



“Semper Reformanda”

Study 6: Christ’s Gospel Ministry (Matt. 9:35-38)

o The ministry of the church must extend from teaching believers to the winning of souls.

I. The significance of Christ’s gospel ministry.

1. The Reformation of the 16th century recovered not only important biblical truths, but also the zeal for missions. This is seen in John Calvin’s attempt to evangelise Europe, including a failed mission to Brazil (see M. Haykin, “John Calvin on Missions”).
 - In the 18th century, the Moravians were exceptionally zealous in sending out missionaries to foreign lands. “This was the first time in the history of Protestant Europe that a congregation of orthodox Christians had deliberately resolved to take the gospel to the heathens.” (JE Hutton)
 - The Particular Baptists were also extremely missions-minded. Preachers were sent out to plant churches throughout Britain in the 17th century. Following the Great Awakening from the 1730s, under the ministries of George Whitfield and John Wesley, the first PB missionary organisation was formed in 1792 which sent out William Carey (1761-1834) and his friends to India. Due to his 87-page book, “An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens” published in 1792, and his subsequent extensive labour in India, Carey has been called the “father of modern missions”. Following that, many missionary organisations were started on both sides of the Atlantic, including the one that sent Hudson Taylor to China and another which sent Adoniram Judson to Burma.
 - Sadly, as the Evangelicals focussed on missions, doctrinal distinctives were sidelined. The modern Church Growth Movement advocate the use of a scientific approach and the adoption of business marketing strategies in evangelism and missions, e.g. contextualisation, seeking numbers, being success oriented, the seeker-sensitive approach, chronological preparationism, etc.
2. Our aim is to recover the biblical approach to missions. The apostle Paul says in 1 Cor. 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”.
 - Paul plays a special role in setting the pattern of church life in the NT age (Gal. 1:15-16; 2:7). Three aspects of Paul’s ministry need to be noted: (i) his understanding of the GC; (ii) the relationship between local church growth and wider church planting; (iii) the training of preachers.
3. The principle of “semper reformanda” requires that we follow the pattern set by the Lord of an all-round ministry, which included teaching, preaching the gospel, and good works. These are included in the GC. We note the following about preaching the gospel:

- In any gathering of God's people to hear God's word, we expect some non-believers to be present (Acts 2:38-39; 1 Cor. 14:23, 24). Believers must be built up in the faith, at the same time that the gospel is preached to win souls within the church.
- Acts 2:39 shows that there are the temporal and spatial dimensions to gospel preaching. The gospel must be preached to those outside the church, and to those of the future generations.

II. The character and relevance of Christ's gospel ministry.

1. It was an extension of the teaching ministry (35). Comparing Matt. 9:35 with 4:23, we realise that the Lord had kept to the same pattern of ministry from the beginning.

- The theme of His ministry must not be over-looked, viz. the necessity of repentance, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (4:17 cf. 3:2). The membership of Christ's church consists of those who have been born again of the Spirit of shown by repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ.

: Teaching in the church includes the preaching of the gospel. The pattern of beginning the Lord's day with worship and ending the Lord's day with worship is a time-honoured one. It is also biblical (cf. Num. 28:1-10; Acts 3:1; 10:9; 20:7ff.). There still exist churches whose historical beginning stretches to the time of the Puritans and the Reformation. Unlike modern churches, these have a history of having two main services on the Lord's day. Having two services on the Lord's day allows for one service to be dedicated to teaching the believers, while the other to winning souls to Christ. The church members attend both services, as they are intended to start and end the Lord's day with worship.

- Not all will be engaged in direct gospel work, but all have a role to play.

: The apostles were not only to pray for others to be sent forth, but to offer themselves. We are to be salt & light (Matt. 5:13-16). We are also to be fishers of men (Matt 4:19).

: Each believer has been given gifts for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 12:27-31; 14:26; Heb. 5:12). Each has been baptised in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:31; Gal. 3:2; Rom. 8:9).

Opportunities for gospel work abound (Matt. 9:37). We must pray for the filling of the Spirit, to enable us to be used in the work of the GC (Acts 4:31; Rom. 8:11; Col. 1:29).

2. It was a soul-winning ministry (36).

- Preachers must travel regularly, and in planned manner, to win souls (cf. Mark 6:6; 1 Cor. 9:5). Gospel preaching should not be confined to within the church. The gospel is to be brought to this e outside the church.

