



CHAPTER FIVE

WHY THE EVANGELISATION OF THE WORLD IS THE PRIORITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

One day I was talking with a pastor in his office and he opened up to me about what it was like being a pastor. “Julian” he said (sighing) *“I have everyone come into my office telling me their ministry is the priority - the prayer co-ordinator, the worship leader, the intercession leader, the deliverance team, the Bible study co-ordinator, the men’s ministry, the signs and wonders and Holy Spirit group, the “seek God’s presence” leaders, the women’s ministry, the children’s church leader, the youth leader, the hospitality team, the “show people the Kingdom” group - literally every one of them sits in the chair you are sitting in and explains to me why their ministry is the priority. And you know what, they all have good reasons and sound plausible. Who is actually right?”*

What are we to make of this? Theologically, biblically, objectively, something actually is **the priority** of the Christian Church. Something is our ultimate goal, the bull’s eye at which we are to be aiming. Jesus left us something to do, something to accomplish, something to complete, something which is measurable and definite and do-able, something of supreme importance.

I am going to come right out with it: it’s to evangelise the world. By this I mean that it is the solemn responsibility of the Church

to ensure every person on the earth actually hears the gospel message and understands it. This is our mission. Lutheran missionary **Justinian von Welz** (1621-1688) first coined the phrase “**The Great Commission**” to describe this mission. Legendary missionary **Hudson Taylor** (1832-1905) picked up the phrase and popularised it.



And how did I come to the conclusion that the Great Commission is the mission of the Church? Initially, I came to it on the basis of my personal observation of Scripture and study of Church history.

For many years I have thought a lot about Jesus, Paul, and the early Christians. They appear to have made a priority of proclaiming the gospel. The New Testament is awash with accounts of people doing it. We know what their ultimate goal was – to “*reconcile people to God*”¹ and “*to seek and save the lost*”² for the glory of Jesus. Look what happened when they kept their focus on the priority – the Church grew like wildfire.

For example, in the period A.D. 260-300, “*Thousands, perhaps millions,*” says church historian **John Terry**, “*gave up their old gods and accepted Christ.*”

Eusebius (A.D. 275-339) was bishop of Caesarea in Palestine. He is often referred to as the father of Church history because of his work in recording the history of the early Christian Church.



“*As soon as the gospel was heard,*” he reports as he observed the Church evangelising, “*men voluntarily in crowds, and eagerly, embraced the true faith, with their whole minds.*”³ It is no fluke that Jesus’ last words were “*...you shall be my witnesses*”⁴ and “*...go into all the world and proclaim the gospel,*”⁵ or that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write the words

1 Ephesians 2:16

2 Luke 19:10

3 Cited in: John Mark Terry. *Evangelism. A Concise History*. Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994, p.34

4 Acts 1:8 Please refer back to Device 10 for a discussion on the Biblical definition of ‘witnessing’. Witnessing and evangelism are the same thing.

5 Mark 16:15

“...the gospel is the power of God for salvation.”⁶

It appeared to me that Jesus and the early Christians viewed evangelism as the priority not only because it was the most potent way to glorify God, but also because it was the best way to win the lost world. They heard Jesus say it was the best way and that was good enough for them.



But how could I be sure my observations and conclusions were accurate? They might be quite wrong. For example, I could be reading in a biased way, wanting to see something in Scripture and history which was not *really* there. Or, I might be missing some vital information which would change my conclusions completely. Or, I might be living in denial (which is not just a river in Egypt).

What I needed to do was to put my conclusions to the test. How does one do this? We test our conclusions when we compare them with the opinions of reputable and proven scholars in the academic world.

Well, this is what I did, and this is what I found.



To scramble the priorities of the Christian Church...

One of Satan’s most potent devices to stop us evangelising the world is to scramble our priorities. He has worked hard to get us to put personal evangelism in last place because he knows things that are last on the “to do” list simply don’t get done.



The priority of the Christian Church is – or should be - the evangelisation of the world for the glory of God. I believe this for seven reasons:

1. Jesus established the idea.

2. Paul and the Early Church carried it on.
3. Scripture teaches it.
4. The apostles believed it.
5. Biblical scholarship supports it.
6. Spiritual giants from the past promoted it.
7. Significant contemporary leaders are advocating it.



Let's look at each of these in turn.

I *Jesus established the idea...*

Take a close look at the start, middle and end of His ministry. It is significant that Jesus quotes Isaiah's prophecy about preaching the gospel just as He starts His ministry: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel*" (Luke 4:18). During His ministry, this emphasis does not lessen. For example, in Mark 1:35 Jesus withdraws to pray in a solitary place. When found by Simon and his companions, He announces, "*Let us go to the nearby villages so I can preach there also. This is why I have come*" (Mark 1:38). It was clearly His plan to ensure His followers maintained this emphasis. In fact, when Jesus appointed the twelve, preaching the gospel is listed first in their job description (Mark 3:14).

Then, at the end of His ministry, His final words were, "*preach the gospel*" (Mark 16:15). Jesus identifies "*witnessing*" as the very reason for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

He could have said, "*When the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be My worshippers, My prayers or My miracle workers.*" He could have said, "*When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be My social action task force, My students of the Bible or My fellowshippers, My people who build friendships with non-Christians, My demon-deliverers, My light-shiners, My salty ones, My committee members, My tithers and givers, or My cake stall organisers.*" Without demeaning these activities in any way, none was the priority, the main reason for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was given for witness. I explained the meaning of the word "witness"





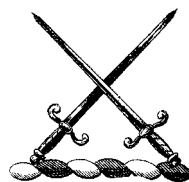
“Paul didn’t take his foot off the gospel accelerator for one second.”

in the previous chapter because misunderstanding about it abounds.

2 *Paul and the Early Church carried on what Jesus initiated...*

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news (i.e. the gospel) that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

Paul didn’t take his foot off the gospel accelerator for one second. For him, reaching everyone with the gospel was his very reason for being: *“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24).* Why was he so committed to this task? Jesus had spoken to him audibly on the Damascus road, telling him to go and proclaim the gospel (Acts 26:16-18). He never forgot these instructions nor did he waver from them. His passion was infectious. Even when social action begged to take top spot, the Early Christians did not succumb (Acts 6:1).



