



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN


# How Evangelism Blesses Society

We've discovered in this book that the command to proclaim the gospel has been neglected by many of us for a long time – and that this neglect is the work of the enemy. Now we will look at the fall-out.

Disobedience, you see, always has fall-out. Between 1000 and 700BC, for example, Israel and Judah neglected virtually all of the commands of God, and the negative consequences of their disobedience eventually crashed

in on them like a tidal wave. Both nations ended up being exiled and taken into captivity. The consequences of not proclaiming the gospel are now showing in the non-Christian world. We looked at some of the consequences in the preface of this book. In this chapter we shall look at others.

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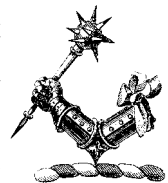
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*“The consequences of not  
proclaiming the gospel are  
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non-Christian world.”*

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### **One competition you do not want to win...**

Let's take my home country, New Zealand, for starters. If we were to hold an Olympic games right now for negative social indicators, New Zealand would break the record in almost every event. We have record-high rates in teen suicide, abortion, teenage alcohol




problems, violence in the home and truancy. We are filling new prisons as fast as we build them.

### Evangelism is a major instrument of social change...

Is there a link between the social decline we are seeing and the Church's failure to evangelise? **Dr John Stott**, one of today's leading theologians, is a man well qualified to answer such a question. He says "yes." The gospel changes people, he

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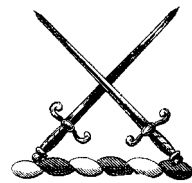
*"We have seen that society needs salt and light, but only the gospel can create them. This is one way which we may declare without embarrassment that evangelism takes primacy over social action."*

Dr John Stott

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says, and people change society: "We have seen that society needs salt and light, but only the gospel can create them. This is one way which we may declare without embarrassment that evangelism takes primacy over social action. Logically speaking, Christian social

responsibility presupposes socially-responsible Christians, and it is the gospel which produces them." He goes on to say that when the gospel is faithfully and widely preached, it brings not only renewal to individuals, but produces in society what has been termed an 'antiseptic atmosphere' – "in which blasphemy, selfishness, greed, dishonesty, immorality, cruelty, and injustice find it harder to flourish. A country which has been permeated by the gospel is not the soil in which these poisonous weeds can take root, let alone luxuriate."<sup>1</sup>



### How oysters can speak...

In probing the causes of a disintegrating society, **Charles Colson**, former White House aide and Founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries, gives the analogy of an oyster.

"Oysters make their own shells, so if the shell is badly formed, the problem is not with the shell but with the oyster. Likewise,

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<sup>1</sup> Dr John Stott, *Issues facing Christians Today*. Marshall Pickering, 1984, pp.69-70

when a culture deforms and decays, don't ask what went wrong with the culture; ask what went wrong with the cult – the religious core.”<sup>2</sup> What's wrong with our “religious core” is that we have stopped proclaiming the gospel, with the result that fewer people are being genuinely saved. If there are fewer saved people, the salt in a society reduces to ineffectual levels and the Christian light becomes dim. Once the salt is gone the rot sets in, and when the light goes out, darkness abounds.



If we want to change a nation we must change the men and women in that nation, and to do that we must change their hearts. But changed hearts come only as a result of hearing, understanding and responding to the gospel.

### **Do evangelism and help create loving people...**

Is this a minority view? Far from it. **Billy Graham** believed wholeheartedly that evangelism was a major instrument of social change. He said, “I am convinced that if the Church went back to its *main task* of preaching the gospel and getting people converted to Christ, it would have a far greater impact on the social, moral and psychological needs of people than any other thing could possibly do. Some of the greatest social movements of history have come about as the result of people being converted to



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Christ. For example, the conversion of Wilberforce led to the freeing of the slaves, the conversion of William Booth led to the founding of the Salvation Army, and the conversion of Keir Hardie led to the founding of the British Labour Party. Scores of current and up-to-date illustrations could be used. We have made the mistake of putting the cart before the horse. We are exhorting men to love each other before they have the *capacity* to love each other. This capacity can

