

Spiritual warfare works

When an editor from the USA contacted me recently about my book of computer programs, he said he was a Christian; he encouraged me about the testimony that I had put in an appendix, and so we fell to chatting about the faith. After I told him about my concern for *les vingt* [64], I started thinking about people becoming Christians, and I realised that the last time I had helped anyone to come to faith was probably 20–25 years ago – half my Christian life!

‘Chuck’ comforted me by reminding me that ‘*the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers*’ (2 Cor 4:4), and how, in his words, ‘people would rather choose to be slaves to their own sinful pleasures, if this means they do not have to submit to God’. [Read that again, and catch the tone – but I’m not saying this critically of Chuck – but what do we mean by ‘submit to God’?!]

But this morning he candidly admitted that when 900 churches in his area recently put on a seven-week evangelistic event, his church of around 3000 people had less than 20 people come to faith.

I’m not going to beat myself up about my lack of ‘winning souls for Christ’, but it would be sobering if each of the 30+ churches represented by my readers were as honest as Chuck. It doesn’t compare well with the progress of the early church, does it? Maybe it’s time we did some spiritual warfare?!

I got drawn into that sect because I saw spiritual gifts being exercised and I thought that if my church took that part of the NT teaching more seriously, then more people would come to faith. We need some spiritual warfare, because seeing miracles will convince people of the truth of the gospel. My motive was good – to see more people come to Christ – but it didn’t work!

But some very, very good things did come out of my sect-time (and from the five years of trying to rebuild my faith, and then from the past two wonderful years):

- 1) I discovered the more beautiful gospel: the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, which can bring us into relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit!
- 2) I realised that we aren’t going to spread the gospel by **convincing** people (either by persuasive words or by acts of power); my aim has wrongly always been to convince other people that I am (well, we are) **right**; ergo, they are wrong.

Putting those two together: the gospel is not about our being **right**, it’s about our being in a right relationship with God and about having a right relationship with people around us, and **that** is what is going to spread the good news of Jesus.

But not without spiritual warfare – of which more anon.

Now, one other theme that’s been smacking me between the eyes recently is what the Bible says about good works. Do you remember how amazed I was when I discovered Matthew 25?! Jesus

clearly teaches that the decision as to who are sheep and who are goats is based on whether they have cared for the poor and marginalised [63]! Those are Jesus' words, not mine!

Then, when I checked the context of my oft-quoted '*all scripture is God-breathed*' (2 Tim 3:16), I saw that if I had bothered to read the rest of the sentence (v.17), I'd have heard Paul saying, '*so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*'.

But we've totally missed the importance of good works because (since the Reformation?) we've been absolutely petrified that anyone might think we're suggesting that you can be **saved** by good works and not '**BY FAITH ALONE**'. We quote Eph 2:8,9: '*For it is by **grace** you have been **saved**, through faith ... **not by works***' but again, we've neglected the context: the very next verse says: '*For [i.e. **because**] we are ... **created in Christ Jesus to do good works.***' (v.10)

I've come to believe, more powerfully than ever, that without good works, my faith is dead, **the** faith is dead, we are dead, the gospel is dead. Good works are the beating heart of the gospel.

When James says (2:14), 'What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? **Can such faith save him?**' we rush to defend our '**by faith alone**' idea.

Brothers and sisters, we need urgently to engage in spiritual warfare – on a daily basis – so that in any and every situation we may preach the gospel **in the good works we do**. We don't need to be persuaders; we don't need to have the gift of healing; we just need to love people in the power of the Spirit.

So we need to engage in what I might call 'spiritual warfare works'. And this is something we can all do, without fear, and without causing offence, without putting people off by our 'we have the right answer' attitude. And **then** numbers of people will be saved.

Isn't that what God wants of us? That's the God who so desperately loves and longs for the people around us – both the people we love desperately and the people we bump into on the street or on the internet!

*Lord, please help me to put on your armour – of defence and attack – to pray constantly for the people around me, so that I may share your love with them, for their own sake, to lighten their lives. And as I do so, please help them to see Jesus, **to see the gospel**, in me! Help me to be a bridge over troubled water, to lead them into your loving, outstretched, cross-shaped arms.*

Lord, let it be so! Please!

Paul Bev. 16.4.19