: The leading teacher of the church is to be sent (cf Acts 13:1-3). The extraordinary offices of apostle, prophet and evangelist have been withdrawn. They were given for the founding of the NT church. The ordinary office of pastor-teacher remains (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 5:17).

: The work of evangelists is subsumed under responsibility of the pastor (2 Tim. 4:5).

"Missionaries" perform the function of evangelists but do not possess the office (Rom. 10:14-15).

: Many Reformed preachers today do not place emphasis on systematic outreach and church-planting because their idea of ministry have been influenced by Richard Baxter's book "The Reformed Pastor", and Charles Bridges's book "The Christian Ministry". Both writers were Anglicans, who believed in the territorial church.

: Contrast this with the view of the Nonconformists: "When, therefore, there are great opportunities and providential calls for the preaching of the gospel unto the conversion of souls, and, the harvest being great, there are not labourers sufficient for it, it is lawful, yea, it is the duty of pastors of particular churches to leave their constant attendance on their pastoral charge in those churches, at least for a season, to apply themselves unto the more

public preaching of the word unto the conversion of the souls of men.” (John Owen, Vol. 16, p. 85.) “Two peculiarities distinguish the Baptist history of the seventeenth century. It was the age of public disputation; and ministers devoted a large amount of time to to evangelistic work.” (Joseph Angus, 1895:183-190).

- Local church growth must go hand-in-hand with wider church planting (2 Cor 10:15).
- : The GC is about local churches planting other local churches (cf. Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor 11:23). Outreach & evangelism must be planned, not left to providence. Beware practical Hyper-Calvinism!
- : Method? Publicly & from house to house (Acts 20:20). Normally, elders must take the initiative to start preaching points. The same households/groups are to be visited regularly, until souls are converted or the preachers unwanted (Matt. 28:19; Acts 18:4-8).

3. A soul-winners’ ministry (37-38).

- The training of preachers essential. It is is part-and-parcel of the Great Commission.
- : The Lord trained up the 12 & the 70 (Luke 9:1; 10:1). Paul trained up Timothy, Titus, Silas, others (Acts 20:4-6).
- : Timothy was asked to train up other teachers (2 Tim. 2:2). The context shows that this is a reference to full-time preachers. Timothy was an apostolic representative, setting an apostolic example (Phil 3:17). This “hath the force of a divine institution” (Owen 16:197).
- : Not all preachers are equipped to train other preachers on a formal basis. Not all churches are called upon to train preachers. Ephesus was the “mother” of the churches in Asia. The training of preachers was done in concert with the other churches.
- A church-based, personal, approach to training is taught (cf. Matt. 18:19; 28:18-20). The principle of accompaniment in training is seen (Mark 6:1, 6; Acts 20:4-6). Doctrine and practical experience are given equal emphasis (Acts 20:20-21, 27; Luke 9:1ff; 10:1ff.)
- : Today, four basic models of missions. The Mentoring Model, the School Model, the Organisation Model, and the Local Church Model. We believe the last is biblical - local churches coming together to run the training of preachers.
- : Ill-trained missionaries may cause havoc, & learn the hard way. Examples include ignorance of doctrinal controversies and practical dangers. Questionable approaches to missions may be absorbed unwittingly, e.g. modern church-growth ideas, chronological preparationism, etc.

= A church without a vision for missions the church will stagnate and die.

Review Questions

1. What is the special role of Paul in the NT age?
2. What three things should be noted about Paul’s gospel ministry?
3. What do the temporal and spatial dimensions of Acts 2:39 mean in practice?
4. What is the advantage of having two services on the Lord’s day?
5. Under “an extension of the teaching ministry” what two main points are made about teaching in the church?
6. Under “a soul-winning ministry”, what two main points are made about the effort to win souls?
7. Under “a soul-winners’ ministry” what two main points are made about the training of preachers?
8. What four basic models of missions are seen today?
9. What are some examples of questionable approaches to missions?

10. What conclusion may we make about a church that is without a vision for missions?

Assignment/Discussion

Comment on the following: (i) “The same groups are to be visited regularly until souls are saved, or the preachers are unwanted;” (ii) “Local church growth must go hand-in-hand with wider church-planting.”

Memory passage (Acts 2:38-39)

38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

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