W *ait a minute...*

Some have interpreted Acts 6:1 quite differently. They argue this passage teaches that when the group of believers was chosen to look after the widows, social action became *their* main thing. That is, the disciples’ main thing was preaching; the seven chosen believers’ main thing was looking after the widows. With this interpretation, the whole body of believers works together, each person focusing on what is their strength. What are we to make of this?



“Even when social action begged to take top spot, the Early Christians did not succumb (Acts 6:1).”

S *orting truth from error...*

Truth and error are mixed. It is true that the seven who were chosen made care for the widows their main thing, while the



disciples' main thing was evangelism. The seven didn't stop doing evangelism, nor the the disciples stop doing any social action. It's an error to think that anyone whose main concern is social action is exempt from the responsibility to evangelise. It is also an error to think that anyone whose main concern is evangelism is exempt from involvement in any social action. Each has a different emphasis, but both have mutual responsibilities.⁷

T*he radical commitment of the Early Church to evangelism ...*

Dr Timothy George, Church Historian and Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Alabama describes how enthusiastically all the early Christians devoted their lives to proclaiming the gospel: *“Imbued with ‘glad tidings’ of new life in Jesus Christ, the early Christians fanned out from Jerusalem and Judea to carry this gospel into all the world. They went everywhere – into the arena, the academies of learning, and the marketplace, to faraway lands such as India and Ethiopia, into every nook and cranny of the Roman Empire. When, in the early fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea set out to chronicle the course of Christian history from the days of the apostles up to his own time, he described the activity of those heralds of faith through whom the spread of the gospel was first carried out. ‘Leaving their homes, they set out to fulfil the work of an evangelist, making it their ambition to preach the word of faith to those who as yet had heard nothing of it, and to commit to them the books of the divine gospels. The last word in the Greek text in Acts is ‘unhindered,’ an adverb used to describe the unstoppable progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.”*⁸

Wow!

3*Scripture teaches that the proclamation of the gospel ought to have priority...*

A key scripture is Mark 13:10. *“And the gospel must first*

7 The next chapter is dedicated to showing how evangelism is the responsibility and privilege of all believers, irrespective of such things as their position in the church, personality type, or spiritual giftings.

8 Cited in: Ravi Zacharias et al. *This We Believe. The Good News Of Jesus Christ For The World.* Zondervan, 2000, pp.232-233



be preached to all nations.” The context of this scripture is the second coming, and “first” indicates a priority.

The word “nations” here means “people groups.” This verse therefore teaches we are to make a priority of reaching unreached people groups in the world with the gospel.

This is the first priority of the mission of the Church. Most mission leaders define a people group as “reached” when an indigenous church, able to evangelise the group, is established.⁹ This is phase one.

Phase two is for the indigenous church to make a priority of reaching every individual in the rest of that people group with the gospel. I discussed these concepts in Chapter Two. So, how is the Church in the West going with these two phases?

T*he majority in the West has not heard the gospel once...*

Most people groups in the West are “reached.” Phase one is looking good.

But what of phase two? The tragedy is that large percentages of people in the West, and I mean upward of 95 percent of non-Christians, have never heard the gospel even once. Cities in the West are peppered with churches, yet phase two, where the local church makes sure everyone in their neighbourhood or town has heard and understood the whole gospel, has all but collapsed. In the Lausanne Covenant on Evangelism, **Dr John Stott** says that world evangelisation requires the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. *“Unless the whole Church is mobilised, the whole world is not likely to be reached. Thus, God’s purpose and the world’s need together bring to the Church the*



“Unless the whole Church is mobilised, the whole world is not likely to be reached. Thus, God’s purpose and the world’s need together bring to the Church the insistent call to evangelise.”

Dr John Stott

insistent call to evangelise."¹⁰ How are we ever going to achieve this? It will never happen unless we take seriously the command to mobilise and equip the whole Church for personal evangelism. In Chapter 13, I role out detailed plans and strategies showing how a church can succeed with this.

In the next chapter I argue that evangelism is the responsibility of all believers. The more believers we mobilise, the more likely we are to evangelise the world.

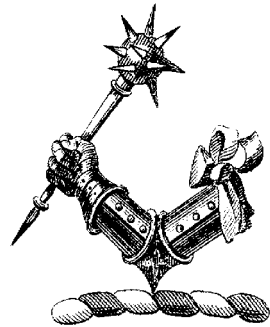
It is one thing to agree that we are to prioritise reaching every people group with the gospel¹¹ and then every person within each group. It is another to argue that Mark 13:10 teaches this ought to be the priority of the Church.

How do first-rank scholars and leaders interpret it? Does the word "first" in the verse refer to one thing needing to be done before another can take place, i.e. the world must be evangelised before Jesus comes again? Or does "first" mean making a priority of getting it done?

Listen to what Christian scholars and significant leaders say...

Commenting on Mark 13:10, **Dr Morna D. Hooker**, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, writes: "*This saying [of Jesus] becomes a reminder to the disciples that their primary task is that of evangelising.*"¹² Since Christians alive today are also disciples, it is our primary task as well.

Citing the same verse, **Dr William Lane**, chair of Wesleyan and Biblical Studies at Seattle Pacific University, says, "*The proclamation of the gospel to all men is an absolute priority.*"¹³

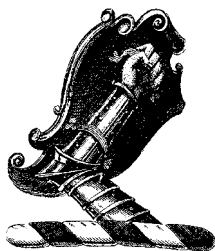


10 *Making Christ Known. Historic Mission Documents From The Lausanne Movement*. 1974-1989, p.29

11 Some would protest by saying 'How can we possibly reach every person in the world with the gospel?! What about babies, the infirm, those with disabilities who are not capable of hearing and understanding the gospel!?' By 'every person' we mean everyone who is capable of hearing and understanding. At judgment, we are going to be held responsible before God for achieving what was possible, not for the impossible. The impossible belongs to God alone.

