

Response

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I can sympathise with the sentiment expressed by Rev Ravelomanantsoa in his work on trying to fulfil the Great Commission.

It is indeed a difficult task especially when our doctrine seems irrelevant to the times. Perhaps we have to face the fact that the Wesleyan Arminian doctrine of entire sanctification leaves many unanswered questions in the light of the modern shift in the Christian religion. It is especially true of those who have been indoctrinated by the Calvinistic doctrines of “once saved always saved”, and the “cheap grace” doctrines that promote “sinful saints” in an entertainment arena called the “Church”.

Perhaps it is true that the message of heart holiness is a “strange and challenging work”. But evangelistic preaching has resistance in most societies in the world today. Even in the UK, since the end of the Second World War, the Christian church has been on the decline. The same holds true for Australia and New Zealand. The task is all the more challenging to those who are called of God to take the Good News into the world. Was it ever easy? Even in the very early stages of the Church’s growth there were anti-Christian movements in high places that opposed the true Church. But, thank God we never have to depend on ourselves, He promised never to leave or forsake us. Success lies in finishing the task allotted to us and not necessarily by statistical demonstrations.

Unfortunately, we are in a world that demands proof and numerical evidence of our effectiveness. We forget that part of the Great Commission where Jesus said, “... and I will be with you to the very end.” Jesus is more interested in the souls of people than any one of us ever could be. He feels our disappointments and our discouragement probably more than we realise. But He asks us to persevere. In fact, I have personal experience of the same problem that is being experienced in Madagascar. Port Elizabeth, where I am ministering, has come under the spell of the Charismatic movement. It has been difficult for the past three years to attract people in a city of many churches where holiness is a strange doctrine. This has been the case for several decades now. There is a

marked decline in interest in our message. We also ask questions like the Rev Ravelomanantsoa does. I have constantly been talking to the Lord about the situation. I even whispered a desire to return to the Church in Cape Town where my ministry was more encouraging. But, even recently the Lord told me to stay where I am. It has renewed my resolve and my desire to carry on. He is with me and He knows the future. All I can do is continue to evangelise and never to compromise the message of heart holiness. Yes, we also face a strange and challenging work not quite the same as in Madagascar, but very similar in spiritual character.

Perhaps I could encourage my brother in Madagascar with my experiences. One of the first messages I preached in my present church was about being strong and very courageous. God was really talking to me as I later discovered when I went through a very difficult time dealing with a rebellion by some leading members in my congregation as well as having to face the leaders of my district. I could have capitulated then, but very distinctly God encouraged me through His word in a wonderful way to remain where I was. My congregation of 28 people became 16 members and some of them subsequently left for jobs in other parts of the country and to overseas. I took in nine members, leaving me with 16 members now. We have a lovely sanctuary and very little overhead expenses. The only difficulty we are facing is attracting more members.

It is a very introspective ministry where we constantly look at ourselves and sometimes have to face questions from others about our lack of growth, etc. But it is not all negative. In fact, once I realised that God wanted me here, I began to enjoy what previously bothered me. Jesus warned us about the times we are living in. Matthew 7:21 was an eye-opener for me. I also looked at the “many” and the “few” in Jesus’ ministry in Matthew’s Gospel. Although I am eager to win the hearts of many, I realise that God is busy speaking through our ministry of holiness and the seeds that we sow will positively affect some. In due time there will be a harvest if we do not give up.

About the *concept of sin*, we need to be aware of what our “target groups” have been taught. If a stream is poisoned at the fountain, the whole stream is polluted. The fountain, in this case is the doctrine of sin. People need to know, regardless of what they have been taught, that the Bible says the penalty for sin is death. It is death for whoever sins. Whether he is a saint

or a sinner, the same penalty applies.

Emphasis on the doctrine of sin has many implications even for the entirely sanctified. Holiness is impossible for the sinner. Some uneducated saints fall into a deceptive trap about the difference between carnality and infirmity, as we understand the term in our theology. While entire sanctification cleanses the heart from the cause of sinning, i.e. original sin, infirmities will always be a part of our humanness. It is necessary to paint the line of distinction although it will be a very broad line. A clear definition of sin will help the saint and the sinner to realise the possibility of Scriptural salvation. Holiness of heart is the work of God in response to a consecrated, born again child of God, hungering and thirsting for this experience. It is unfortunate that not much is seen of the necessary hunger for this “second work of grace”. Here is where we who tackle holiness evangelism need to be very clear in dealing with preconceived ideas about *the concept of salvation*. The Bible is very clear from beginning to end that “without holiness...” there is no salvation.

Pre-evangelism can be done by building up a rapport between ourselves and our target groups. It is probably true that we will win to Christ only those whom we have won to ourselves. How we accomplish such interpersonal relationships depends a lot on our own heart condition. What we are speaks louder than what we say. People read our hearts, not our lips. Much prayer must precede every contact we make with potential converts. It is God’s love that we need to share with people. Doing good deeds for the community and for individuals outside of the church is possibly a very good way of getting the attention of the communities we are serving. Sometimes it will seem like we are spinning our wheels in the mud and getting nowhere, but we need always to courageously and purposely continue to do good to others who do not necessarily deserve it. That is one of the reasons I am now serving the Lord in His kingdom; somebody in the church was good to me and my family.

Biblical responses... Speaking the truth in love must always have preference over doctrinal correctness. It is one thing to boast about our Scriptural exactness, but it is also intimidating to a sincere seeker. Many people enter into doctrinal debates because they are unsure of their beliefs. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:15 to wait until we are asked before we pounce on a listener with evangelical jargon that does nothing but antagonise.

Nonetheless, we need to spend much time in prayer and study to ensure our own knowledge of truth. We are blessed as a denomination with a wonderful treasure of literature and many gifted writers who have helped countless numbers of ministers to understand God's word and to apply its truths.

Our Great Commission not only in Madagascar, but throughout the entire world, is holiness evangelism. Thank God for the "John the Baptists" who bring people to the initial stage of salvation through repentance and the new birth. The fields are ripe out there. Many of these souls are waiting to hear the Good News of Full Salvation. This doctrine of Entire Sanctification- is critically important for those souls. If we do not do the job, if we fail to tell them (Ezekiel 3:17 – 21), who will?