

Dr Shawn Merithew March 13, 2007 *The Family*  
EVANGELISM: GUILT OR GLADNESS?

I have had the subject of evangelism on my heart a lot lately as I prepare for the Personal Evangelism class I will be teaching next quarter in our MIT program. The material I have been reviewing is both convicting and challenging. Even though I am a pastor, and the ministry of the gospel is my life, I too can get into a rut where I am not sharing my faith. That is why we all must be intentional about praying for and seeking out opportunities for evangelism.

As we come to grips with that reality, it is important to examine our motives. What is it that drives us to do evangelism? The most common motive for evangelism is guilt. Pastors and teachers will push members to evangelize by pounding on the issue of disobedience to the Great Commission. The typical mantra sounds something like this: "We are a bunch of lazy, fearful, disobedient Christians who won't even cross the street to seek the salvation of our neighbors. Every day, thousands of people are going to hell, and if we don't get out there and start winning them to Christ, their blood is on our hands!"

Now I want to be careful to say that some elements of those statements are true. Many of us are ineffective at evangelism because we are afraid of how people will respond to us or because we are struggling with spiritual apathy and sins of omission. The Great Commission is indeed for every believer, and each of us are responsible for "winning" people to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-22) and raising them up to be reproducing disciples of our Lord. However, the Bible never says that the blood of unsaved people is on our hands. We are certainly responsible for God's command to proclaim the Gospel; silence is disobedience. But we are not responsible for saving people – that is God's responsibility alone.

Given that understanding, what should be the primary motive for evangelism? Here's a hint – it is the motive most often ignored: JOY. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus endured the cross "*for the JOY set before Him.*" Acts 2:46-47 shows us that the first church was characterized by a GLADNESS in the Lord and favor among the people, and that God was thus "*adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*" In Acts 13:50-52, even when Paul and Barnabas were persecuted in their evangelistic endeavors, the disciples were "*continually filled with JOY and with the Holy Spirit.*"

We are indeed held responsible for whether or not we proclaim His truth, but our primary motive in evangelism should be the gladness of a heart wrapped up in God. In other words, we should be mindful to not disobey God's command, but we should be driven by the delight of seeing our precious Lord magnified and worshiped among newly redeemed souls. We should exult in the fire of God's glory spreading through the harvest fields of Montgomery, America, and the world. We should gladly spend ourselves to spread His love because there is no pursuit on earth that can compare with what God has in store for His faithful children: "*Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.*" (Psalm 16:11)

My deep desire for Morningview Baptist is that we would be a family of faith known for intense, self-sacrificing evangelism; the kind of evangelism that is like a geyser of truth and effort erupting forth from hearts that are swelled by the resplendent greatness of God; the kind of evangelism that reflects to the world the true JOY of being children of the King!