12 Dr Morna D. Hooker. *The Gospel According To Mark*. A&C Black Publishers, London, 1991, p.310

13 Dr William L. Lane. (General Editor Gordon Fee), *The Gospel Of Mark*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, p.462



Missionary statesman **Oswald J. Smith** asks: *“Why did Jesus use the word ‘first’? Why did He not just say, ‘The gospel must be proclaimed among all nations’? That would have made sense. That I could have understood. But that is not what He said. He injected the word ‘first.’ He wanted to say that before we did anything else, we were to evangelise the world.”*¹⁴ From Mark 13:10 then, we could conclude Jesus is saying to His disciples: *“Of all the things I have taught you, make a priority of proclaiming the gospel to everyone everywhere. Start by targeting people groups who have never heard. Then, once you have reached a people group, go on to evangelise everyone in that people group with the gospel.”* Conclusion? Jesus teaches in Mark 13:10 that we are to make a priority of evangelising the world.

Other than Mark 13:10, are there any other scriptures which indicate we are to make a priority of gospel proclamation?

Jesus’ last words, our first priority...

These are the last words of Jesus just before He ascended into heaven: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

Commenting on this scripture and Matthew 28:19¹⁵, **Dr Millard Erickson** writes: *“The one topic emphasised in both accounts of Jesus’ last words to His disciples is evangelism... this was the final point Jesus made to His disciples. It appears He regarded evangelism as the very reason for their being. The call to evangelise is a command. Having accepted Jesus as Lord, the disciples had brought themselves under His rule and were obligated to do whatever He asked. For He had said, ‘If you love*



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14 Oswald J. Smith. *The Passion For Souls*. Marshall, Morgan and Scott. London, 1950, pp.48-49

15 A disciple is principally a proclaimer of the gospel. Think about this - if evangelising the world was Jesus’ priority, then what would dominate His discipleship program for His disciples? You know the answer.

Me, you will keep My commandments' (John 14:15); if the disciples truly loved their Lord, they would carry out His call to evangelise. It was not an optional matter for them."¹⁶ Conclusion: these last words of Jesus remain the priority of the Church today.

Paul's challenge to us today to proclaim the gospel...

Then there is Acts 20:24, "*I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*"

In this verse, which summarises Paul's entire ministry, we notice:

- Paul's task came directly from Jesus.
- This task was to proclaim the gospel.
- Paul had many aspects to his ministry, but he never lost sight of his priority.
- Paul's *goal* was to proclaim the gospel.
- He called it *the task*.

It is as if Paul were saying, "*In my other letters I taught you about family, love, intercession, service, ethics, church government, end times, dealing with conflict, prayer and fasting, caring for the disadvantaged, letting your light shine, being salt, living lives of honesty and integrity, and so on, but if, after all that, I have not proclaimed the gospel, then my efforts have been in vain.*"

Don't waste all the good works being done. See them as a means to an end.

These scriptures challenge us too. If all our conferences, Bible College training, worship, church services, prayer meetings, home groups, studies, missions, relationships, outreach events, mothers' groups, mens' groups and so on (the component parts of our mission), do not end in our evangelising the world (our mission), **then we are failing**, no matter how wonderful the component parts. At the end of this chapter I discuss in more detail this relationship between our mission and its component parts.

4 *The apostles believed the proclamation of the gospel was the priority of the Church.*



The apostles of the Early Church were commissioned by Jesus to carry on the work after He ascended into heaven. He told them how to grow the Church, establish the Kingdom and expand Christianity. Their instruction should be our template. Who says so?

Listen to **Dr Michael Green**: *“The essential qualifications of the twelve apostles of Jesus were that they should be with Him, and that He should send them forth*



to preach. They were apparently given a ‘trial run’ during the ministry itself¹⁷ but after the death and resurrection of their Master, preaching the gospel became their main concern. We learn from Acts¹⁸ how they found themselves becoming choked with administration, and deliberately delegated this work so they could give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”¹⁹

“After the death and resurrection of their Master, preaching the gospel became their [the apostles] main concern.”

Dr Michael Green

Eusebius,²⁰ the third century church historian, describes how the Early Church made evangelism the priority and describes what happened when they did: *“By the power and assistance of heaven, the saving Word [i.e. the gospel]²¹ began to flood the whole world with light like the rays of the sun. At once, in accordance with the divine Scriptures, the voice of its inspired evangelists*



and apostles went forward to the whole earth and their word to the end of the world. In every city and village arose churches crowded with thousands of

“How could the gospel have ‘flooded the whole world’ if every believer had not made it a priority?”

17 Matthew 10

18 Acts 6:4

19 Dr Michael Green. *Evangelism In The Early Church*. Highland Books, 1970, p.200.

20 Eusebius of Caesarea (c263 or 265 to 340). As a Church historian, Eusebius spent much time espousing the Old and New Testaments as inspired writings that were commented upon by the successors of the apostles. He also wrote much about the canon of the New Testament in his Ecclesiastical History. It was Eusebius of Caesarea who was commissioned to make fifty copies of the Scriptures following the Council of Nicea (325AD).

21 The words in brackets are mine.

men like a teeming threshing floor.”²²
We can flood the world again with the gospel...



How could the gospel have flooded the whole world if every believer had not made it a priority?²³ If the proclamation of the gospel was the chief concern of the apostles and documented by Eusebius, what reason could we possibly have, as leaders and pastors in the apostolic line, not to make it ours?

Just imagine, for a moment, if today’s Church leaders were the first group to return to the pattern set by the apostles in Acts 5:41-42.

For one thing, churches would re-structure so that administrative tasks were delegated to others.²⁴ Then leaders would not succumb to the business and busyness of church life.

In the mix of all the other things pastors and leaders do, they would be seen out and about in the world of the non-Christians, giving the gospel just as Jesus, Paul and the apostles did.

If you were to drive through the town of this new breed of leaders, it would not be uncommon to see them peppered around the streets, engaging non-Christians, giving the gospel. Seeing unfamiliar faces in the staff lounge of the church during the week would not be a rare thing. “*Hey, guys,*” the pastor would announce with a beaming smile, “*this is Jimmy. We just met down the street.*



I have invited him back for lunch.” Pastors couldn’t, of course, be out there all day. To expect this would be folly in view of their many and varied responsibilities. But what about 30 minutes a day? The point is, this vision for the renaissance of a new breed of pastor evangelist is entirely possible, but only if we are willing to return to the pattern and

22 Cited by Michael Green. *Evangelism In The Early Church*. Highland Books, 1970, p.201

23 This is not merely hyperbole being used here. Later in this book, I show how the early Church literally evangelised the entire known world.

