

SUM BIBLE COLLEGE AND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE EFFECTIVE INVITATION

ANNA KRISTENE O'DELL

Evangelistic Preaching

Dr. Scott Camp

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## The Effective Invitation

Inviting one to come to Christ is the most loving act in which a person may engage, yet it is not without controversy. Some have been critical of the need for a public invitation; some have lost their lives in the offering. No one can discount that men and women throughout the ages have responded to a public call, even if that invitation has taken many different forms. Within the heart of every person who has heard a true gospel message is one question that demands an answer, "In light of this, what must I do?" The evangelist that knows how to deliver an effective invitation dispels man's confusion and helps the seeker navigate toward the proper conclusion.

### Summary of the Book

In order to be effective in inviting a person to receive Christ, we need to make sure that our message is truly the Lord's message. In the book *The Effective Invitation* by R. Alan Street, the author quotes John R. W. Stott as saying, "We must never issue an appeal without first making the proclamation."<sup>1</sup> Understanding the components of the true gospel message is vital. God has chosen the way of making known His message. He sends His ambassadors to publically proclaim the message of the Kingdom. James A Stewart points to Romans 1:1 which uses the words the "gospel of God" to say, "This speaks of ORIGIN. It is God's gospel. It was born in the heart and mind of the Father. As Paul told the Galatians, it is not a man-made message. It is good news from heaven."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, (2004) Kregal Publications: Grand Rapids, MI 49501, p 21.

<sup>2</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, p 27.

A true gospel message is both Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). J I Packer warns, “We must not present the Person of Christ apart from His saving work.”<sup>3</sup> It is both in knowing from who our salvation originates and the significance of His death, burial, and resurrection that we hear a true representation of the gospel. Our book however, deals mainly with another important element of proclaiming the message of the Kingdom – the invitation. Once we hear the gospel it demands a response. The proclamation is not complete if the response needed is not clearly articulated and offered. Again, the proper response to the message that makes it effectual in our lives is laid out in the scriptures. Jesus Himself states clearly what the terms are, “Repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14.15).

Our English word repent comes from the Greek word *metanoeo* which means to have a change of mind toward someone or something.<sup>4</sup> Repentance is a gift from God and is offered because of His kindness toward us (Romans 2:4). It is a work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of man. It may or may not include an outward emotional response. It is not simply a heightened emotional sense toward God, it is an actual about-face change within our thinking. Street says it this way, “When the man of God has been faithful to preach the pure gospel, he can extend the invitation for sinners to repent, with the assurance that the Holy Spirit will work in the listener’s heart.”<sup>5</sup>

Faith is the other action involved in true repentance. As one turns away from following his darkened mindset, he or she turns toward God. The word for faith or believe is *pisteuo* meaning to place one’s trust in a person or thing.<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 2:2 speaks of Jesus being the author

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<sup>3</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, p 28.

<sup>4</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, p 40.

<sup>5</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, p 45.

<sup>6</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, p 48.

(the originator) and the finisher (the one who brings it to completion) of our faith. We also learn in Romans that, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17). Professor Derek Prince expounds on the Virgin Mary’s response to her role in the Messiah’s birth, “That is the secret of scriptural faith – ‘according to thy word.’ Scriptural faith is produced within the soul by the hearing of God’s Word, and then is expressed by the active response of claiming the fulfillment of that which God has said.”<sup>7</sup> Faith is the action our will takes to lay hold of the promises that are offered through the blood of Jesus. Faith in and of itself does not save. Jesus saves. But, as we hear the true gospel message, the Holy Spirit moves upon our thinking so that we change our minds while our will surrenders and takes hold of that which is being offered – new life in Christ. That is certainly good news and the kindness of God in action!

In the New Testament we see two different public invitations. One was during a gospel presentation that called for a public acknowledgment of repentance and faith. The other was a public profession after conversion that made known that this person was indeed a follower of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Our author takes the necessity of the public profession of faith all the way back to Genesis. He notes that after Adam sinned, he hid. God called out to him and Adam responded by stepping out and answering the Lord’s voice. He goes on to list many other examples of a public call and response in both the New Testament and the Old. A Biblical argument for the use of a public invitation can certainly be made and seems rather necessary, but throughout the church age, it has not always been the case.

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<sup>7</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, p 52.

<sup>8</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, p 55.

Some say that the public invitation is an invention of Evangelist Charles Finney whose ministry dates back to the early 1800's. This is most likely due to the public confession of faith being replaced by Constantine's issuance of the state church and baptism being the initiator of membership. Following this was the rise of the Catholic Church which stressed salvation through observing the sacraments instead of the finished work of Christ. During the reformation we see an emphasis on evangelism once again, but not truly on a public call to repent and believe.<sup>9</sup>

God, however, always has a remnant. As early as the fourth century we can read of accounts of evangelist that were not swayed by the establishment of the church. Men such as Gregory of Nanzianzus and John Chrysostom of Antioch who publically proclaimed the gospel message. There were certainly others in the years that followed these men, but some are more well-known than others. Patrick, Ireland's missionary is still celebrated today. Boniface took the message of the gospel to Germany as he confronted the worshippers of Thor. Bernard of Clairvaux is also a name we know. He was an evangelist in the twelfth century who preached during the times of the crusades. He is actually credited with calling for a show of hands as a public invitation long before Finney's ministry.<sup>10</sup>

There were those that lost their lives due to the public proclamation of the gospel and the denouncing of the unscriptural rituals of the established church. The Anabaptist were persecuted from both the Catholic and Reformed churches. They called upon converts to be rebaptized if they had been baptized as infants. It was this public response to the gospel that stirred the ire of the reformers. The Separatist (Puritans) were not excluded from persecution due to their stance

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<sup>9</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, pp 81-82.

