and saving grace of Another.

Because of Satanic blindness to the Gospel of Grace (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4), unregenerate man cannot comprehend the true basis of salvation, and is therefore ever prone to do the best he knows. This is to attempt to work out his own standing before God by his own efforts. It is this natural tendency to do something of merit that prompts many to respond to any appeal for a public action. It was an expression of sincerity that inquired of Jesus: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" And His answer then is His answer now: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John vi. 28, 29).

It may be conceded that genuine results are sometimes obtained even where misleading methods are employed; but there may be great harm done as well. Far too little has been said on this point. Some of these evils should be mentioned. Let it be remembered, however, that this is a discussion of the possible evils that may follow the *wrong* use of methods in which a public action is demanded as a necessary condition of salvation.