24 Those to whom administration tasks were delegated would have ‘release time’ built into their job descriptions so that they too could take time out for the priority.

priority for personal evangelism set by Jesus, Paul and the apostles.

5 *Christian scholars and leaders support the idea that taking the gospel to the whole world is the priority of the mission of the Church.*

This whole concept will at first seem alien and so lest you think it's just my interpretation, I want to show you the opinions of a sample of first-rank scholars and leaders. They have formed their views after a careful study of Scripture and history. Read carefully what these great minds have to say.

F *First rank scholars...*

Dr Derek Prince said, *"The supreme purpose of every true Christian church, the chief duty of every Christian minister, the main responsibility of every Christian layman, is to present to all who may be reached, in the clearest and most forceful way, the basic facts of the gospel of Christ, and to urge all who hear to make the definite personal response to these facts which God requires. To this, the supreme task, every other duty and activity of the church must be secondary and subsidiary."*²⁵

Dr John Stott put it like this: *"Our first duty is to communicate this gospel, to use old ways and seek fresh ways of making it known throughout the whole world."*²⁶

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"Our first duty is to communicate this gospel, to use old ways and seek fresh ways of making it known throughout the whole world."

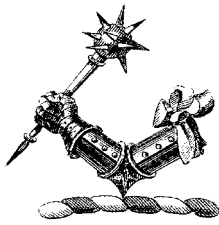
Dr John Stott

Historian **Dr Michael Green** is another scholar who contends evangelism ought to be our priority: *"In these first two centuries of the Church's existence, we find evangelistic zeal and effort exerted by the whole broad spectrum of the Christian community to bring other people to the feet of their ascended Lord and into fellowship of His willing servants. This is a permanent reminder*



25 Dr Derek Prince. *Foundation Series. Volume 1.* Sovereign World Books, 1986, p.145

26 Dr John R.W. Stott. *Guard The Gospel. The Message Of 2 Timothy.* Inter Varsity Press, 1973, p.47



of the Church's first priority. 'Day by day, the Lord added to their number those whom He was saving' (Acts 2:46-47). It could happen again, if the Church was prepared to pay the price."²⁷

Dr William Abraham²⁸ writes: "Consensus [among scholars] is emerging that evangelism must become a top priority for the modern Church."²⁹

Professor E.M. Blakelock said: "Evangelism is the end and crown of all Church activity, social, communal and in every other device of service or penetration of society."³⁰

The Anglicans are adamant...

Canadian Anglican heads concur. At *The Essentials* conference in Montreal, 1994, they affirmed: "The task [of evangelism], which is thus a matter of priority, calls for personal training and a constant search for modes of persuasive outreach. We sow the seed, and look to God for the fruit."³¹ In 1948, the Anglican bishops of England circulated a letter which affirmed that the "supreme task of the Church today is... to take the Good News to those who have not heard it."³²

And eminent theologians...

Theologian and teacher **Dr Wayne Grudem**³³ wrote: "This evangelistic work of declaring the gospel is the primary ministry that the Church has towards the world."³⁴

The late **Dr Francis Schaeffer**, founder of L'Abri International Study Centre and Christian Community, wrote: "Because we love the Lord Jesus Christ and know Him personally as our Saviour, we must, through God's grace, love our neighbour as ourselves. And if we love



27 Dr Michael Green. *Evangelism In The Early Church*. Highland Books, 1970, p.339

28 Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

29 Dr William J. Abraham. *The Logic Of Evangelism*. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002, p.12

30 E.M. Blakelock. *The Answer is in the Bible*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978, p.154

31 <http://www.stpaulshalifax.org/Essentials.html#11>

32 Cited in: John Stott. *Our Guilty Silence. The Church, The Gospel And The World*. IVP, 1997, pp.63-64

33 Former Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and now Research Professor of Bible and Theology at Phoenix Seminary.

34 Dr Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology. An Introduction To Biblical Doctrine*. IVP, 2003, p.868

our neighbour as Christ would have us love our neighbour, we will certainly want to share the gospel with our neighbour... [therefore] evangelism is primary.”³⁵

The Puritans and the Baptists

Puritan leader **Richard Baxter** (1615-1691) was unyielding. “The work of conversion is the first and greatest thing we must drive



“There is no excuse for anyone not giving evangelism first place in individual covenant church life.”

Dr Lewis Drummond

at,” he insisted. “After this we must labour with all our might.”³⁶

The Puritans knew that the gospel was the most powerful weapon given to us from heaven in our war to save lost souls. For them, evangelism was primary.

The late **Dr Lewis Drummond**, President of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and former Director of the Billy Graham Evangelism Centre, wrote: “There is no excuse for anyone not giving evangelism first place in individual covenant church life.”³⁷

Evangelist **Ray Comfort** has noted: “Right from the beginning of His ministry, Jesus made it clear that His supreme mandate was to reach lost humanity with the



The Assembly of God: the Spirit was given for witness...

In a review of the history of the Assembly of God movement in the world, **Dr William W. Menzies**³⁹ wrote: “From the

“Early leaders recognised that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was an empowering for witness, not merely an experience for personal enjoyment.”

Dr William W. Menzies

35 Dr Francis Schaeffer. *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. Crossway Books, 1984, p.39

36 Richard Baxter. *The Reformed Pastor*. Reprinted in Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1979, p.94

37 Dr Lewis A. Drummond. *The Word Of The Cross*. Broadman, 1992, p.293

38 Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort. *The Way Of The Master. How To Share Your Faith Simply, Effectively, Biblically, The Way Jesus Did*. Tyndale, 2003, p.47

39 Long time educator with the Assemblies of God, and Chancellor of Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines.



beginning of the Pentecostal movement, reaching the lost of this world for Christ was the central passion. Early leaders recognised that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was an empowering for witness, not merely an experience for personal enjoyment.”⁴⁰

And the great Charles Spurgeon...

