

# False Forces in Evangelism

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the true basis of salvation and the dangers of relying on superficial methods in evangelism.*

**Scripture:** Luke 19:10, John 5:24, John 6:28, John 19:30, Acts 1:1, Romans 8:39, Romans 10:9, Ephesians 4:8, Hebrews 7:25

**Topics:** "Evangelism Methods", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer preaches about the divine mission of seeking and saving the lost, emphasizing that while the work of saving the lost is accomplished through Christ's finished work on the cross, seeking them is a divine preparation by the Holy Spirit. He discusses the false forces in evangelism, focusing on Men, Methods, and Messages, highlighting the importance of recognizing and cooperating with the divine movements of the Spirit. Chafer warns against substituting true forces with false ones, such as undue emphasis on public acts in conversion and deviating from the prescribed message of the Gospel of Grace.

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## Transcript

The Lord Jesus described His mission by the words: "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), and this concise statement included both His finished work upon the cross (John 19:30), and His unfinished work in the world (Acts 1:1). While the work of saving the lost must ever be a divine undertaking accomplished only through His finished work on the cross, there are aspects of the work of seeking them which were committed to His followers, and which are a part of His unfinished work in the world.

The work of seeking the lost, like the work of saving them, is in reality a divine undertaking. It is distinctly stated that the Son of Man is come to seek. Thus He is again pictured in the Parable of the Lost Sheep: "When he hath found it, he layeth it upon his shoulders, rejoicing." It is the "goodness of God that leadeth to repentance," and the whole undertaking of finding lost men is but "the power of God unto salvation"; for no human effort or service can be effectual apart from the power of God. Seeking the lost is more than a mere attempt to locate unsaved men, for they are present on every hand. The term "seeking the lost," therefore, suggests a divine preparation of the unsaved that will bring them into adjustment with the necessary conditions of salvation.

It will be found, in the course of these studies, that there are successive aspects of the divine seeking of the lost to be traced in the Scriptures, and every phase of this work, is undertaken and wholly

accomplished by God the Holy Spirit. To recognize these divine movements and to be willing humbly to cooperate with them is the true basis of all soul-saving work. While it has pleased God to appoint to His saints (not as a corporate body, but as individuals) a portion in the work of seeking, the human part in that work is not worthy to be compared with the divine. Yet man, who by nature comprehends and measures only visible things, is ever prone to disregard the invisible working of the Spirit, and to place an undue emphasis upon the comparatively small human share in those undertakings.

It is under these distorted estimates of the factors in the work of salvation that those things which may be called "false forces" in evangelism are substituted for the true. What are here termed "false forces" are, in some measure, God-appointed means in true evangelism. They become false forces only when they receive too much emphasis, or are strained to perform a function beyond that assigned to them in the purpose of God. Thus it may be seen that failure in evangelism is not always due to an entire neglect of some part, or parts, of the divine appointments for the work; but may be due to an unbalanced estimate of the relative values of these forces.

This discussion of false forces in evangelism will be limited to three general aspects -- viz., Men, Methods, and Messages.

Men. -- By this term reference is made to a class of men in the ministry called "evangelists," and on whom the church has come to depend so largely for her activity in evangelism.

The word "evangelist" is used but three times in the Scriptures, and but one of these passages is to any extent descriptive. It is as follows: "Wherefore he saith, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." . . . "And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:8, 11-13, R.V.).

Here the evangelist is seen, with the apostle, prophet, pastor and teacher, to be a gift of the ascended Christ to His church in the world. This ministry gift of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor and teacher should be distinguished from the endowment for service bestowed upon the individual believer (1 Cor. 12:4-31; Rom. 12:3-8). In the one case the servant of God who has been endued for ministry is Christ's gift to the whole church; while in the other case a special enablement for service is given to the individual believer by the sovereign Spirit "as he will." In this same connection still another distinction should be made, in that the believer, in addition to the exercise of gifts, is appointed to the ministry of the priestly office; and since evangelism will be found to depend so largely upon the exercise of the believer's gifts and his ministry in the priestly office, a violation has been done to the plan of God, as revealed in His Word, insomuch as the work of evangelism has been taken from the whole company of believers and entrusted to a few.

The evangelist of the Scriptures is, without question, the messenger to the unevangelized, preparing the way for the pastor and teacher in his more constant ministry in the church. The evangelist, therefore, finds his fullest divine mission as a pioneer missionary to the hitherto unevangelized.

