

The Kingdom of God The Government of God – Evangelists

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Studio Session 51
08/2004

The church in America today is experiencing a decline in membership and what is commonly considered to be growth is merely the shift of membership, usually from smaller storefront church groups to mega-churches. Now the mega-churches argue that they can better serve those people because they have more to offer and the small storefront operations, that lost membership, argue that the mega-church does not understand how to bring order and discipline and even to provide fellowship for the membership that leaves the smaller churches. And one of the complaints I commonly hear is when the people who leave the small churches and go to the mega-churches get in trouble, they come back to the smaller churches in order to find fellowship and to find the support they need in the times of their problems and needs.

One of our problems is that the way we think of the government of God is as it relates to “congregations”, great, large or small. The government of God is meant for a people who are a nation... a nation. We are a holy nation and this nation has citizens in every city. (Inserted – actual verse—**“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” – I Peter 2: 9**) In every city, the expression of the body of Christ ought to be that there is only one body. But what typically happens is that men have the idea that they can best serve God in certain particular ways and then they recruit people to help them to do the things that they believe represent how they are going to serve God.

Let me suggest to you that the government of God only really works when we are talking about it as providing an environment of peace and good order, training and disciplining of the character and providing oversight so that the people of God can actually grow up and become mature and allow the Spirit of God to move them and to operate in them in the way that permits the Lord *to do with them* and *to do through them* the very thing for which they were created. That’s a totally different concept of why you are here and what the church is supposed to be. It even re-defines the church—not as small groups or mega-groups—but instead: God’s own people who are called out. And it therefore defines the government as existing to serve these vital needs of the believers.

But when it is all said and done, these five gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers—are given to equip the saints, because every saint is given the opportunity by God for the Holy Spirit to invest them and dwell in them and direct them in such a way that God may do, through them, what God *intended* to do through them and is the very reason why God created the person in the first place. (Inserted – actual verse—**“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”** – Ephesians 4:11-13)

So the government of God is meant to operate, *not over a congregation* of people. It’s meant to operate in regards to *a nation* of people. Simple understanding; [the] implications are far-reaching and so profound that they would shake up the existing church structure. See, if you think of evangelism, for example, in terms only of the local congregation, then what are we talking about? We are talking about training people to go and recruit other people for membership in our church, whatever that church might be. There are actually groups of people at the present time, in this nation, who will form their church direction after having done a survey to decide what the people in a certain location want from a church. Is there any wonder there is so much “bad blood” between the mega-church and the small storefront church? Is there any wonder why there is such competition among groups?

The fact is: we don’t see ourselves as a nation, we see ourselves as a series of congregations and we accept as normal, this blatant, sinful conduct of the dividing of the body of Christ. Now the gifts are meant to equip the saints, which means there ought to be a purpose behind this equipping. The purpose is: for the work of their ministry, and as I’ve said repeatedly throughout this series, “Your ministry is what God had in mind when He made you.” God wanted to touch humanity—those humans whom your life will interface with, will touch—God had in mind to touch them and He made you as that instrument by whom He would accomplish that. The equipping then, is for you to touch others.

Evangelism is not for the building-up of some local congregation. Evangelism—the gift of evangelism—is to show the love of God to people. The core of the gift of evangelism is *that* gift that demonstrates the love of God, shows people that God loves them. Now there is the assumption that evangelism always results in somebody being saved. No. Evangelism *may* result in someone being saved, but evangelism is about planting the seed of hope in the hearts of people. That’s evangelism: one plants, another waters and God grants the increase. (Inserted – actual verse—**“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”** – I Corinthians 3:6,7)

So, in the course of evangelism, when you speak of evangelism as somebody coming to Christ, and whose life is transformed by the presence of Christ, quite often evangelism occurs beginning with a seed planted in the heart of a person... a good word, a kind deed. Usually evangelism occurs when the Living God speaks into the life of a sinner and brings hope. Now take for example: on one occasion Jesus met a blind man and He healed him. The religious fellows got onto Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. Actually, the thing that they were against was that He healed at all, because it showed that God was with Him. But they found the excuse that He did so on the Sabbath, so of course they were opposed to the good work, the work of God being done on the Sabbath.

