

Thomas D. Elliff

## Why Every Church Member Must Be Soul-winners

### Proverbs 24: 10 - 12

I'm going to be speaking on this subject: "Why every member of our church must be a soul-winner." If you're a little bit worried because you say, "Look, that's not for me. I don't want to sit through a sermon where I feel a little bit uncomfortable," let me just confirm your fears. That is the distinct purpose of this message.

Someone has said, "Well, I don't like to go to a church where when the preacher preaches I sometimes feel a little guilty." Well, it's not my responsibility to make anyone feel guilty about anything. That's the work of the Holy Spirit of God but let me tell you something, friend, pray that you will never lose sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Conviction of sin is as valuable to you in the spiritual sense as pain is in the physical sense. It lets you know there is a problem that must be dealt with. I'm praying that every member of this church will become deeply convicted that he or she should be a soul-winner, someone who shares the good news that Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins.

We are an evangelical church. What does that mean? In all this spectrum of churches that call themselves Christian churches, there's a very small group, about 10 percent that are evangelical churches. What is the dividing line? It is this: what we call the sufficiency of Christ. That is that salvation comes by the grace of God through faith in Christ plus nothing else. Once you trust in Jesus Christ, He comes to dwell in your life. He forgives you of your sin, and you have eternal life. You don't get that eternal life by any good works or by going through any ritual or

by seeing any priest or pastor or going through any kind of activity. It comes by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ plus nothing. In all these churches that call themselves Christian churches you'll find men that say, "Well, yes, you're saved by faith in Jesus but you have to do good works, and you can lose your salvation." Or "Yes, you're saved by faith in Jesus and the grace of God, but there are these sacraments that you go through or there are these rituals that you go through or you must be baptized or you must have the Lord's Supper, or you must come back and do this over and over again or you will not stay saved." An evangelical church is a church that believes that Christ is sufficient. That is that when you repent of sin and you trust in Jesus, He comes to dwell within you, old things passed away. All things become new. You are what the Scripture calls born again. That's Jesus' phrase. You are a brand new creature in Christ Jesus, and you have eternal life; and heaven will one day be your home. That's an evangelical church. But then what about the word evangelistic?

We're also an evangelistic church. That means we meet together such as we are this morning. Inevitably there will be a moment when someone will encourage others to trust Jesus as Savior. Last Sunday morning in this auditorium many people came forward receiving Christ, trusting in Him as Savior and as Lord of their life. I pray the same thing will happen this morning at invitation time. Many people will open their hearts because they will hear an evangelistic invitation, the message of the gospel accompanied with an invitation to trust in Jesus, to repent of sin, to believe on Him and receive this new life which only Christ can offer. And so we are an evangelistic church. Evangelizing. . . that's what this preacher's working on. We're an evangelical church. We believe in the sufficiency of Christ. We're an evangelistic church. When we get together, well, you're going to hear an evangelistic appeal - an invitation to

receive Christ. And we have evangelism training. We send people out to share the gospel. But I am not thoroughly convinced, and I know neither are you, that we are an evangelizing church.

What does that mean? That means that we are a church where every member has a passion for sharing the message of the gospel. Somebody will say, “Well, Brother Tom, you do that because you’re the preacher.” No, I do that because I’m a believer in Jesus.

I preach gospel messages and perform the responsibilities of a pastor because that’s my calling, but every one of us as believers in Christ is to be an evangelizing person. That means other people need to hear from you and from me the wonderful story that Jesus can save them. You need to encourage them to repent of sin and trust in Jesus. You ought to accompany them to church. You ought to come down the aisle with them. At invitation time you ought to tap them on the shoulder and say, “Look, wouldn’t you like today to trust in Jesus as your Savior?” We need to become an evangelizing church. We’ve got a wonderful goal up here to baptize 700 people by the end of the year. The truth of the matter is we could do that next Sunday if every person in this auditorium was an evangelizing person, and we were an evangelizing church. I want to share with you why every church member **must** . . . you say, “You mean those who want to.” No, why every church member **must** . . . and it’s not because Brother Tom says so, but I believe it is a very clear teaching of the Scripture. I’m praying that God will convince you this morning that we **must** be an evangelizing church. You must be a winner of souls to Jesus.