Charles Spurgeon argued in the same way. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 9:22 (“I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”) he said:

“Paul’s great object was not merely to instruct and to improve, but to save. Anything short of this would have disappointed him; he would have men renewed in heart, forgiven, sanctified, in fact, saved. Have our Christian labours been aimed at anything below this great point? Then let us amend our ways, for to what avail will it be at the last great day to have taught and moralised men if they appear before God unsaved? Paul knew the ruin of man’s natural state, and did not try to educate him but to save him; he saw men sinking to hell, and did not talk of refining them but of saving them from the wrath to come. To compass their salvation, **he gave himself up with untiring zeal to telling abroad the gospel, to warning and beseeching men to be reconciled to God...** this was the crown for which he strove, the sole and sufficient reward of all his labours and self-denials. Dear reader, have you and I lived to win souls at this noble rate? O that the Lord would saturate us through and through with an undying zeal for the souls of men.”⁴¹

“In those early days,” writes church historian **Herbert Kane**, “the Church was mission. The missionary programme of the Early Church was based on _____
 two assumptions: (1) The chief task of the Church is world evangelisation. (2) The responsibility of carrying out the task rests with the whole _____



“The chief task of the Church is world evangelisation.”

Historian Herbert Kane.

40 http://www.ag.org/enrichmentjournal/199904/084_lessons.cfm

41 December 7-Evening Reading. Cited in *Morning and Evening Devotionals* by C.H. Spurgeon www.esword.net

Christian community.”⁴²

And Church Growth experts...

Church growth expert **Dr Peter Wagner**: “I would love to see membership declines in the mainline denominations bottom out and begin to soar upward. But I am afraid they will not unless and until the evangelist mandate is restored to its biblical position as the top goal.”⁴³

What does he mean by “the evangelist mandate”? **Wagner** refers to certain people (listed in Ephesians 4:11-12) who are “gifts” to the Church. One of them is the evangelist, who is given to the Church to equip and motivate other members to evangelise. One reason most Christians don’t proclaim the gospel is that they don’t know how.

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“If you lead a church, your first goal should be to enlist the help of gifted evangelists to equip the congregation to proclaim or spread the gospel.”

If you lead a church, one of your goals should be to enlist the help of gifted evangelists to equip the congregation to evangelise. How can an army expect to win a war without thorough training? As leader of your church, it’s your call to make this happen. Are many church leaders doing this? No.

Research findings about the church in Britain are alarming.

“Of the 1017 churches in Britain who were surveyed to ascertain how many had trained their people for evangelism in the decade 2001 to 2010, only a staggering 36 (3.5%) said they had done so.”⁴⁴

This is solid proof the Church in Britain is very confused about its mission. But let’s not be quick to point the finger at Britain. I have no reason to believe any other Western country would fare better if



42 J. Herbert Kane. *Christian Missions In Biblical Perspective*. Baker Book House, 1976, p.65

43 Dr C. Peter Wagner. *Leading Your Church To Growth*. Regal Books. California, 1984, p.34

44 The Baptist Times, October 1st, 2010, page 1

it were probed in the same way.

Put simply, evangelising the world is now not even on the radar of most churches in the West. ***It's literally and actually gone.***

In most Western churches, something other than evangelism has become top priority – usually social action, prayer, worship, seeking God's presence or teaching, miracles, fellowship, and so on.

Without in any way devaluing the necessity of these aspects



“Take a man out of the slums, heal his body, give him decent clothes, provide him a home in the country, then let him die and go to hell? Really, it is not worthwhile.”

William Booth

of our Christian witness and service, the scholars and leaders who met at Lausanne in 1974 concluded that if anything other than evangelism was the priority, it ought not to be. The covenant they wrote concluded: *“In the Church's mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary.”*⁴⁵

Listen to William Booth, the king of good works. He considered evangelism primary...

Social action, for example, is vital. But it should not be our number one focus. **William Booth**, Founder of the legendary Salvation Army, declared: *“Take a man out of the slums, heal his body, give him decent clothes, provide him a home in the country, then let him die and go to hell? Really, it is not worthwhile.”*⁴⁶

For Booth, social service was a critical and indispensable part

of his mission (as he put it, he wanted to eliminate hell on earth), but it was primarily a means to a greater end. How do we know this? He said so: *“I must assert in the most unqualified way, that it is primarily and mainly for*



“The accent must first and always be on evangelism and discipleship.”

Dr K.P. Yohannan

45 Dr John Stott. *Making Christ Known. Historic Mission Documents From The Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989.* Paternoster Press, 1996, p.29

46 Cited in: Norm Lewis. *Priority One.* OM Literature, 1988, p.99

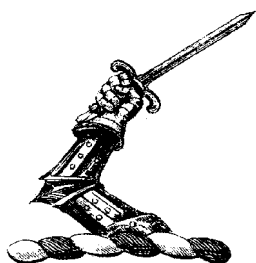
the sake of saving the soul that I seek the salvation of the body.”⁴⁷ Booth’s primary vision was, “One of hell, and salvation, here and hereafter.”⁴⁸

A great missionary speaks from experience...

Missionary to Asia **Dr K.P. Yohannan**⁴⁹

agreed social action should not be the number one priority, despite the appalling poverty in much of the world. “*The trouble with the social gospel,*” he said, “*even when it is clothed with religious garb and operating within Christian institutions, is that it seeks to fight what is basically spiritual warfare with weapons of the flesh. A spiritual battle fought with spiritual weapons will produce eternal victories. This is why we insist upon restoring a right balance to gospel outreach. The accent must first and always be on evangelism and discipleship.*”⁵⁰

Even Christian counsellors see evangelism as the priority World-renown counsellor and author **Michael Wells** gives the following account of how he came to view evangelism as a one of the priorities of the Church: “*Recently, after attending a program professing to spur participants on toward spirituality (i.e. going to church, scripture memory, bible reading, prayer, fasting, etc), I returned home perplexed at how difficult it can be to live as a Christian. I decided to search the scriptures to discover for myself God’s priorities. I thought, rather than looking at all we are to do [i.e to be ‘spiritual’], I would focus on a more serious topic: the things we are never to neglect. I found five things in the Bible that are never to be neglected (God’s priorities): prayer and sharing the gospel, Acts 6:2-4; our spiritual gifts, 1 Timothy 4:14; so great a salvation, Hebrews 2:3; and doing good*



47 Major Malcolm Herring. Life Conference Workshop Paper. Auckland, New Zealand, September 2012, p.3

48 Major Malcolm Herring. Life Conference Workshop Paper. Auckland, New Zealand, September 2012, p.4


49 Please take the time to read Dr Yohannan’s excellent commentary on the interplay between evangelism and social action in appendix two.