2 Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* Tyndale Publishers, 1999, p.37

only come through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

### Do evangelism and bless society...

Then there is **Dr Donald McGavran**: “When the population of the world has become more Christian, it will hear Almighty God’s command to treat other men fairly and to obey that command more faithfully. It is useless to expect that non-Christians will be



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Billy Graham

as interested as Christians in treating all men as God’s children. If we want mercy, justice, and righteousness to spread throughout the earth, we can take no more effective action than to multiply congregations of the redeemed in every segment of society. No one



will act more justly towards his or her fellows than those who live in Christ, and whose lives are guided by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

It is clear: moral and spiritual decline follows when the Church stops evangelising. To see a nation deteriorate, just arrange for the church to be silent about the gospel. Build a stay-at-home-introspective-only-look-after-Christians-social-action-only-orientated Church. Be committed to praying for the un-churched, singing about them, doing studies about them, having



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Dr Donald McGavran.

conferences about them and analysing them, but never ever actually engaging them with the gospel. As **Dr Stott** comments:

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3 Dr Billy Graham. *One Race, One Gospel, One Task. World Congress on Evangelism.* World Wide Publications, 1967, p.28

4 Dr Donald A McGavran. *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate.* Presbyterian Reform Publishing, 1988, p.103



“It remains questionable whether a stay-at-home church – disobedient to the Great Commission, and indifferent to the needs of the nations – is in any position to claim or inherit the fulness of Christ’s promised blessings.”<sup>5</sup>

## Do evangelism and save people from tragedy...

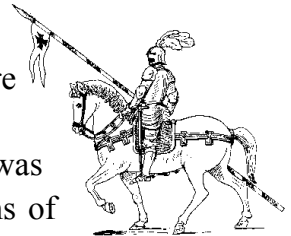
I was on a plane going from one city to another, sitting next to a 59-year-old businessman. I took him through the full gospel, and at the end of the presentation asked the critical question: “If you died tonight, where would you go?”

He thought about it for a few seconds and then replied: “Heaven.”

When asked “Why?” he said, “Because when I was a boy, I can remember being taught by my Bible teacher that Jesus wants all people in heaven. And being God, I am sure He will get what He wants.”

He told me that in the years between boyhood and the present he had never gone to church on Sundays, never read a Bible, never given Jesus so much as a thought. Yet because of what the Bible teacher had told him as a child, he was convinced he was a Christian. His Bible teacher had not explained the whole gospel. This man would likely have perished in hell for eternity if someone had not come along and completed what the good Bible teacher had started. It was only when I did the review section<sup>6</sup> of the gospel presentation that he discovered he was not in fact a Christian and was bound for hell. On another flight, about ten days later, I was again sitting next to a businessman. He was older, but as sharp as a tack. I got to the end of the presentation of the gospel and asked him, “If you died tonight, where would you go?” “Heaven,” he replied.

When asked “Why?” he said, “Because I was taught as a youngster that God died for the sins of



5 John Stott, *One Race. One Gospel. One Task.* World Congress on Evangelism, World Wide Publications, 1967, p.44

6 The “Review” is a succinct and probing summary of the gospel message we proclaim with the tools we have developed.

the whole world. We are all Christians, aren't we?"

These two stories illustrate how dangerous it is to proclaim only bits of the gospel in our churches and never give regular, powerful, complete, 'all-at-one-time' presentations of it.<sup>7</sup> All these two men had to go on was a fragment of the truth about Jesus – heard in childhood. A little knowledge can be dangerous and deceiving. How tragic it would have been if they had gone to their death, not hearing the truth.

### Do evangelism and get beautiful feet...

These are not isolated cases. Millions of people are living spiritually-deluded lives like these men,



*"It is dangerous to proclaim only bits of the gospel in our churches and never give regular, powerful, complete, all-at-one-time presentations of it."*



believing they are Christians and that they are going to heaven. Why? Because most Christians are just not proclaiming or spreading the gospel. As Paul so clearly declared to the Romans, "How, then, can

they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news [literally *the gospel*]'"  
(Romans 10:14-15).