Something has to happen in your heart. Something has to happen in our hearts corporately so that we will not even tolerate the idea that a person could go to hell without us doing everything we can to keep that from happening.

Read with me Proverbs 24:10 – 12 (NKIV):

“If you faint in the day of adversity, Your strength is small. Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, “Surely we did not know this” Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”

Dear friend I'm praying this morning with one intent. My thoughts are focused on one issue. I have one purpose one consuming ambition for these next very few moments and that is that somehow God would convince that you ought to be a soul-winner, not just someone who endorses soul-winning as worthy, not just someone who gives financially so that others will go and win people to Jesus, but that every one of us will realize God intends for us to be soul-winners, and I must do it. My option is either to do it or to be disobedient, and there is much much at stake in this issue of soul-winner. It's not just what this preacher says. I want you to see that the Word of God clearly states that you must be a soul-winner. Why? Well, let's look at it.

First of all because of the perilous condition of the lost. Look at verse 11. He says,

“If you forbear to deliver those that are drawn unto death and those who are ready to be

slain” as a matter of fact some translations of this say, “Do not forbear to deliver those who are drawn unto death and those who are staggering to slaughter,, Oh hold them back.” (NASB)

Look with me at three words which describe people who are without Christ. First he describes them as people who are being drawn toward death. The picture in the language of the Scripture is that they have been taken by the hand by someone who is their friend, someone who is promising them everything they want, someone who is promising them safety. Because their eyes are blinded and they cannot see with their heart, they assume the way they’re going is the right way. They’re being led along like a blind person totally, oblivious to the fact that the ultimate end of that road is eternity separated from God in hell. If you’re without Jesus and cannot say that you know there’s been that moment in time when you’ve transferred your trust to Jesus only; if you don’t have the confidence that if you died today you’d spend your forever with God in heaven, you are in this group of people about which this Scripture is speaking. You are being drawn along to an ultimate death. You think you’re going in the right direction. Everything feels right to you. Oh yeah, you have occasional problems but the best you know how, you’re following your own leadership. And so you are being drawn along unto death. Not only are you being drawn but the Bible says a person without Christ is dropping. They stumbling to the slaughter.

This phrase “stumbling to the slaughter” is a phrase that describes someone who is standing, perhaps was standing on a slope and all of a sudden the gravel begins to give away. Perhaps they’re scuffling with their feet and reaching to grab this thing and that thing but the truth of the

matter is they are stumbling. They are dropping, and imagine a cliff out there. They are headed toward that cliff. It's not that you're standing in a fork of the road and if you decide you want to go to hell, you take a leap in that direction. No, the Bible says you are dropping already. You are stumbling to the slaughter. All that's left is for you to plummet into an eternal abyss called hell. That's why the Bible speaks about becoming a Christian in terms of being saved. A person without Christ is a person who is dropping. For some of you grandmothers and granddaddies here, that's the case of your grandchildren. You say, "They're good kids, but they're out of church. I remember a time when they came forward, but they don't live like a Christian, and I'm worried about them."

In all likelihood those children, those grandchildren are headed to hell. Your mama, your daddy, your grandmother, your granddaddy all may be headed to hell. That student next to you in that locker room is headed to hell. They're being drawn along. They are dropping, and ultimately they will die. Notice what he says. They are stumbling to the slaughter. They are being drawn toward death. Ultimately they will plummet into hell. They'll spend forever separated from God. Separated from the Lord, separated from everything that's good and true and right and wholesome and beautiful. And it's not just for a week. It's not just for a month or a year. It's forever. No half way point. No time when you sorta get used to it. It is a forever in hell. How under heaven can you work with people like this and live next to people like this and have them sit at the table with you and not be broken over their condition and not cry out to God over the lostness of your loved ones and lostness of those who live next to you, your neighbors and your coworkers? How can you not cry out with tears, be broken, be burdened over the lostness of people?

