

# **New Covenant Evangelism**

## ***God Opens and Closes Doors***

### **II Corinthians 2:12-13**

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Part Two

<sup>12</sup> Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, <sup>13</sup> I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.

This is part two of a two-part series on new covenant Evangelism. In part one, I reminded you that the overall context for II Corinthians is the ministry of the new covenant of the Spirit in Paul and his associates, as over and against the ministry of the letter of the law of Paul's opponents, whom he referred to as "super-apostles." That ministry of Paul was both the proclamation of the reconciling work of Christ and the appropriating work of the Spirit in those who believe. It is by the Spirit we appropriate what Christ's accomplished for us in his death and resurrection; we do not appropriate Christ's work by returning to the law. Yet, that was the message of the false apostles of Paul's day, and it remains the message of Paul's opponents today as well.

Any so-called Christian ministry that points you back to Moses after conversion to Christ is something other than a Christian ministry. Any ministry that fails to facilitate ever-increasing conformity to Christ, is something other than a Christian ministry. They may use Christian symbols and terminologies, they may insist they believe the Bible, but if they are not facilitating in you the image and glory of Christ, they are not a Christian ministry.

Are you presently involved in a Christian ministry, or is something other? How can you know? Do you experience the hope that comes as you grow in Christlikeness? Then you are in a Christian ministry? If this is not true for you, then I pray you find another ministry and continue to listen to this study in 2 Corinthians.

## **Compelled by the Spirit**

Now, this brings us back to our text in 2 Corinthians. Paul was a traveling man. He went to Troas with the intention to preach the gospel of Christ, to preach the “good news” of Christ to pagan Gentiles. And these Gentiles were a hard crowd. They were steeped in Greek philosophy, Roman paganism, and some were God-fearers, meaning uncircumcised Gentile attenders at the local Jewish Synagogue. Sometimes riots would ensue, others times Paul would be dismissed, as he was in Athens, and other times he was stoned and left for dead. Paul told the Ephesian elders,

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace (Acts 20:22-24).

Paul had no illusions as to what awaited him. He knew he was preaching the gospel of Christ to a hostile audience. There was no stadium filled with adoring fans who had brought their unsaved friends to hear the famous preacher. There was no welcoming committee awaiting him at the port. He and his associates went out to preach to a hostile world, in the power of the Spirit, not knowing what would become of them. But he was compelled, not by personal gain, the lust for fame, or even the assurance of safety and positive reception; rather, he was compelled by the Spirit to go. I know of one famous preacher in our day that insisted that any church invitation to speak would include first-class seating on the plane, a guaranteed number of people in attendance, and a handsome “honorarium” (fee). Yet, such demands are nothing new. The greater context reminds us that there are many then and now who merely peddle the word of God for profit (II Corinthians 2:17a).

But that wasn’t Paul’s ethic, nor should it be for any one called to preach; by stark contrast, Paul was compelled by the Spirit to travel wherever the Spirit led him. This then is the first point to understand the new covenant ministry of the Spirit: *Evangelism is compelled by*

*the Spirit*. In Christ, Paul spoke before God with sincerity, as those sent from God (2:17b), and as those compelled by the Spirit.

Back to our subject text.

### **An Open Door**

It is God who both opens and closes doors for our evangelistic efforts. Our text tells us Paul went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, and there he “found that the Lord has opened a door for me.” Paul wasn’t in Troas to initiate a campaign for Jesus. It wasn’t to tell the people of Troas how Jesus “Gets Us.” He was not there to do market surveys. No, Paul had come to realize his itinerary was set by the Spirit of God; it was the Lord who must open the door. “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builder labors in vain,” says the Psalmist, and, “Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

In the last 50 years we have experienced a wave of evangelical gimmicks and schemes, largely derived from worldly sales and marketing programs; the goal was to get the unbeliever to like us and come to our church. This is what happens when we do not understand new covenant evangelism — we default to worldly wisdom. When we refuse to rely upon God and wait for an open door, we tend to adopt worldly strategies to open doors that God has not.