*"A little knowledge can be dangerous and deceiving. How tragic it would have been if they had gone to their death, not hearing the truth."*

### Do evangelism and beat deception...

The devil seems to have prevented Christians from examining important statistics about spiritual deception. If they don't see these statistics, they will not perceive the extent of the fall-out from

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7 Please visit [www.esisite.com](http://www.esisite.com).

neglecting the proclamation of the gospel.

What are these statistics? Well, in the 1996 New Zealand census, 59 percent of the population of four million (i.e. 2.3 million people) said they were Christians or affiliated with a Christian church. Yet in the same census, only one

Kiwi in ten (i.e. 390,000 people) indicated they attended church at least once a month. Let's assume all these churchgoers are genuine believers.<sup>8</sup> The question we have to ask, then is, "Where are the other 49 percent (i.e. nearly 2 million people) on Sunday?"<sup>9</sup> There are a number of possible explanations:

- 1 Some could be sick or elderly or live in remote geographical locations.
- 2 Others could have had a bad church experience and are having a temporary break from attending services on Sunday.
- 3 Others could be genuinely Christian but their community of faith meets regularly in a home rather than a church building.
- 4 Some could have ticked "Christian" on the census form but have since left New Zealand.

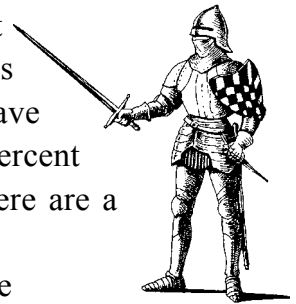
Another possibility – and the more likely scenario – is that most of the people who say they are Christians but do not attend any form of church regularly are not Christians at all. If this is the case, we now have a large percentage of the population who are totally deceived. These people have no relationship with God, and when they die they are going to be surprised to find themselves in an eternity without Christ. The reason is simple: they have created

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8 We know that not everyone who goes to church is saved. At least, in America they're not. According to research, half of all people who attend protestant churches in America are not Christian. See George Barna. *Evangelism That Works*. Regal, 1995, p.38

9 We are presuming here, of course, that attending a local church regularly is a strong indicator of saving faith.

their own image of Christianity, of who Jesus is, of heaven and hell, and of what qualifies a person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The reason they have made up these things is that we have not gone to them with the gospel and explained it to them.

### **British students confess: “Playing God is not easy.”**

I was speaking recently to a group of British high school students – young people from about thirteen to seventeen. As a ministry we have produced an electronic version of the gospel which runs from a laptop, through a data projector, and onto a screen. The first image in this presentation is a logo which says “Why Some Good People Don’t Go To Heaven.” When the students entered the classroom for the lesson we had prepared, the first thing they saw was this graphic on the screen. Many looked confused, and some of them began to discuss it spontaneously. We then introduced ourselves and the lesson began.



First we asked the students, “What do you notice about this logo?” They talked about the colours and shapes of it, but very early on, someone brought up the words,

*“Why Some Good People Don’t Go To Heaven.”*

*“Is there anything you don’t agree with about that?”*

*I asked them.*

*“I don’t agree with it,” someone said quickly.*

*“I think if you are good you should go to heaven.”*

*This was the start we wanted – and which we anticipated. I show this presentation in high schools a lot – and the same things happen almost invariably.*

*“Okay, so you think that if you are a good person, you should go to heaven?”<sup>10</sup> I asked them.*

*Smiling, the class agreed unanimously.*

*“So no axe murderers?” I asked. “Serial killers, Hitler, and people like that?”*

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<sup>10</sup> What I found interesting was that young people almost without exception accepted without question that heaven and hell existed.