I'm convinced that if you ever seriously consider the end of unbelief, you'll become broken over the lost, and you'll become broken to the Lord's command. It won't be any problem with you to accept His command that "as you are going make disciples of all nations." "You shall be witnesses unto me," He said to us. Preach the gospel to all nations. You'll be broken over the condition of the lost.

William Booth the founder of the Salvation Army said, "All I desire for those who work for me is if they could just spend 15 minutes in hell and see what it's like" he said, "I would never have any problem convincing them of the importance of winning people to Jesus." And many of us go around with these false assumptions. We're so afraid we're going to offend someone that we don't ever challenge them. The false assumption is they must be going to heaven. They're in church with me. They're in choir with me. They're in the youth group with me. And the invitation is given, and we see this person next to us, and we never say a word to them. We never encourage them. We never lean over and say, "Look, is everything really all right with you?" We never say to them, "Share with me your testimony." I am convinced that if you ever really considered the end of the lost, drawn, dropping, ultimately they will be forever in hell-conscious, in agony, crying out and knowing that you came into their life and had the gospel but did not share it. But knowing they're there for their own sins, you'd be broken over the lost, and you'd be broken to the command of the Lord. It wouldn't be any problem with you. You wouldn't argue with it. We'd give you opportunities to train for EE or How to Share Your Faith Without Fear, and you'd be breaking the doors down to get in. "Let me become a better student of that. Let me be a better witness. Let me learn how better." You'd be saying, "Look, I have

friends. I have loved ones. I have a son or daughter or grandchildren, and they are without God, and my heart is broken over it. There are people with whom I work. I have never confronted them with the gospel, and my heart is broken over it.” If you just ever considered the perilous condition of the lost. For that reason alone you must be a soul-winner. You must go and share the gospel. You’ll be compelled by the perilous state of the lost.

You must be a soul-winner because of the pointed command of the Lord. “Deliver those who are drawn toward death,” he said. “And those ready to be slain hold them back hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.” That’s not a suggestion. That’s not a hint. That’s not an idle muse. God’s just not thinking aloud here saying, “You know maybe this would be a good thing for you to do.” He has given a very specific, pointed command. Notice two aspects of it.

First of all He says to deliver them. That means go to them with the message. Tell them how they can have eternal life. You say, "I'm not very good at it." Well be as good as you can be. You say, "I'll stumble." Then tell them why you stumble. Say, "I'll hem and haw and gets some facts wrong." Go ahead. Get some facts wrong. Better to do that and to try to share the gospel than to let them go to hell knowing that you never raised a word. You never lifted a hand. You never took a step to save them. We say, "I'll go when I get it all down pat, when I can have it all right, when I have all the pieces of the puzzle together." I want to tell you something. People who are involved in a rescue situation don't worry about any of that.

I remember when that tornado swept through this town and in minutes some of us were out there. We didn't worry about what was happening to the nice shoes we had on or the nice clothes we had on. We didn't worry about what was happening to our cars. I remember driving down the street. First thing to happen I got a flat tire, turned around and drove back on the flat. We got another car and headed back down there into the rubble. We were involved in search and rescue- clamoring up on boards, shouting down, hollering out, "Hey, can you hear me? Is anybody there?" And you didn't worry about your reputation. You didn't worry about your looks. You had never rehearsed a "Can I help you? Can I save you?" speech. You were just involved in search and rescue, and that's just to save people's physical lives. We're talking about forever. You say, "Well it will take a night of my life, an hour of my time. Will I look right? Will I think right? Can I say the right things?" If you ever get convinced of what it means to be lost, you won't worry about how poorly you share the gospel. You'll see how desperately they need to hear it no matter how "poorly" you share it.