The modern "revival" the work of the "revivalist" who comes under the title of an evangelist, but works as a religious promoter in the organized church -- is unexpected in the Scriptures, except as the word "revival" is used to denote a forward movement in the spiritual life of the church, without including the idea of

attempting to regain some spiritual position once held, but now lost. The use of the word usually means, however, a getting up after having fallen down, or a waking after sleeping, or a coming to strength after a period of weakness; while, on the other hand, the Scriptures pre-suppose a continual erect, wakeful and aggressive position for service on the part of every Christian (Eph. 6:10-17). A "revival" is abnormal rather than normal. It may have a function when needed, but in no way should become a habit, much less a sanctioned method of work. Having regained vitality, believers are not warranted in returning habitually to an anemic state.

The re-adjustment of a powerless church into a normal position of fruit-bearing fellowship with God is, without question, an undertaking that is warranted in the Scriptures. Such a transformation, however, can be accomplished only through a ministry of teaching and pastoral care. Thus it falls naturally within the sphere of service committed to the pastor and teacher whose ministry is not necessarily located in one place, since he is a gift to the whole body of believers. Such a ministry may be undertaken by a pastor and teacher who is a specialist in such work, and who may visit the field to assist temporarily the resident pastor in his work. If this adjustment of the church is accomplished, the pastor or special assistant may then "do the work of an evangelist." There is an important distinction, however, between being an evangelist by calling, and doing the work of an evangelist as occasion may arise in the pastoral office.

The efficiency of the whole company of believers must depend upon their proper adjustment to God in the cleansing and fitting of their individual lives. Just here there is a grave danger lest the church shall ignore her God-appointed work, and the necessary individual preparation for it, and attempt to substitute the wholesale machinery and appeal of the modern "revival" in its place.

The fact that a "revival" is planned for is a confession on the part of a church of a condition which would render the normal movements of the Spirit in salvation impossible. The special help of a Scriptural evangelist might be imperative in gathering the abundant fruit produced by the faithful evangelizing efforts of a church. It will be admitted, however, that such conditions do not often exist. On the contrary, the sincere and intelligent evangelist, almost without exception, must first do the work of a pastor and teacher by seeking to revive the church itself.

The unfruitful condition of the church has created a great temptation for the evangelist to be superficial in his aim and undertakings. His reputation, and often his remuneration, are dependent upon apparent results. If the evangelist understands the divine program in soul-winning, and proposes to be thorough with unspiritual churches, he must do a teaching work that he may build the necessary Scriptural foundation for abiding fruit. In undertaking a thorough foundation work in the churches, the evangelist would thus be forsaking his own calling, and would be assuming the work of the pastor and teacher; and might be a disappointment to those who had called him and upon whom he depends, humanly speaking, for his support. His temptation is to secure the apparent results that are expected. The work of the evangelist is a vital ministry in this age, but it, like all ministry, should be kept within the sphere divinely appointed for it.

The discussion of the fundamental error of the church, in unduly magnifying the work of the evangelist and neglecting her own God-appointed ministry in salvation, will be the theme of succeeding chapters.

Methods. -- Likewise, an undue emphasis upon methods in modern evangelism is almost universal. The erroneous impression exists that evangelistic efforts should be confined to stated times and seasons, and that impression has led to a far more serious one, namely, that God is only occasionally "on the giving

hand"; whereas the Scriptural forces in true evangelism depend upon the unchanging promises of God, the constant abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and His continual working through the members of the body of Christ.

Frequent gatherings may be of unmeasured value in the life of any company of believers; but such meetings should not become the only time of soul-winning expectation. The conditions are most unreasonable when the unbelievers of any locality have come to realize that to avoid the spasmodic solicitude of the church for a period of a few days is to be free from such appeals for the rest of the year, or for, perhaps, a term of years. This unreality is one of the fruits of an evangelism that depends upon times and seasons.

Again, the false or undue emphasis on methods is disclosed by the imperative demand for some public action in connection with conversion, such as standing or going forward in a meeting. Great confusion has been wrought by the intrusion of such public acts into the condition for salvation; thereby making salvation seem to be by faith in Christ, plus a supposedly meritorious public act.

These required public acts are usually justified from one or two passages of Scripture, which are here quoted: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32), and, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9, 10).

A careful study of the whole context of the former passage will reveal that the passage occurs in a body of Scripture which is primarily applicable to the yet future kingdom age, and it, like all that truth, bears only a moral or secondary application to the age of the church. From this particular passage, therefore, confession cannot be made a present condition of salvation.