50 Dr K.P. Yohannan. *Revolution In World Missions*. Gfa books, 2004, pp.105-129

and sharing, Hebrews 13:16. To my amazement, not one of God's priorities was featured during the program that claimed to teach how to be a dynamic, successful Christian."⁵¹

Michael Wells makes a telling point here. If evangelism is a priority to God (actually *the* priority), and a vital part of making dynamic, successful Christians, how can any church justify neglecting it?

P *Prayer must never become a substitute for evangelism...*



*"The proclamation of the gospel is **the** work of missions."*

Dr John Piper

The place of prayer in the battle for souls cannot be over-emphasised; the current rise of the 24/7 prayer movement around the world is timely and exciting, but prayer should never be a substitute for active participation in evangelism.

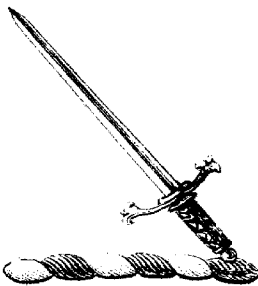
As pastor and author **Dr John Piper** wrote, caution is needed.

*"I sense the danger of overstating the role of prayer in relation to the Word of God and the preaching of the gospel. I am not comfortable, for example, calling prayer the work of missions."⁵² The proclamation of the gospel is **the** work of missions. It is the weapon that God designed to use in penetrating the kingdom of darkness and gathering the children of light from all the nations (Acts 26:16-18). His whole redemptive plan for the universe hangs on the success of His Word. If the proclamation of the Word aborts, the purposes of God fail."⁵³*

Spurgeon, too, warned: *"Prayer and means [i.e. proclaiming the gospel] must go together. Means without prayer – presumption. Prayer without means – hypocrisy!"⁵⁴*

T *The Catholics agree on the priority...*

Pope John Paul II in a key document on mission described mission in this way:



51 Michael Wells. *Problems, God's Presence and Prayer*. Abiding Life Press. 1993. p.76-79

52 Dr John Piper. *Let The Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy Of God In Missions*. IVP, 1993 2nd ed 2003, p.63

53 *ibid.* pp.64-65

54 Charles H. Spurgeon. *The Soul Winner*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1948, p.140

“Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ’s explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the ‘Good News’ about their being loved and saved by God.”⁵⁵



Pastors who are leading the way...

It is so exciting when modern day pastors catch on to what Christian statesmen through the ages have been saying.

Here and there key churches are beginning to make proclaiming the gospel their number one priority. Mark Conner is one such pastor. He leads the 5000 strong Waverley Christian Fellowship in Melbourne, Australia. He writes: *“If evangelism is heaven’s priority, then it must be the passionate priority of the Church here on earth... our top priorities can easily be replaced by other seemingly urgent or pressing matters. As we become busy with so many things in church life, we can begin to drift from our mission. That’s why the work of an evangelist also involves keeping the evangelistic passion of a church community alive and bright hot.”⁵⁶* **Bill Hybels** is another pastor making evangelism the priority. **Hybels** is rightly “big” on Christians demonstrating love through acts of kindness. Willow Creek Church is renowned for this. Yet, he calls giving the gospel to a non-Christian *‘the ultimate act of goodness.’⁵⁷*

From the discussion so far in this chapter, there are twenty reasons why Christian scholars, leaders and historians conclude that the evangelisation of the earth is the mission of the Church.

1. It is the greatest way to express love for our neighbour (**Dr Francis Schaeffer**).
2. Jesus gave evangelism priority. We are modelling Him and so we are to do the same (**Dr Millard Erickson**).
3. The gospel is our most powerful spiritual weapon (**Dr K.P. Yohannan**).
4. Words and works (i.e. social action) ought to be bracketed

⁵⁵ Roger P. Schroeder. *What Is the Mission of the Church? A Guide For Catholics*. Orbis Books. New York. 2008. p.2

⁵⁶ Cited in Bronwyn Hughes and John Bellamy (Editors). *A Passion For Evangelism: Turning Vision Into Action*. Open Book Publishers, 2004, pp.154, 161

⁵⁷ Bill Hybels. *Making Life Work. Putting God’s Wisdom Into Action*. IVP, 2003, p.74

together. Winning souls for the glory of God ought to be the ultimate end of all our Christian activity. The gospel was given by God for this purpose (**General William Booth**).



5. Evangelism was Jesus' supreme mandate (**Ray Comfort**).
6. Evangelism was the priority of the Early Church (Church historian **Dr John Terry**).
7. Evangelism is the key to church growth (**Dr Peter Wagner**).
8. Evangelism was the hallmark of everyone in the Early Church. Their example is our template (**Dr Michael Green**).
9. Evangelism, not prayer, is *the* work of mission (**Dr John Piper**).
10. Evangelism is heaven's priority (**Mark Conner**).
11. Evangelism is on God's 'never to be neglected list' (**Micheal Wells**).
12. To evangelise is to engage in the 'ultimate act of goodness' (**Bill Hybels**).
13. Evangelism is the priority of the Church's mission (**Pope John Paul II**).
14. Evangelism is the surpreme task of the Church (**Dr Derek Prince**).
15. Evangelism is the primary ministry of the Church towards the world (**Dr Wayne Grudem**).
16. Evangelism must become a top priority for the modern Church (**Dr William Abraham**).
17. Evangelism is the end and crown of all Church activity (**Professor E.M. Blakelock**).
18. The primary task of a disciple (**Dr Morna D. Hooker, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University**).
19. Our first duty

(Dr John Stott).

20. The mission of the Church

(Historian Herbert Kane).

Lest you are still not convinced, there are other reasons why the evangelisation of the earth is the priority of the Church.

For example, evangelising is one of the greatest ways to give glory to God.⁵⁸

It is one of the most potent sources of Christian joy, pivotal to becoming fully mature as a Christian.⁵⁹ It is the highest form of worship.⁶⁰

Gospel proclamation is pivotal to so much in Church life...

So much of the rest of church life depends upon it and relates to it. The gospel, you see, is a supernatural seed.

