

## INTERACTION WITH CHAFER'S *TRUE EVANGELISM*

In explaining the essential steps to pursuing “true evangelism” [the title of the book] – intercessory prayer, a clear presentation of the true gospel, and movement by the Holy Spirit – Chafer discussed several integral concepts worth noting, such as whether a confession of faith is part of the salvation process [18-24], the dangers inherent to the corruption of – and distraction from – the pure gospel message [25-27], and the need for cleansing through confession to have effective intercessory prayer [81-88]. The discussion herein will cover two such concepts.

The first is the need to rely on the Holy Spirit, not only to work on the heart of the unbeliever, but also to prompt the evangelizer to act in the right timing. Chafer said the evangelizer needs to rely on the Spirit to move the non-believer to conviction because the veil under which the non-believer struggles is satanic in nature [44, 50]. Though the Spirit will work through our prayer [55] and sharing of scripture [54], our logic, testimony, scripture, and enthusiasm cannot be effective without a movement of the Spirit in the non-believer, for it is the Spirit who illuminates Christ's righteousness and our need for it [52-53], as well as the need for moving from hope of self-merit to trusting in God's provision through Christ [45].

An implication of dependence on the action of the Holy Spirit is that the evangelizer must cooperate with the Spirit in timing, not pushing the issue before the Spirit has done his preparatory work in the unbeliever [22-24]. Chafer elaborated by pointing to the scriptural record in the New Testament, from which he saw no need for urging or coaxing, but rather that people approached the evangelizer with a clear indication that they were ready to hear the gospel [58, 72]. Chafer concluded that evangelizers should be prompted by the Spirit as to the intensity of discussion [i.e. the timing of reaping the harvest] as well as choice of method [72]. He explained that, while we should always seek opportunities to present the gospel, we should press for a decision from an individual only if led by the Spirit [72-73].

The second concept is related: that if we do not heed the Spirit's prompting in the process of evangelism, we could [among other problems] induce false confessions of faith, as people seek to follow their emotions or achieve social acceptance [56-57]. The most tragic element of this would be that the false confessor would remain unsaved while believing he was saved. Some of these people might not fall away, maintaining an upright image akin to the non-believer in civic clubs, falsely motivated to pious acts and reliant on a sense of self-righteousness [57]. Some would become aware of their failure to grow spiritually, their failure to realize the blessings promised in the new life, and become disillusioned, perhaps relapsing into the former way of life [21-22, 57].

Many pastors struggle with the issues of assurance of salvation and perseverance of believers – despite scripture passages in support – because they have seen apparently devout believers walk away from the faith. Sometimes these people are in bondage to sin, still truly saved but acting worldly in their broken fellowship with God. Though it is hard to comprehend in the moment how a believer can fall so far as to walk away from the community of the church, it is not hard to understand when considering the work of our enemy, our remaining inherent weakness, and our failure to vigilantly protect ourselves as outlined in the Bible.

Pastors have a harder time understanding the one who not only walks away from fellowship with – and obedience to – God, but also disclaims any remaining faith in God. If we believe faith to be an integral part of salvation – at least evidence of it! – then it is hard to understand how this can occur. Chafer’s answer would be that they never really believed [47]. Yes, they said they did, but they had been caught up in the emotion of the moment or believed in a distorted truth instead of the true gospel; yes they lived like they did, but they lived such for selfish reasons and in a sense of self-righteousness [57]. Now, whether due to disillusion, distraction, or temptation, they have come to realize that they never were regenerated, never were connected to the living God, and their rejection is hardened by the thought that the whole thing was an illusion... which, for them, it was.

Chafer addressed the meaning of a particularly tricky passage, Hebrews 6:4-9. According to Chafer, the person under question is unsaved, for if the passage were to discuss a true believer it would describe him as having *received* the heavenly gift, not just *tasted* it; as having been *sealed* by the Holy Spirit, not just *partaken* of him; as having been *regenerated* by the Word of God, not just *tasted* it [46-47]. Chafer added that if an unsaved person was drawn and convicted by the Holy Spirit in preparation for salvation, then that person would be like the one described in this passage [47], and he maintained that some who have been so drawn and convicted will reject the way of life [57].

This book is useful and provocative, with its theme of relying on scripture, instead of human constructs, to develop the concept of evangelism. If we believe that God, in the Bible, has provided us with the guidelines necessary to succeed in evangelism, then this book can help us understand those guidelines. This is not to say that prayerful thought is unnecessary in the process of reaching the lost – for one needs to know how best to communicate to each person – but it is to say that one should avoid artificial methods which do not rely on scripture.