*“No, definitely not!” someone protested strongly, and everyone quickly agreed.*

*“So there are some people who are not good?” I continued. “Is that what you are saying?”*

*“Yes!” shouted the class.*

*“Well, how good do you have to be to get into heaven?” I asked.*

*“And how bad do you have to be to be shut out?”*

*I invited them to play God for the next 20 minutes, and to decide the criteria for entry to heaven and the criteria for exclusion.*

*I went to the white board and divided it into two.*

*On one side I wrote, “Things that qualify us for heaven.”*

*On the other side I wrote,*

*“Things that disqualify us from heaven.”*

*“Okay, let’s start with the things that qualify someone for heaven,” I said. “Who’d like to start? What do you have to do to get into heaven?”*

*“You have to be good!” shouted one person.*

*“Okay,” I replied. “How good?”*

*Many hands shot up enthusiastically.*

*“You have to do good things for other people!” said one.*

*“What do you mean by ‘good things’?” I probed.*

*Several answers came at me at once.*

*“Going to church, helping your parents, saving an animal, saying prayers...”*

*“Hmmm,” I said. “And how often do you have to do these good things...once a day? once a week? once a month?”*

*“Once a day!” someone shouted.*

*“No!” someone else disagreed. “We must do good things in every situation!”*

*Spontaneous discussion followed.*

*“But are some things better than others?” I asked them.*

*“Surely something like saving someone’s life is worth more than passing your little brother the butter at breakfast...?”*



*More animated discussion.*

*“Let’s say we live for 75 years and there are 365 days in the year.” I said. “That’s 27,375 days, right?”*

*The class agreed.*

*“Okay,” I went on. “Let’s agree that we have to do one good thing a day to get into heaven. Can we all agree on this? Let’s forget about weighing the good things for a minute because that is going to get too complicated...”*

*The class looked very relieved that they didn’t have to weigh all the good things people did and decide which ones were worth more than others.*

*“Yes!” they chorused.*

*“Being God isn’t so easy, is it?” I commented.*

*“Okay, here’s another question. Do we start counting the good things a person does from the moment he or she is born?”*

*The class looked confused.*

*“No, not until someone is five” suggested someone.*

*“All right,” I said. “Let’s say we start counting from age five.*

*Now we are looking at a new sum – 70 times 365 = 25,550 days.*

*What happens if you miss a day? What then?”*

*The class looked even more confused.*

*“Ah... forgive them,” said one person.*

*“How many times would you have to forgive before you reach the cut-off point?” I asked.*

*There were baffled looks and a long silence as they thought furiously.*

*“I can see we’re not doing too well as God here,” I said.*

*“Let’s move on. So far on the ‘Things that qualify us for heaven’ side of the board we only have ‘Do good things for other people.’ What else could we put up on this side of the board?”*

*“Prayers,” suggested someone.*

*“How many? How often? Do they need to be sincere?”*

*What is a sincere prayer?”*

*“It needs to come from the heart?” said one girl.*

*“But what happens if it doesn’t come from the heart? Does it still count? What happens if it’s a selfish prayer?”*



*Is that a bad thing, and if so should we put it on the other side of the board with the things that disqualify us from heaven?"*  
*The class looked perplexed, and a heated debate followed.*



*"Let's move on," I said again.*

*"What other things qualify us to get into heaven?"*

*"Going to church!" was suggested next.*

*"How often?" I asked. "What happens if you miss a Sunday? Would you need a note? A doctor's certificate? Could you make it up by going twice on another Sunday?"*

*More debate followed as we proceeded to list five or six key behaviours on one side of the board.*

*The class was not finding it easy to play God at all!*

*"Let's go quickly to the other side of the white board," I said.*

*"Is there anything a person could do that would definitely disqualify them from heaven? I mean, something that if they did it they would absolutely never make it!"*

*"Murder!"*

*(This was nearly always the first suggestion in every class)*

*"Rape!" shouted another person.*

*"Serial killing!" shouted another.*

*I wrote all these responses on the board.*

*"What about things like lying and stealing? Would they disqualify us?"*

*A discussion followed about how bad the lie was, how big the thing stolen, etc. No agreement was reached, and the group felt defeated. Of course, we went through this exercise to show how futile and frustrating it was. Then I asked them another question.*

*"Do you want to know what God really said? Would you like to know what really qualifies a person to enter heaven?"*

*The students felt relieved their role as God was now over.*

*"Yes!" they said enthusiastically.*



We proceeded to show the electronic gospel presentation, which takes about eleven minutes. During this presentation we use the Law; and the students found



out that according to what God says, they were thieves, liars, and murderers – the very things they said would disqualify others from heaven.