As a general principle, if we do not sow, we will not reap.⁶¹ If there is no reaping, there will be no one to baptise. If there is no one to baptise, there will be no one to disciple. And if there is no one to disciple, there will eventually be no one to perform ministry, except those who are the products of biological growth. The Great Commission will shrivel and the Church will begin to implode.⁶²

As I outlined in the preface, there are early signs this has already started to happen in the West.

It all started when we became confused about our mission.

Being part of the solution...

With everything within me, I believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit and prayer, the generation of Christian pastors and leaders alive on the earth right now possess the calibre and character to beat the devil and his devices and re-fire the Great Commission.

In this respect there are basically three groups of pastors and



58 See chapter 21.

59 See chapter four.

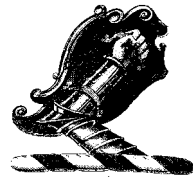
60 To know why evangelism is the highest form of worship, please see chapter 21.

61 I recently met a businessman who said he had led many families to Christ through relationships without proclaiming the gospel. Is it possible for people to be 'saved' without hearing the gospel? I discuss this issue in chapter 11.

62 Yes, we could all throw our hands up in the air and just say, "Well, that will never happen. God is in control. He is sovereign. So let's just rest and see what He does." Such an attitude is hardly that of a committed disciple who loves the Lord, and the Lord's purposes.

leaders:

1. *Those who know the priority but have been sidetracked (a tiny few).*
2. *Those who have never known the priority (the vast majority).*
3. *The few who know and are making evangelism the priority (a tiny few).*



Let's look at these three groups briefly.

1 THE "I HAVE BEEN SIDETRACKED" GROUP

Satan often sidetracks us away from the priority with the busyness of good, wholesome Christian programmes and activities. He knows that when we immerse ourselves in the sea of church activities, evangelism will be difficult to start, let alone maintain. There just won't be room to fit it into the existing program.

On this subject, **Pastor Mark Conner**, after growing a church of 5000, gives sound advice to other leaders:

*"We must decide that [evangelism] is a priority and begin taking steps to make it a reality. Over time, if we do not give up, a wonderful momentum will be created where the vision [of creating an evangelistic church] starts to stick and then become a reality."*⁶³ My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will work through this book to cause pastors to stop and audit all they are doing. Really, how successful is a church which is busy but neglecting the priority of Jesus? Is obedience better than sacrifice or not? (1 Samuel 15:22). You know the answer.

2 THE "I HAVE NEVER KNOWN" GROUP:

There are, however, leaders and pastors who have never known the priority. There is strong evidence that most are in this category. According to research by **George Barna**.⁶⁴

- 90 percent of American adult church



63 Dr Bronwyn Hughes and Dr John Bellamy (Editors). *A Passion For Evangelism: Turning Vision Into Action*. Open Book Publishers, 2004, p.162

64 Dr George Barna. *Evangelism That Works*. Regal, 1995, p.35

attendees cannot accurately define the meaning of “The Great Commission.”

- Nearly 70 percent of American church attendees have no clue what “John 3:16” means.
- Barely 30 percent of all church attendees know the meaning of the expression “the gospel.”
- Another 30 percent described it inaccurately.
- Just 4 percent can accurately describe the meaning of the gospel, John 3:16, and the Great Commission.

If the people in the pews don’t know, who is not telling them?.

It seems, from this research at least, that if we, pastors and leaders, don’t know what the priority is, how are we going to articulate it to those who follow? We can’t impart what we don’t know.

Maybe many Christian leaders have never asked the question “what is the priority?”

You’d think it would be the first question they would ask as they seek God about plans and timetables for their churches, seminaries, and Christian institutions.

Governments, sports teams, corporations, businesses etc view asking this question as crucial for their success, but somehow we don’t.

Dr John Piper said: “*It continually amazes me how few people [in Christian leadership] ask and answer with conviction and passion the most important questions – ultimate questions.*”⁶⁵

THE “I KNOW IT AND AM DOING IT” GROUP:

This group is tiny, but as awareness of the issues in this book grows, so will the size of this group.

Application:

To bring this chapter to a close, I want to focus on application, and in so doing raise two issues.

(1) **ISSUE ONE:** The first is the relationship between our mission and all the other ministries of the Church. For example, I have heard people say when they discover our mission: “*Wait a minute. When Jesus came to earth He did a lot more than*



preach the gospel. Surely our mission is much wider and broader than simply evangelising the world?”

How should we answer?

Think of the mission of NASA⁶⁶ in the 1960's. It had a mission, which was to make sure America was the first nation in the world to have a man walk on the moon. The mission had vital component parts such as building a rocket and a lunar-landing craft,

training astronauts, undertaking reconnaissance of the moon, and so on. These component parts were vital aspects of the mission but they were not THE mission of NASA. Likewise, all the component parts (i.e. ministries) of the Church are vital, but they are not THE mission of the Church. Our mission is to make sure every single person on the earth hears and understands the gospel at least once.

Now here is the mother of all questions - if NASA had ticked all the boxes with respect to the component parts of its mission, but hadn't been the first to land a man on the moon, how would you describe that mission? You know the answer.

It's the same with the Christian Church. If we "tick the boxes" with every ministry in our church (i.e. the vital component parts of the mission), succeeding gloriously with each one, yet fail with THE mission, brothers and sisters in Christ, we fail.

What you have just read in the paragraph above is a point of monumental significance and really encapsulates the entire message of this book.

You see, all the vital component parts of our mission were never meant to be ends in themselves. They were always meant to be



66 NASA stands for National Aeronautics And Space Administration.

means to one great end - the evangelisation of the earth.

When they become ends only, “church” quickly degenerates into nothing more than a club whose members meet just for the sake of meeting, going through the motions.



The people of a churches which have become clubs view their “church” in one of three ways.

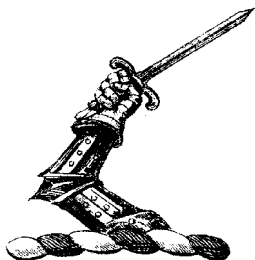
(1) They become bored and leave church altogether.
 (2) The resilient stay, toughing it out. To find fulfilment and purpose, they turn to taking up hobbies, making money, and other activities outside of church. For this group, Christianity becomes a compartment of their life, rather than something vital which effects all of their life.

(3) They leave their church in search of another church which is more aligned with Jesus’ mission.

