

The Lord's Invitation

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Jesus extended his invitation by saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

To let one and all know what he would expect of those who would respond to his invitation, Jesus commanded the apostles to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Mark recorded the Lord's great commission in this way, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

What is the gospel that the Lord is talking about? The word literally means "good news" (Romans 10:15), the message telling of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:1-4). In obeying the *commands* of the gospel, picturing what Christ has done for us, a person dies to his sins, is buried in the waters of baptism, and is resurrected from that watery grave to walk in newness of life. Read John 3:3-5 and Romans 6:4.

Because of the meaning of "gospel" Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for *it is the power of God unto salvation* to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH" (Romans 1:16-17).

Following the Lord's personal ministry on the earth, after he had died, been buried, resurrected, and had returned to the Father in heaven, on the Day of Pentecost the apostles received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, enabling them to begin the work of preaching that gospel to a lost world. A great gathering took place in the city of Jerusalem on that day, and the apostles preached to the multitude.

Many of those heard the message became believers, and they wanted to know what else they should do. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off [Gentiles], even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them [the apostles] about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:38-41). And as they continued to teach and serve God, ". . . the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

Now when I was growing up back in the 50's, I was blessed to hear the gospel preached by great gospel preachers on the radio, in gospel meetings, and in various worship services of the church. Those who were preaching always extended the Lord's invitation to those who were present, explaining what one needed to do to be saved and encouraging the erring Christian to return to God. All of this was done in a clear, kind way so that there would be no doubt as to what the Lord expected anyone to do.

In more recent years, however, many preachers have evidently decided that surely all those in the audience would have heard the gospel enough times that it would not be necessary to take the time to tell the sinner what he must to obey the gospel or to tell the erring Christian that he needed to return to the Lord. As a result, we have generations growing up not hearing the commands of the gospel presented in each sermon, and not hearing the exhortation to the erring to repent and to ask the church to pray that God might forgive that person.

While most preachers seem to have fallen in line with this practice, and elders evidently do not find any problem with this procedure, several important things are being overlooked. What about children and young people growing up without hearing the Lord's invitation presented, not being taught what one must do to be saved, or what the erring must do to return to the church? What about

visitors being present, people who perhaps have never heard the message of the gospel—how are they going to know what they must do to be saved if they are not told while they are there? What if they never return? Might they, perhaps, die without ever hearing what they must do to have their sins forgiven?

When the preacher offers a blanket invitation, encouraging those who need to come forward to do so, but without explanation of what the Lord requires of them, with what sort of knowledge might they “go forward”? with only the knowledge they have from attending the meetings of denominations? In that case, they may respond with the expectation that the preacher will offer prayer that their soul may be saved, or they may respond with some other thought in mind that is equally foreign to the scriptures. We have seen non-members respond, simply asking for prayers, and prayers were offered on their behalf for strength and for God’s help with the problems in their lives, but without anyone ever trying to help them realize that their need was to obey the gospel in order to be born into God’s family, so that they would be in position to expect God’s help in response to their prayers.

Then what about members of the church themselves, whether young or old: if they cease to hear the plan of salvation given, will they not eventually forget the importance of offering the Lord’s invitation, or will they not forget what the Lord requires of those who are lost, or what he expects of the erring member? Repetition is used in the scriptures for a good reason: we remember what we hear repeated often.

My brethren, I know this sounds like an innocent thing, but it is so easy for us to begin to drift away from the Lord. This omission is something that has been recently introduced but the question is, what will come next?

As far as I am concerned I will continue to extend the Lord’s invitation after each sermon, explaining what one must do to be saved and what the erring must do to return to the church. I want no one’s blood on my hands.

Also, in preaching over the radio or in speaking on TV, I will also explain after each sermon what one must do to be saved and what the erring must do to return to the church. What if the Lord’s invitation is not extended properly after a sermon from the pulpit or by radio and TV, and that person does not return or listen again to the radio or TV message? It means that we did not use these

opportunities to tell those who were listening what they needed to do to be saved. Our negligence could mean that they will be eternally lost.

What does the Lord’s invitation mean to you? Don’t you think it is worth repeating? Do you really think the repetition is a boring waste of time? Explaining that invitation, with the love and concern of the Lord, could make an eternal difference for someone in the audience. (*The Voice of Truth International*, 54:3-5).