But this was not Paul’s program or even his mentality.

At Acts 14 we read,

From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. <sup>27</sup> On arriving there, they gathered the church together and *reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles*. <sup>28</sup> And they stayed there a long time with the disciples (Acts 14:26-28 emphasis mine).

Paul had finished his first missionary journey and returned to Antioch where he and his companions, had been “committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed,” the “they” meaning Paul and his companions. God does not send us out alone. The work of God is too much for one person, it must be done with others. Jesus sent his disciples out two by two,

and he never asked any of them to take on the Great Commission on their own apart from the ministry and support of others. Let's make note now of two critical points:

- New covenant evangelism is compelled by the Spirit
- New covenant evangelism is a community effort, not a one-man show.

Paul did not find his brother in the faith Titus, and so he said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia. It may be the door of opportunity was for preaching at Troas the region including Macedonia. It would be out of character for Paul to abandon an open door merely because Titus was delayed. But the greater point in Acts 14 is that back in Antioch, they reported what God had done through them, and how "he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."

It is God's work, it is God's timing, and it is God's Spirit that brings the result, and not worldly wisdom and schemes. A few years ago, most churches had to have an espresso stand in the foyer. They had to ask visitors to fill out a survey of what they liked and didn't like about the service, etc., Seldom in church history has such a shameless display of worldly evangelism occurred in our churches. Maybe the crusades. Maybe the inquisition.

Why depend on God to open doors when we have technology and proven marketing programs? That's the thinking of Paul's opponents in ministry both then and now. The last thing the devil wants is men and women compelled by the Spirit to do evangelism. So the devil did not like Paul and his associates, for they are ministers of the new covenant of the Spirit, and not of the letter, for as Craig Keener points out, "the letter could only inform, whereas the Spirit came to transform." So, Paul is a man of the Spirit. He knows evangelism, like the entirety of God's redemptive work in the world, must be God's work.

At I Corinthians 16, Paul tells the Corinthians of his winter travel plans, saying, "But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, *because a great door for effective work has opened to me*, and there are many who oppose me" (I Corinthians 16:8-9). Two things Paul sought to discern: God's work in opening doors, and opposition. How unlike modern evangelists! In Colossians, Paul asks the church to pray for him, "that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains" (Colossians 4:3). He even asks

them to pray for how he delivers the gospel, “Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should” (4:4). Pray for an open door, for opposition, and clarity of message. That’s new covenant evangelism. Here are three points of new covenant evangelism.

- New covenant evangelism is compelled by the Spirit, not worldly motivations.
- New covenant evangelism is done in community, two-by-two, or more, but never a one-man show.
- New covenant evangelism relies upon God to open and close doors, as opposed to manipulative marketing schemes.

### **Conclusion**

To the church at Philadelphia, the risen Christ said, “These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut” (Revelation 3:7-8a). Evangelism, as with all of God’s redemptive work, must be of the Lord in order to be legitimate and effectual. Yet, men reject God’s ways and adopt worldly wisdom and schemes with the result of filling pews with unregenerate churchgoers how have yet to hear the gospel. God’s purpose in evangelism is to reach the elect with the good news of reconciliation and transformation.

And the means by which he does this is the ministry of the new covenant of the Spirit; it is by that ministry to which Paul and his associates have reached the Corinthians, and that ministry alone. If you are not clear regarding the covenant under which you live, and if you are not experiencing the dynamic work of the Spirit in transforming you into ever-increasing conformity to Christ, then you are not under a Christian ministry. It is as simple, and yet, as profound, as that. But this can change for you as, by the grace of God, you can become clearer as to what is legitimate Christian ministry and what is Satan’s cheap counterfeit. It is my hope you will stay with this study and grow in the grace of God and the discernment necessary to walk in the truth. **AMEN.**

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