In the Preface I showed how most people choose option (1) above.

What people who *don’t* do evangelism *don’t* realise is that doing evangelism injects excitement, thrill, purpose, and meaning into individual and corporate life. It’s the glue that holds all other aspects of Christian life together, giving them meaning, purpose, and context. God has designed it to have this effect (Mark 8:35).

When we lose sight of our mission, we become like two soccer teams playing the game without goal posts, golfers without a course, or basketball players without a hoop at each end of the court. The game can be a little fun for a while, but eventually it becomes meaningless. Eventually the players will stop and ask, “Errr....excuse me...what’s the point of what we are doing here?”



Canon Gordon Bridger, retired Principal of London’s Oak Hill Theological College

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““In my experience, when a church gives priority to evangelism, other things fall into place.””

Canon Gordon Bridger

and reader in theology at Cambridge had this to say about any church which makes the evangelisation of the earth central in all it does: *“In my experience, when a church gives priority to evangelism, other things fall into place.”*⁶⁷

To try and stop people leaving church because they are bored, many churches, instead of focussing afresh on Jesus’ mission, putting it back on centre stage where it ought to be, turn to entertainment. But really, this is like trying to fix cancer with an aspirin. Aspirin might temporarily alleviate a little bit of the pain caused by the cancer, but it won’t for a second fix it.

No entertainment will ever come near to replacing the deep inner joy which comes from engaging in evangelism. Find one of the 2% who are doing it. They will tell you.

No entertainment will never replace the gluing, uniting, disciplining, vision-giving effect which doing evangelism will have on a local church.

The more you focus on the mission, the more you’ll see and feel a wonderful surge in forward momentum and the infusion of supernatural life into your church.

Try it and see.⁶⁸

(2) **ISSUE TWO:** The second issue is raised by a question: *“Now that we know the mission of the Church, how must this effect all the other ministries of the Church?”*

Good question. The following are some examples.

If my church had a prayer ministry, I would ask the prayer team the following three questions:

- How much of the prayer team’s



67 <http://www.e-n.org.uk/1996-09/242-A-tribute-to-God's-sovereignty.htm>

68 If you’d like to connect with churches who are experiencing this right now as a result of putting evangelism centre stage, please contact me. julian@esisite.com

time and effort is given to praying for the evangelisation of the world?

- Are the prayer team actually engaging in evangelism personally i.e. being the answer to their prayers?
- Are they accountable to one another for their efforts in evangelism?



If my church had a social action department, I would ask:

- Are the social action team being trained to evangelise?
- Are they accountable for their efforts in evangelism?
- How much evangelism is going on as they go about their excellent good works?

I would ask the worship team:

- How is your worship helping to motivate, encourage, and stimulate the congregation for evangelism?
- Are the worship team being trained how to do evangelism?
- Are they accountable for their efforts in evangelism?

These kinds of questions **must** be asked of every ministry in a church, including all the administration staff if we want to cause a resurgence in world evangelism.

Someone might protest *“Wait a minute. I run a pregnancy clinic. How am I going to evangelise the world and yet still be faithful to what God has called me to do?”* How should we answer? The clinic’s “immediate priority” is saving babies from abortion. This is what they have been called to do and this is good and right. In this respect, don’t change a thing.

But saving babies from abortion is not the mission of the Church. Those who run the clinic need to think how they can give the gospel clearly, lovingly, and appropriately to the people who use their services. This is the “ultimate priority” of the clinic staff. In other words, the staff at this clinic must find the best way to synchronise their ministry’s immediate priority (i.e. saving babies) with God’s ultimate priority (i.e. the evangelisation of the world).

When they find a way, and do it, they are operating a truly Biblical, faithful, Great Commission honouring, Jesus glorifying ministry. Wow!

The bottom line is this - everything that goes on in a church **must** to be filtered through the lens of Jesus' mission because... well... it's Jesus' mission!

It's what He commanded us to do. It's what He MOST wants to see completed. Therefore, it ought to be our *raison d'être*. It ought to be OUR main thing.

Remember, if we succeed with all the component parts of our mission (e.g. prayer, fasting, social action, bible study, serving, worship, raising healthy families, being a holy people, being a loving people, being used by God to work the miraculous, advancing the Kingdom on earth, etc) but fail with THE mission (evangelising the world), we fail. End of story.

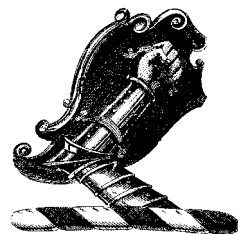
If to evangelise the earth is truly, biblically, theologically, and objectively the priority of the Church, then let's take whatever action is necessary to make it so in reality.

If you as a leader are looking for the ultimate way to express your love for God, and help your people do the same, then make His mission your mission and THE mission of your church (John 14:21).

Summary

The evangelisation of the world is the priority of Jesus. It's our mission. How do we know this?

- He established the idea.
- Paul and the Early Church carried it on.
- Scripture teaches it.
- The Apostles believed it.
- Biblical scholarship supports it.
- Spiritual giants from the past promote it.
- Significant contemporary leaders advocate it.
- To evangelise is to enter the highest form of worship.
- It's the fast track to one of the most potent sources of Christian joy.
- It's one of the greatest ways to bring glory to God.
- It's vital to distinguish between the component parts of our mission and THE



mission.

- All ministries must be filtered through the lens of our mission.
- Every ministry in the church needs to be active in evangelism, and accountable for the same.
- If we fail with the evangelising of the world, no matter how successful we are in other areas of ministry, we fail.
- **ACTION POINT:** Start spreading awareness of the issues raised in this chapter to other Christians, particularly leaders. Email everyone on your address book and encourage them to do the same. Send them a PDF file of this chapter by writing to julian@esisite.com.
- **ACTION POINT:** Go to the leaders of your church. Ask them to make changes to their mission statement so that evangelism becomes central. Ask them to bring evangelism back to centre stage in the life of your church. Pray for them. Encourage them. Work with them. Dialogue.

In the next chapter I am going to reveal one of the major devices of the enemy which stops Christians from doing evangelism. This is one of the dirtiest of all his tricks. Stay with me. I am going to take you right behind enemy lines. You are about to see some scenes I pray you will never forget. The war for souls is about to get hotter...