This same discussion happens in Christian schools as well as state schools. The reason none of these students knew how God was going to judge each person at death is that they had never heard the gospel – even in Christian establishments. With the current state of evangelism in the West, if we hadn't explained it to them, it is highly likely they would have gone all the way to their deaths without ever hearing the gospel from another Christian.

### **Do evangelism and avoid a spiritual holocaust....**

In World War II the Nazis rounded up many Jews and herded them into cattle wagons and trains. They were headed for camps where they were told they would be stripped, showered and given camp clothes. They were stripped, but when the showers were turned on it was not water that came out of the nozzle but poisonous gas. The people had been deceived. Commentators use an ancient Hebrew word to describe the enormity of the devastation that occurred in those camps: *Holocaust*. The Oxford English dictionary defines *holocaust* as “the destruction of a large number of persons; a great slaughter or massacre.”<sup>11</sup> The Nazi holocaust has always disturbed me greatly. I would wince every time I heard about it. Then one day it dawned on me that a spiritual holocaust was happening right before my eyes. It was designed by the devil and happening today, across the Western world. Millions of non-Christians sincerely believe that when they die they are going to heaven, simply because they consider themselves to be good people.



*“And with the current state of the evangelism in the West, if we hadn't explained the gospel to them, it is highly likely they would have gone all the way to their deaths without ever hearing it from another Christian.”*

11 *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Vol. X, H-K, p.344 Definition C.

## **Christians and their music and literature are everywhere, but non-Christians are just not getting it...**

In the time it has taken you to read this chapter, people from your own country have died. Some in car accidents, some from disease, some through crime, others from old age. Many of them – like the 49 percent of New Zealanders in the census – thought they were going to heaven. Right now they are suffering in hell. They died never having heard about the amazing grace of Jesus through the gospel. Not even once. How do we know this? We know it from the research quoted at the beginning of this book.

I also know it from personal experience. In thousands of one-on-one evangelism encounters, I have not found more than a dozen people who had heard and understood the whole gospel before. Can you believe it? Yet there are churches on every corner, Christians living in most streets, Christians working in most places of employment, Christians attending most schools and universities, Christian radio and TV filling the airwaves,<sup>12</sup> billboards in public places with Christian messages, many people praying fervently, and dozens of Christian publications in circulation. Because of these things it is easy to imagine we are living in an evangelised nation. Nothing could be further from the truth. How can this possibly have happened, other than great darkness has caused it? Not only did they perish eternally and unnecessarily, but their conversion in this life might have helped make a better, lighter, saltier, more God-glorifying society.

In the next chapter, I detail how the creation of pseudo-conversions has contributed to the decline of evangelism in the West and how the enemy has orchestrated this. Any army which is serious about winning ought to be intensely interested to know how impostors could slip into the ranks of the authentic. Don't miss the strategies from heaven in the next chapter. You cannot afford to step on to the battle field without them...

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12 TV and radio have the potential to significantly increase their impact on the non-Christian world if they would commit to regularly presenting the whole gospel in an 'all-at-one-time' format. I think Christian radio and TV have made an enormous contribution to bringing Christ into society. My own family has already been positively impacted by Christian TV. If Christian TV and radio have a weakness, it is that they present the gospel bit by bit, scattering the bits in a sea of other information. Why don't we help non-Christians by putting it all together for them, so they can make sense of it? 2 Corinthians 4:4 says that the devil is not helping non-Christians see the gospel. Let's not have the same charge levelled at us.