

Response

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In his introductory comments, Rev Ravelomanantsoa points to a problem which describes a form of Christianity which can be called “nominalism,” which pervades the majority of mainstream denominations and churches throughout East and Central Africa, as well as Madagascar. Profession of faith alone is not enough! The Scriptures say, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder”(James 2:19, NASB). But, they are still demons – Satan’s emissaries. Their belief alone has not changed their very nature. The theologies which teach that the principle of sin will always be there and is unavoidable and untreatable by salvation or sanctification – lock believers into a hopelessly helpless state of never being totally forgiven or fully delivered. There is never true hope that one can live a holy life, pleasing to God, and without sin. This breeds “nominalism”, a scourge of the church that “...just barely gets a believer’s foot in the door of salvation...” and gives no reason or hope for change in character in Christ, or for a deeper walk with the Lord. It promotes doing only the bare minimum action on the part of the believer to be called “Christian”, with the hope that it is just enough to enter in. Yet they struggle with sin. They are not satisfied with just a profession of faith, although they teach theologically that profession of faith is enough.

As Ravelomanantsoa has described, in both the ecumenical and most evangelical churches, the biggest problem is there is little or no change in the way people live, among those who call themselves Christian believers. It is a nominalistic faith. Often, there is little evidence that baptism or communion has brought regeneration, nor has it made a difference in the heart and character of the individual believer. Where is evidence of transformation of character? Where is evidence of restoration to the image of God? Regarding the mechanical, human actions of Communion and Baptism: can simple acts of men provide the means of grace for salvation, regeneration, or renewal to the image of God which is holy? These acts are based on ritual, formulae, and tradition. They are works of man, one to another, but can they in and of themselves effect salvation or holiness?

Ravelomanantsoa has rightly identified the need for establishing

relationships with small groups as essential for effective evangelism. Good relationships foster trust and establish opportunities for others to see within us the difference that comes from true salvation and sanctification. Scripture says “they will know them by their fruits”, and those fruits of the Spirit swiftly become self-evident in the sanctified believer. The unbeliever and the nominal believer will not miss seeing the fruits exhibited within a sanctified believer.

The challenge of the Great Commission to the Church is to “go”, “make disciples”, “baptizing them”, and “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (portions: Matthew 28:19-20, NASB). To answer that challenge, churches that are Great Commission churches MUST be “Missional” in their approach. The churches that are Great Commission churches bring people to be born again (justification, regeneration, and adoption) and bring the biblical concept of sanctification as a second definite work of grace, as deliverance from or cleansing from the sin nature. This recognizes the biblical evidence of the sin problem – the two aspects of sin; the sinful nature and the acts of sin or personal sin, as Ravelomanantsoa has so well stated and referenced in his paper.

In addressing the Great Commission and our response to it, Christ’s teaching calls for a life-changing decision and unwavering faith. Relationship with the living God brings change. He also commanded his followers to “wait for what the Father has promised...you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit...and you shall be my witnesses.” We cannot neglect the importance of the proximity of these teachings to one another, nor the results of that baptism as related repeatedly throughout the book of Acts.

A W Tozer (1979, 29) says, “In my sober judgment the relation of the Spirit to the believer is the most vital question the church faces today. Satan has opposed the doctrine of the Spirit-filled life about as bitterly as any other doctrine there is. He has confused it, opposed it, surrounded it with false notions and fears. He has blocked every effort of the Church of Christ to receive from the Father her divine and blood-bought patrimony. The church has tragically neglected this great liberating truth – that there is now for the child of God a full and wonderful and completely satisfying anointing with the Holy Ghost. The Spirit-filled life is not a special deluxe edition of Christianity. It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for His

people”.¹⁵⁷

The response of the Church to the problems Ravelomanantsoa has identified, must be to be fully “Great Commission” in our preaching and teaching, as well as in our going and discipling. There are the elements of “knowing, being, and doing” in the fulfilment of the Great Commission by the Missional church. We must KNOW our Saviour, in a relationship that transcends human understanding. We must be able to KNOW we are saved, beyond doubt. It is necessary for “making disciples”. We must BE children of the King, disciples that are filled with His Holy Spirit to overflowing. It is this baptism of the Holy Spirit that makes us witnesses – “...And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses...” And that baptism of the Holy Spirit is how we are empowered to BE his witnesses to DO the Great Commission, which is to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...”(Matt. 28:19-20, NASB).

God’s nature is to solve the problem completely and wholly. His nature does not allow the ongoing presence of sin. May God help us to experience fully, to live fully, and to faithfully teach the full gospel of Jesus Christ. And this in order that we may be restored to the original image of God, in which both the sins of man and the sinful nature of man are dealt with completely and wholly through regeneration and sanctification through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Holiness! It is our hope and our calling. Holiness is the hope for Africa. It is the hope for all.

¹⁵⁷ Tozer, A W. *Gems from Tozer: Selections From the Writings of A W Tozer*. Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1979.