The second passage quoted above (Rom. 10:9, 10), is perhaps more important, since it falls within the teachings and conditions which belong primarily to the soul under grace.

The force of the positive statement in verse 9, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," is explained in verse 10: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." In the latter verse the true meaning and use of the word "confess" is suggested. Of this word in this same passage the late Dr. Arthur T. Pierson wrote: "That word means to speak out of a like nature to one another. I believe and receive the love of God. In receiving His love I receive His life, in receiving His life I receive His nature, and His nature in me naturally expresses itself according to His will. That is confession. Dr. McLaren has said: 'Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, because the candle would either go out or burn the bushel.' You must have vent for life, light and love, or how can they abide? And a confession of Christ Jesus as Lord is the answer of the new life of God received. In receiving love, you are born of God, and, being born of God, you cry, 'Abba, Father,' which is but the Aramaic word for 'Papa' -- syllables which can be pronounced before there are any teeth, because they are made with the gums and lips -- the first word of a new-born soul, born of God, knowing God, and out of a like nature with God speaking in the language of a child."

Confession, then, does not provide a reason for salvation, but rather proves its reality. It is clearly the believer's privilege, and is of no value until Christ has been received and the new life begun.

So with the heart, or inner consciousness, man believes unto righteousness, which is the one condition of acceptance before God; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation, which is but the normal answer of the new-born soul to God.

That these passages do not demand a public act as a condition of salvation is obvious for at least two other reasons. First, such an interpretation would disagree with all other passages of Scripture on salvation, since it would cause grace to be no more grace, inasmuch as there was saving merit in a human deed; and it is difficult to demand confession in connection with conversion without making it seem to be meritorious, and, to that extent, a frustrating of the whole doctrine of grace. And second, a public confession cannot be a necessity in salvation, since an innumerable company have found fullest peace with God through Christ Jesus who were deprived of the supposed value of any such action.

In coming to a positive decision, the human mind is undoubtedly aided by some physical action which serves to strengthen the impression. This psychological fact usually underlies the demands that are made for public acts in connection with the acceptance of Christ. The only issue which is raised here concerning the combining of public acts with the acceptance of Christ, is that such acts, if urged at all, should be so presented that they could not be thought of by any individual as forming a part of the one condition of salvation. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is the very opposite of doing anything: it is resting in the work and saving grace of Another.

Because of Satanic blindness to the Gospel of Grace (2 Cor. 4:3, 4), unregenerate man cannot comprehend the true basis of salvation, and is therefore ever prone to do the best he knows. This is to attempt to work out his own standing before God by his own efforts. It is this natural tendency to do something of merit that prompts many to respond to any appeal for a public action. It was an expression of sincerity that inquired of Jesus: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" And His answer then is His answer now: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:28, 29).

It may be conceded that genuine results are sometimes obtained even where misleading methods are employed; but there may be great harm done as well. Far too little has been said on this point. Some of these evils should be mentioned. Let it be remembered, however, that this is a discussion of the possible evils that may follow the wrong use of methods in which a public action is demanded as a necessary condition of salvation.

#### I. -- A False Issue

The leader who has accustomed himself to years of public service can hardly realize the almost impossible task that is placed before the majority of people when they are asked to do some conspicuous act. People usually find such acts very difficult; and while they might be willing to receive Christ as a personal Saviour, they often shrink from taking a public step because of their natural timidity. Thus the real issue is many times subordinated to another; and that new issue is not only unreal, but is entirely foreign to the all-important question. In this connection it is often urged that the unsaved should be sufficiently in earnest to comply readily with any method or custom that may be employed. But is it not evident, in addition to the fact that such demands may be a denial of the doctrine of grace, that they are both unwarranted and unreasonable, since God has provided no enabling power whereby unregenerate people may do commendable acts for Him? A public confession is a far different task to the same timid person after he has received the new divine life; for he can then say by faith, and in all humility: "I can do all things

through Christ which strengthened me" (Phil. 4:13).

The one necessary step -- the acceptance of Christ as Saviour -- can be performed only in the secret of the heart itself, by a personal choice and action of the will. This is a dealing with Christ alone, and as the time of this decision is the most critical moment in a human life, reason demands that it should be guarded from every distracting and confusing condition.