“Deliver them,” He says. And if they will not be delivered you are to at least detain them. See those stumbling to the slaughter? Oh, hold them back. Those who are sliding, they are dropping. They are headed down. Grab for them. Reach for them. Do everything you can to hold them back.

Would you let God write this truth in your heart? Just put it down someplace. While knowing you cannot guarantee any person’s salvation, it should at least give them an advantage. That neighbor next to you who’s going to hell. What advantage is it to that neighbor that you live there? What advantage has it been in terms of the gospel? That son or daughter who sits at the table with you, that mom and dad who lives in the same house with you, that man who works next to you, that student whose locker is next to you or plays on the same team or sings in the same choir or plays in the same orchestra Answer it honestly, what advantage has it been knowing you in terms of the gospel?

You can’t guarantee these folks are going to go to heaven. They may reject the gospel. But don’t you agree with me it ought to be some advantage to live next door to you, to go to the same school you attend, to work where you work, to be in your home? Shouldn’t there be some advantage to that? Shouldn’t that give them just a little edge in knowing how to be saved and that it’s important to be saved and that Jesus saves? Shouldn’t that give them some little edge? You see, you must be a soul-winner not only because of the perilous condition of the lost but because of the pointed command of the Lord. You must.

But let me offer one other reason for your consideration. You must be a soul-winner because of the promised consequences of laziness. You see there are going to be some who'll go home and here's what they're going to say, "I don't like that kind of preaching, and you'll think of all of the reasons why it's not right to go soul-winning. "I don't to embarrass. I don't want to offend. I'm not trained." You'll think of all of those reasons, but let me tell you something. Behind it all is one thing. Laziness. "I just don't want to." You say, "Well no, I'd like to." No, if you wanted to, you'd do it because you do what you want to do. Don't you? You watch the TV you want to watch. You spend your night times the way you want to spend them. Nobody's forcing you to work where you work.

The profession that you're in you may not like it, but you're not under lock and key. You do what you want to do with your time, your money. You say, "I have all these commitments." Those commitments came because you did what you wanted to do, and if you want to reach people for Jesus, you'll do it and if you don't do it, the bottom line is laziness.

You say, "Brother Tom, that's a pretty harsh judgment of me. I'm a nice guy. I like to give. I like to share. I'm one of your most faithful people in this church." That's okay, but if you're not a soul-winner, you're lazy. Bottom line.

Now wait a minute. How do you know that I'm lazy?" Because the Bible says you're lazy. You see, I'm a preacher of the Word. I'm a delivery boy. I'm just like your paper boy. I try to chunk it as close to your door as I can get it. Whether you read it or not that's your business. I can't

make you read it, but I'm going to try to get it right up to your door of your brain. I'm going to throw this just as close as I can to your door.

Notice these three verses?

He says if you faint, you just give up, your strength is small. You say, "I'm not going to do that. I can't do that. There's no way I can do that. I'm not good at doing that. I'm not one of those guys gifted at that." I don't find any place in the Scripture where Jesus gave His commission and said "this is only for those who are gifted." As a matter of fact, He did just the opposite. He said, "As you're going, make disciples." Teaching them to do what? To do everything I commanded you. Not just teaching them everything I commanded you but teaching them to **do** everything I commanded you. And so their commission is our commission. And He didn't say I just want you to teach those who have this unique gift of evangelism or those who have the gift of gab or those you know who can go to school and those who have the time. No. He says I want all of My children to know that they must be soul-winners. And He says if you faint, if you just throw up your hand and say, "I'm not going to do that. That's too much, that's too big. Brother Tom just doesn't know what I..." Listen this is not an issue between me and you. It's an issue between you and God. And Jesus said, "Why do you call me your Lord if you don't do what I say?"

