

# Beloved

*The Weekly Pastoral Letter of Dr. T.J. Gentry – July 6, A.D. 2008 – Evangelism V*

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Grace to you and peace, beloved. May the Lord be with you!

We evangelize because we love God and desire to obey Him, and He is pleased to use evangelism to bring in the fullness of those chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. What is amazing still is that when we evangelize, we are transformed more and more into the image and likeness of Christ. Consider it for a moment, and let it sink into your soul. God uses evangelism not only to change others; He also uses it to change us. In the mysterious outworking of His purpose to make us more Christ-like, He uses evangelism as a means to our transformation. We know this is true, on the one hand, because we know that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Romans 8:28b-29, NKJV) We see here that, amazingly, God uses our simple act of loving obedience in evangelism (one of many examples of Paul’s idea of “all things”) to accomplish His ultimate good purpose in making us like His Son. It’s just as I said earlier. On the one hand, evangelism, like every other act of loving obedience, is used by God as a means to our transformation. On the other hand, however, there is a special sense in which evangelism, when entered into faithfully and consistently, has a transformative effect unlike other acts of obedience. Whoa! You’re scratching your head and asking, “Does this guy mean that evangelism is like some sort of super sanctifier? Like some kind of magic tonic for the soul?” Well, that’s not exactly what I had in mind, but it’s not far from the mark. The truth is, when we evangelize we co-labor in a special manner with the Holy Spirit as a sort of spiritual midwife. Now if you’ve ever been involved in the delivery of a baby then you know what a significant and special role is played by the delivery doctor and nurses (or, for those of you who prefer them, the midwife). You understand that people who deliver babies are

special. They have specialized training for which they have extraordinary expectations placed on them. You and I know that we don’t look at the Physician’s Assistant at the local clinic, helpful as he or she may be, the same way we look at someone involved in the delivery of our children. It’s one thing to take my temperature and prescribe an antibiotic. It’s an entirely different matter to facilitate the arrival of my new child! In the spiritual realm this is also true. As a minister I may teach many Bible studies and lead many worship services, but when I actually take part in leading someone to profess faith in Jesus Christ there is something extraordinary happening. And it’s not just happening to the person making the profession of faith, it’s happening to me. I am, at that point, participating with the Holy Spirit in calling this person out of darkness and into light. As I speak the words of the gospel they change me; my faith grows and my reliance upon Christ is deepened. As I proclaim Jesus’ lordship and invite others to submit unto Him, my heart is humbled and my knees are bowed. My entire person is transformed as I handle the Word of Truth. (If you’re looking for a proof text for what I am saying, I don’t know of one. I can’t find a particular place in Scripture to tell me that evangelism is transformative for the Christian in a way that is above and beyond the ordinary means of grace. As a matter of fact, don’t even go there because that’s not the point I am making. I am thankful for all the means of grace. Period. ) My experience is that when Christians evangelize with humility and love, God is pleased to transform everyone involved in the process. The hearer is either softened or hardened – they never remain unchanged. Likewise, the messenger is drawn closer to Christ. He is made more into the image of the One whose beautiful feet both bring the good news and bear the marks of those it is for. On a simple gut-level, evangelism is like a good night’s rest when you’re exhausted. It restores your perspective. It’s like a meal when you’re famished. It restores your strength. Believe it or not, evangelism changes us. Try it and see. – T.J.