## II. -- A False Assurance

A leader with a commanding personality may secure the public action of many when the issue is made one of religious merit through some public act. Under such an impression, a serious person may stand in a meeting who has no conception of what is involved in standing by faith on the Rock Christ Jesus; or he may be persuaded to abandon his natural timidity when he knows nothing of abandoning his Satanic tendency to self-help, and resting by faith on that which Christ has done for him. If questioned carefully, the basis of assurance with all such converts will be found to be no more than a consciousness that they have acted out the program prescribed for them.

## III. -- "Backsliding"

Careful students of evangelism have noticed that where the necessity of public action as a part of conversion has been most emphasized there has been a corresponding increase in the God-dishonoring record of so-called "backsliding"; and this is natural. The covenant of God is to keep eternally all who are truly saved, and there are no other provisions than the one way of salvation by Christ's willing substitution, whereby God can be just and still be the justifier of a sin-cursed soul. To attempt to "come unto God" on the grounds of a public performance, even with great earnestness, is but to fail, and the misguided soul who makes that attempt, when his hope has proven false, is often the hardest to reach thereafter.

## IV. -- Discredit to the Covenant of God

As has just been stated, the essential and Scriptural doctrine of the eternal keeping by God of every regenerate soul has been brought into discredit and almost lost. This has come to pass through an attempt to reconcile His covenants with "actual experience" in evangelism today. It has been necessary to question this otherwise clear doctrine of the Scriptures to allow for the appalling percentage of failures in the ranks of supposed converts. But when it is remembered that the modification of that positive doctrine, and the forced interpretation of the Word of God to that end, has been attempted largely by those who have insisted on a spectacular conversion, their challenge of that glorious truth may be set aside without discussion.

Although an innumerable multitude may have been misguided by responding to false issues and have returned, sooner or later, to their own place outside Christian fellowship, the covenant of God is not involved. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost [eternally] that come unto God by him" -- Christ (Heb. 7:25); He "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). And the soul that believes in Christ "shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Nor can any "pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:29), or separate them "from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39).

It is quite possible for a newly-saved person so to misunderstand the forces and habits of the old life and the possible power and victory of the new life as to be overtaken in sin and appear, for a time, to be "in a far country"; yet, if he has ever been in the Father's house as a son, he, like the prodigal is still a son, and therefore will be constantly constrained by the Spirit to arise and go to his Father.

Incalculable harm has been done to all Christendom by this widespread denial of the grace and faithfulness of God. Because of this denial, saints have been occupied with futile attempts at self-keeping to the neglect of true service for God, and intelligent sinners have feared to take the Christian's position when reason warned them that such a position would be impossible for them to maintain.

#### V. -- Dishonor to the Spirit of God

The aim of all public demands in modern evangelism is to terminate indifference and hesitation by a positive decision. But this is sometimes undertaken without due regard for the whole process of preparation by the Spirit for the intelligent exercise of saving faith. Thus the all-important work of the Spirit for the unsaved has often been neglected and the Spirit dishonored in the vain attempt to hasten decisions and to secure visible results.

A true decision must depend upon the action of the will of the individual as he is moved by his own clear vision of his place in the saving work of Christ, and that vision must be created by the Spirit. When this is accomplished, there will be little occasion to argue and plead, and methods which are calculated to force a decision will be found to be superfluous; and any method which is superfluous is usually resented by intelligent people. Such methods create a sense of unreality where there should be a growing reality.

Many serious men have concluded that to send out workers to plead with individuals in a miscellaneous congregation is not only embarrassing to the people thus approached, but is, in the majority of cases, a service which hardens and repels. Forced decisions sometimes follow such appeals. These, they observe, are usually premature and unintelligent decisions; for in such methods there can be no certainty concerning the conviction by the Spirit and no very definite dependence upon His leading. On the other hand, the many who have resisted the personal appeal have been hardened or driven away.

Public methods which embarrass any person or class of persons may be not only useless but intrusive. There is little gained by inviting all Christians in a public gathering to stand, thus forcing all others into a conspicuous position, causing them annoyance and creating an occasion for prejudice. It is not strange that intelligent unsaved people sometimes avoid meetings where these methods are employed. By adopting such a program the evangelist or pastor may be hindering the very work of God which he is attempting to do.

If the spectacular element in public soul-winning is eliminated there will be less opportunity to count supposed results, and the test of conversion will be removed from the sphere of profession and made to rest on the reality of a changed life afterwards.