<sup>10</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, pp 84-85.

on a public response through baptism. John Bunyan chose twelve years in prison over renouncing his call to preach and to issue a public response.<sup>11</sup>

It was during both the First and Second Great Awakening that we see the public invitation and response come into the mainstream. Often a bench was used for those under conviction to come and sit upon in order to receive counsel and prayer. John Wesley may have been the first in England to use the “anxious seat” as a means of public confession. Fifty years later, in America, Finney’s “mourners bench” would be the site of many a converted soul. Since then, it can be said that the recovery of the public invitation and response has made its way back into mainline denominations.<sup>12</sup>

### **My Thoughts**

After studying Azusa Street in my Pentecostal History class, I saw a reoccurring theme in reading this book as well. True revival is a recovery of something that has been suppressed from the original design in which God intended. What would cause men to lose their lives in standing against a church system that suppresses a vital component of the gospel except the Holy Spirit? God does nothing arbitrarily. He has designed the way that mankind will come to know Him and He is zealous in making Himself known. Although there may be private elements to our faith in Christ, we do not have the option to be private with our faith. The entirety of our identification with Him is that we have died to the world and now we are witnesses to the fact that there is another Kingdom with a King whose specific name is Jesus. Our mandate is found in Matthew 28:19-20, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

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<sup>11</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, pp 86-88.

<sup>12</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, pp 91-96.

Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

I appreciated the seven reasons why the public invitation is needed as stated by Dr. Street. Under the subtitles of Scriptural Reasons, Historical Reasons, Practical Reasons, Logical Reasons, Psychological Reasons, Consequential Reasons, and Effects on Pastors and Evangelists, he makes sound arguments pertaining to each category. We have touched on the scriptural and historical reasons, but the one that I want to highlight is the psychological reasons. Our author states, “Man needs an outlet for response. When the heart is stirred and the mind convinced, an avenue of expression must be provided. The invisible realities of the soul seek to express themselves through visible manifestations.”<sup>13</sup> I thought this was profound. I know this to be true in my own life. When God impresses something of His nature upon my soul, I must respond. If I do not immediately respond, then my heart is hardened. If I allow my heart to be hardened, I do not want to respond as quickly the next time He deals with me in that area. However, if I immediately respond to His Spirit, the fullness of what He wants me to receive is made known. I am reminded that Jesus said, “If you love Me, obey My commandments.” (John 14:15). God has made us in His image. Part of that image is creativity. The creative being is an expressive being. If that is shut down and not allowed an outward expression, the creative person becomes depressed and begins to retreat inside of himself in an unhealthy way. People in the mental health field will tell you that often wounded souls who are trying to heal from tremendous trauma in their lives need to express themselves creatively. It helps them to come outside of the trappings of their own personal prison. Once they appropriate their freedom from

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<sup>13</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, p 145.

the pain of their experience, they are then free to share their experience with others who are in need of the same healing.

Is this not a picture of Evangelism? The reason this approach works in psychology is because it is a basic human need designed by God Himself. God is love. Love is an outward expression toward another. As the public proclamation is given, which is God's love toward mankind, man responds in an outward expression of love back to God. Fear keeps us trapped within ourselves. Love sets us free to love others. This is what God is doing for us as we publically profess our allegiance to Him. We die to our fear of the world's rejection and we publically proclaim our love for God as we share the life transforming story of how Jesus set us free. When we revert back to inwardness and privatize our Christianity, we allow fear to rule our thinking and we become religious and cold. A life driven by fear will create scenarios that are not real that simply feed the fear. This life-style becomes more about self-preservation than it is laying down one's life for another. It is the exact opposite of what we are called to be about in the Kingdom.

Christ hung naked on a criminal's cross and endured public humiliation so that we might be free from whatever would dominate us in this world. It is in our public identification with Him that we see the reality of that freedom. Our author also points out that our public confession of faith is a psychological aid to help us remember our commitment to Christ when things get difficult. Street states, "The believer who trusts Christ publicly carries with him a vivid picture of the time and circumstances of his conversion. Whenever he is tempted by the enemy to turn his back on God, or begins to doubt his salvation, he has a mental reminder of his surrender to the Lord."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> R. Alan Street, *The Effective Invitation*, p 147.



With all of this in mind, the evangelist who hones the art of effectively giving an invitation to respond to the gospel is acting in great love both toward God and the people he or she is called to reach. Not only are we to give a true representation of the gospel message, but we are to understand that the invitation is the doorway into eternal life. We can close the door for others without even realizing it if we are not prepared to help them get to the threshold. It goes back to the original question that the gospel will bring forth in the human heart, "What must I do?" Upon reaching this point, the evangelist must be able to clearly articulate how this question is answered. If he or she does not, then we could actually be participating in the hardening of a heart instead of salvation. This is a sobering thought.

An evangelist must exude confidence that the message they preach is crucial for every soul that listens. They must speak it with the authority granted by Jesus Himself knowing that the Holy Spirit will work upon the heart as the gospel goes forth. But the confidence cannot stop once the message has been given. The person receiving Christ must have complete trust that it is Jesus alone that saves. However, people will feed on the evangelist's ability to lead them all the way through the process. They need to know that the evangelist stakes his life on his claim and that he loves them enough to make every opportunity for them to receive eternity. We cannot fumble the invitation. It is not an invitation that man can turn down without dire consequences. I am thankful for the practical application of this book. It will be a reference that will be used time and time again.