That's the nature of religion, by the way, it places its forms above the substance of God's presence. Now they cornered the fellow that had been healed and they said to him, "Well, who do you think Jesus is? He healed you, who do you say that He is?" And first the fellow said, "Well, are you asking me because you want to be His disciples?" And they said, "No, no... just answer our question." Realizing that it was a trap, the man said to them, in effect, "I can't answer your question, but this I do know: once I was blind, but now I see." (Inserted – actual verse—**"A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. 'Give glory to God,' they said. 'We know this man is a sinner.' He replied, 'Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see!' Then they asked him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered, 'I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?' Then they hurled insults at him and said, 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.'"** – John 9: 24-32)

When Jesus healed him, the love of God was demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ, to the man in need. "Signs", the Scriptures say, are not for the believers, but for the unbelievers. (Inserted – actual verse—**"Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers."** – I Corinthians 14:22) So, it is typical for evangelism to occur— as part of the process of evangelism—for somebody who is lost to encounter the presence of Jesus Christ in some miraculous fashion. Today most of our thoughts about evangelism are how to prepare and distribute some message that would get somebody to be an intellectual believer. Do you know... do you know that there is not a single biblical reference to a "sinner's prayer"—that widely used recruitment tool, commonly employed by evangelicals—is not to be found either directly, or indirectly in the Scriptures. Nowhere is there a reference to a "sinner's prayer". How on earth would you lead anyone to Christ if you did not have the benefit of the "sinner's prayer"—which, by the way was an invention of Charles

Finney, in the days of the great revivals in America? It was how you “closed the deal”.

Biblically, let me give you an example of how someone might be saved, might be brought to Christ without a “sinner’s prayer”. Jesus met a man... Jesus was coming along the road one day and there was a man named Zacchaeus—we are familiar with him, he was the fellow of small stature. As children we say, “Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he” meaning that he was a very small fellow. He was also a tax collector and collected taxes from the Jews for the Romans and, as such, the Jews hated the tax collectors because they were a constant reminder of their loss of freedom. This small fellow who was hated by the Jews climbs into a tree as Jesus was coming along a street that was so crowded with people that it was impossible for a man of small stature—walking in the crowd—to see Jesus. So he climbs into the tree. Jesus comes along, stands under the tree and looks up and He says to him, “Zacchaeus, come down. I’m going with you to your house.” And as they walked, Jesus talked with him and Jesus proclaimed to him that salvation had come to his house.

Later on, that very day, after spending a little time with Jesus, Zacchaeus comes out and he makes this incredible declaration of repentance. He says to everybody present, “Today, if I have robbed any man, in my taking of the taxes, I will restore four times—four times to one. If I robbed you of a quarter, I’ll pay you a dollar. Four times to one I will refund you whatever I have taken from you.” Clearly the man was saved. Now, nowhere in this is either implied, or an actual reference to the “sinner’s prayer”. Jesus simply stops under the tree, tells him to come down, tells him to go. Now, I’m getting to something. How did Jesus know to stop under the tree and tell Zacchaeus to come down and to go with Him because salvation had come to his house? The answer is very simple.

Why would Zacchaeus climb into the tree in the first place? Do short people want to call attention, typically, to their small stature? No. We know, and refer to, the “small man syndrome”—the idea that when a man is small, he wants to make you think that he is not. Climbing up into a tree, in front of everybody, in front of this great mob of people right below him is hardly the way that Zacchaeus wanted to advertise the fact that he was small of stature. In addition to that, he was a tax collector. Even if he were tall, as a tax collector the same crowd of people, gathered to see Jesus, gathered below the tree, because we know it was below the tree; Jesus walked right by and stopped under the tree. That crowd was the very crowd that hated the tax collector. So you have a small, hated man, showing himself in a tree to the whole crowd, calling attention to the fact that: a) he was small and b) he was a tax collector—by being in the tree. Is that normal? Do people who are hated put themselves up for ridicule by public displays? No. Are people who are small of stature desirous of being pointed to and referred to and otherwise dissected and referenced? No.

Normally, the normal person would be ashamed and embarrassed on both counts—small

of stature and hated by the crowd—to go into the tree. What could motivate a man to go into a tree under those circumstances? *The answer is very simple: the need for God that was in him was greater than either his fear of ridicule, or his fear of scorn.* The fact that he was short was an impediment and the fact that he was a tax collector was a restraint but *neither* was strong enough to offset or overcome the desire in his heart, you see, to see the Lord. Somehow, that day, he had to be close enough to see the Lord. (Inserted – actual verse—**“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.’” – Luke 19: 1-10)**

It’s almost like another character in the Scripture who said, “If I could only touch the hem of His garment I know I’ll be whole.” (Inserted – actual verse—**“Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.’” – Matthew 9: 20,21)** *That’s* what Jesus saw when He came and stood under the tree. He saw a man who was so driven to make contact with Jesus that he was willing to risk public ridicule on both counts—on account of his stature and on account of his occupation—in order to see the Lord. He was willing to do that. Well you see, if we didn’t have the “sinner’s prayer”, if we didn’t have the “canned” speeches, if we didn’t have the rehearsed program to win someone to Christ, we might just have to discern where people are.