The sincere evangelist who fearlessly judges, before God, every method he employs -- judging them as to their exact value or possible harm in their influence on immortal souls -- will find that many methods in evangelism are more a habit than a necessity, or that they have been employed in an effort to produce visible results, rather than to create a means by which sin-burdened souls may find rest and peace through a personal and intelligent faith in Christ as Saviour.

Lest it seem that this criticism of modern methods in evangelism has left no possible means of bringing a whole congregation to a point of decision, the following suggestions are offered, which have proven useful.

The real value of public methods may be secured and many evils avoided if, after explaining the way of life and during a season of silent prayer, the unsaved are asked to accept Christ by a conscious act of the will, directed in definite silent prayer to God. Such a decision may then be greatly strengthened by an immediate public confession of Christ. The vital difference in question is, however, that such are then confessing that they have believed on Christ, rather than making a confession in order that they may be saved. After such an appeal, an opportunity should be made for personal conversation with any who believe they have accepted Christ by faith, or any others who may have honest difficulties. In this conversation the individual's exact understanding of the step may be ascertained and his faith strengthened. Such conversations may be secured early in an after-meeting, or by offering some attractive literature suited to beginners in the Christian life. When it is clear that an intelligent decision has been made, constant confession of Christ as a personal Saviour, should be urged along with the other duties and privileges of the new life.

Messages. -- In considering messages as the last of the three "false forces" in evangelism already mentioned, it may well be restated that the ministry of the New Testament evangelist was intended to be wider in its scope than the accepted mission of the evangelist of today. As his name implies, he is the "bearer of glad tidings," and so is in marked contrast to the prophet who proclaims the great principles of morality and righteousness. He has also a far different mission than the pastor and teacher who shepherds the flock and feeds them on the Word of God.

The New Testament evangelist is given a particular message to proclaim. That message is the "good news" of the Gospel of Grace; it is therefore a distinct body of truth for this age. His evangel is one of "glad tidings," because it offers freedom from the bondage of the law, with attempts at self-fitting for the presence of God, and because it proclaims a perfect salvation by the power of God through faith in Jesus Christ and His redemption by the cross -- a salvation through which God by His power produces a "new creature," able, because of the new life imparted, to bring forth fruit to His glory.

Any deviation from this prescribed message of redemptive truth is an unwarranted undertaking on the part of the evangelist, and is fraught with grave dangers. On the one hand, he may be tempted to adopt the message of the prophet; or he may undertake the work of the pastor and teacher and deal with matters of Christian living, and thus encumber the glorious but limited message of the evangelist. For the issue before the unsaved is not one of after-conduct. The life to be led after conversion can be determined only by the individual himself in the light and power of the new relation to Christ, Whom he has received, and the manner of that new life is a personal matter between the Christian and his Lord (Rom. 14:4). Yet, when dealing with the unsaved, the questions which belong to Christian living, such as forms of amusement, or even church membership, are often discussed by evangelists, and these issues may become conditions of salvation to those who hear. The individual may be willing to accept Christ, but be wholly unable to see beyond that one step until that one step is taken.

Again, a message may become a "false force" and, to some extent, a hindrance in true evangelism, through a common tendency to depend upon it to move the unsaved to decision. Only the Spirit of God can illuminate the vision and convict the heart of its sinfulness; and while the Spirit may use the message to that end, the work is His and His alone.

The divine plan in saving men provides that the Gospel of the saving grace of Christ is to be clearly presented to them. As they hear, some will believe, and when they believe they will that instant be saved by the mighty power of God (John 3:36). There is little demand for methods beyond this God-given program. It is doubtless important to discover and follow up every decision. Simple methods often help to this end; but such machinery is no part of the plan God has ordained. The unsaved are expected to believe the message of salvation as they hear it. Failure is too often in the preaching. The messenger should know the Gospel, or else be silent.

The real purpose of the message and the utter impossibility of its possessing convicting power in and of itself will be more fully stated in another chapter, when dealing with the illuminating work of the Spirit as one of the true forces in the evangelism of the New Testament.

In considering the true forces in evangelism as they are set forth in the Scriptures, it will be found that they, in contrast with the "false forces" already mentioned, depend upon the activity of the whole company of believers in prayer and in the ministry of the Word; that they demand an unceasing effort for their fullest realization; and that they, from necessity, must usually be carried on independently of public gatherings or special leaders. These true forces in evangelism will, for the sake of emphasis, be taken up in their reverse order; beginning with the objective, or end, which true evangelism must have in view, and tracing the successive steps backward to the real point of human responsibility.

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