If your determination right now is, "I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to share. I can't. I won't. I will not." Don't call Him Lord because He said, "Why do you call me Lord and do not the things I say unto you?" There are those who faint. Then there are those who according to the

King James version forbear. I just don't want to tonight. I'll do it next week. I'll do it next month. I'll let those children get a little closer to hell. I'll let that grandchild just get right to the edge of hell. I'll let that husband that wife that mother that father that fellow student that choir member that church member that class member. I'll let them just get right out there where...I'm going to give the devil another week another month. I'm going to put their life in peril. They might not even live. That's okay. I'm just going to forbear. I'm going to put it off. Yeah, I know God put it on my heart this afternoon. I'm just not going to do it. I'm just going to wait. I'll sit down and think about it, and that'll pass. I'll get involved in the football game and that'll pass - that feeling that I ought to go witness to my neighbor or my friend or my loved one or my family member. I'll just I'll get over it." If you forbear. That's laziness. And then He says if you fake it.

If you say, "I didn't know this. There's not one person who hears this who can offer that excuse to God. He will remind you one day of and say "there was a preacher who told you this was your responsibility as a believer in Christ." So you can't say we didn't know it. "I didn't understand it was that important." He says I want to tell you what's going to happen. Here are the consequences of laziness. One of these days there's going to be a judgment. It's called the judgment seat of Christ. It's not the great white throne judgment when believers are cast into hell. This is a judgment for people who professed in Jesus as Savior, and our works will be tried the Scripture says. And every man according to 2 Corinthians 5:10 will receive the things done in His body.

That is why you were alive right here. You see one day you will stand before the Lord and account for every soul-winning opportunity that ever came your way, every soul-winning opportunity afforded to you. One of these days you'll stand before the Lord and give an account for it. What about this person? What about this neighbor? What about this student? What about this friend? What about that grandchild, that grandson or daughter? What about that child? What about that parent? What about that husband? What about that wife? There are all those times and you had a notion that one day you're going to do it but you just never got around to doing it.

You see, it's an assured judgment. He says does not he that ponders the heart consider it and he that keeps your soul does He not know it and shall not He render unto every man according to his works.

I'm thinking now of a moment for which I one day will have to give an account. I was busy, I was tired, and I was hoarse. It was the year before Jeanie and I were married. I was tutoring students on a university campus and pastoring a church full time. I was coaching a 37 person swimming team with all the whistle blowing and hollering and screaming that goes along with that. One day at the end of a particularly exhausting session with that team I finally excused them all. Once they were out of the room . . . out of the natatorium there where the pool was, I jumped in the pool myself and was just sort of floating out there trying to cool off, slow down, rest. I was just paddling around, you know relaxing, and I heard a voice, "Hey." And I looked up and sitting on the end of the diving board was one of the students. He said, "They tell me you're a preacher." I said, "Yeah." He said, "How about that?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I've been

thinking a lot about that.” I said, “You mean about preaching?” He said, “No, just about church and the Lord.” I was so tired I said, “Oh, really?” He said, “Yeah, a lot.” I said, “I’d like to talk to you about that sometime.” He said, “Well, okay. I sure hope we can.” And with that he stood up, walked back to the ladder on the diving board and left. I made a mental note to be sure and talk to him one day.

The next day I went to see a physician. He said, “You’re developing some nodes on your vocal chords. You’ve got to quit doing some of these things.” So I called the school, said I can’t coach any more, can’t make that trip down there, can’t tutor any more, but I’ll be back for the first semester of graduate school. When the fall rolled around I went back to graduate school. I was teaching freshman history at the university. I asked one of the history professors about this young man. You see, this young man was a high school senior who was planning on entering as a freshman in that university. I said I haven’t seen him on campus. Is he going to be assigned to my class? He said, “Didn’t you hear?” I said, “Hear what?” He said, “Didn’t you read yesterday’s paper?” I said, “Tell me.” He said, “Yesterday morning he went out in the back yard of his home and killed himself.” It causes me no end of grief to know that one day I will give an account of a failed opportunity to witness. It will be assured to me. It will be an accurate account, and He who keeps my soul knows what’s in my heart. I am grieved over it, but I cannot change it now.