Do you know why most of our efforts to win people to Christ, fail? They fail because we have no idea the readiness or the preparedness of the people for the coming of the truth to them. Jesus did not send us out just to speak to anybody who would stop and listen or whom we could arrest in their process. No. He sent us out with the understanding that the Holy Spirit would already go before us and who was being called to Christ, will come. When you see someone in a tree, driven there by the desperation of the need that is in him, then it is appropriate for you to tell them what God has already done for them. When Jesus saw Zacchaeus in the tree, Jesus had the Spirit of the Lord in Him and He could discern that here was a man... here was a man, who did not need to be taught to repent, here was a man who did not need to be taught his need for God, here was a man who was like a ripe, low-hanging fruit, ready to be picked.

So when He said to him, “Salvation has come to your house”, on one hand He discerned the condition of need that was in the man and on the other hand, He was the one who was sent as an able administrator of the grace of God. The fact that he was short meant nothing to Jesus and the fact that he was a tax collector meant nothing to Jesus because the spirit of evangelism is the spirit of the love of God for the lost, that’s in you. Now, if you will couple God’s love for the lost with someone who is ready to hear about the love of God, someone who has already been drawn, then it is no stretch for you to be able to say to someone, “Your sins are forgiven.” Now does that mean that *you* are forgiving their sins? No, you didn’t die on the cross, so you have no ability to forgive their sins—on your own. But what are you then? You are the mouthpiece, but from your heart is spoken the love of God, by God himself.

The Spirit of God who lives in you, who sees—this is the spirit of discernment—who sees and recognizes the person who is lost and in need of Christ, the Spirit of God within you, then, speaks to that person and conveys to that person the love of God for them. And when you speak the love of God to that person, such a person will immediately receive it because he is ready. Evangelism, then, is God’s love for the lost but it requires discernment by the Spirit to know when it is time—and to whom—to declare the forgiveness of God. God draws them—you speak. That’s the order of evangelism. The gift of the evangelist is not meant to go and win people for Christ. Like all the other gifts, the gift of evangelism is meant to equip the saints so that you can do the work; you can be the one who speaks about the love of God.

Now I’ll give you an example. I was in the country of Sweden, in the city of Kumla, a couple of years ago and we met with a woman who had had three husbands; she had had multiple affairs. One of her children had died from an overdose of heroin and she was in very sad shape when we met her and she was angry with the Lord. The one who invited us to meet with her said that they didn’t know what could be done but perhaps there might be something we could say. Well when we started to speak with her, we started to talk to her about her need to forgive various ones: to forgive her father for abandoning, her grandfather for molesting, husbands for cheating. And she said, “Well, I can’t.” So I said, “Well it’s like having a handcuff. You are handcuffed to these memories and they define you. To forgive, doesn’t mean that the wrong was not done, it means that you want to turn yourself loose, to be set free from the wrong-doer who remains tied to you in your memory by the event that you recall. Forgiveness will loosen you from the memory.” She said, “Well, I could do that.”

So we led her through many of these things and finally I drove out the spirits that were associated with these abuses. And then, by the time she was relieved of that, by then, when I spoke the word of the Lord to her—I simply had to say, “Your sins are forgiven you because Jesus loves you. You are saved.” Ten years fell off this woman’s face. She was transformed before our very eyes. She went from being an unbeliever who saw

the goodness of God to a believer. Evangelism is the declaration of the goodness of God to someone who is ready to hear about God's goodness. God draws them, you tell them, the salvation occurs and they are on their way in their relationship to God. The gift of evangelism prepares you for that. We have more to say about evangelism and I hope you'll join me as we continue our discussion. I'm Sam Soleyn and we'll see you next time.

Scripture References:

I Peter 2:9

Ephesians 4:11-13

I Corinthians 3:6,7

John 9: 24-32

I Corinthians 14: 22

Luke 19: 1-10

Matthew 9: 20,21