

# Growth Points

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## Preach for a Verdict

The Gospel of Mark shows that our role as servants of Christ is to preach the good news of salvation and persuade men and women, boys and girls, to place their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Or, another way to say it is our role is to preach for a verdict!

Among other things, this means we must be people of action, obediently doing our part in spreading the good news about Jesus Christ, and people of persuasion, boldly

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declaring Jesus Christ to be the only way to salvation.

The old debates concerning man's obedience and God's sovereignty in Christian mission, as well as the place of dialogue and persuasion in evangelism, are major issues in Christian outreach today. In wrestling with our role and responsibility in connection with God's sovereignty in salvation, some stress that since God is sovereign, and therefore sufficient to accomplish evangelism without human agency, our role is simply to bear witness through our lives to his love and grace, allowing God to bring about people's salvation in his time. According to this perspective, our role is to follow the well-quoted guideline of St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words." The idea is we must let our light shine, and God will bring people to faith as he desires. Of course, God is sovereign and does not need us to accomplish his purposes on earth. However, no Christian denies either God's sovereignty or man's responsibility for preaching the good news. Indisputably

God is sovereign, but plainly he calls his people to obediently take the gospel to the world. The symbolism of *stewards* and *servants* in the New Testament is rich in this regard.

We are God's fellow-workers (1 Corinthians 3:9). The word fellow worker (*sunergoi*) is a concept applied throughout the New Testament. In all cases the one given the role of worker or steward is required to be obedient. For example, in the parable of the pounds and the talents the master gives gifts to servants who are considered responsible agents. At the end of each story the master holds the servants responsible for their obedience or disobedience (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). Those servants who were obedient received

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# Is Christ the savior of the world or not?

## Christ asked, "Who do you say that I am?"

a reward, while the disobedient servants received punishment. Likewise the Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that he "planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth" (3:6). There is the answer to the debate abbreviated. God sovereignly brings about the growth of the church through evangelism, but his servants are held responsible. Paul notes the servant's responsibility when he says, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers" (3:8-9). Only God in his sovereignty brings people to faith in Christ, but our role as responsible agents (stewards and servants) is to take specific action to fulfill this calling by preaching for a verdict.

We live in an extremely diverse religious culture, which causes some Christians to back away from attempting to persuade others that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven (John 14:6). It is suggested that the best approach is to dialogue with others in an attempt to find the common truth in all faiths, while allowing individuals to come to their own conclusions about truth. Regrettably, the concept of dialogue is quite vague. The best meaning of the term *dialogue* suggests a friendly, respectful discussion that seeks to persuade the other person to one's view. In the weakest use of the term, however, dialogue suggests a conversation between people where neither seeks to persuade the other, rather they dialogue purely to communicate. Dialogue becomes nothing but an attitude of respectful discussion with no agenda of converting the other person to one's point of view. The first form of dialogue is certainly biblical, i.e., we should seek to persuade others with a spirit of mutual understanding. But the second concept of dialogue is decidedly not biblical, for Christians must always witness for a

verdict, i.e., the Christian always seeks to persuade another to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, accept baptism, and become a responsible part of the church.

Both the Old and New Testaments place belief in God over against the gods of this world. The entire Bible presents God as the Creator and Sustainer of the world (Gen. 1:1-2:25; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17). He alone is worthy of worship, as God commanded, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). In the New Testament people are called to make a choice for or against Jesus Christ." He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Jesus' declaration that he is "the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" demands a verdict (John 14:6). Jesus stressed the need to chose when he asked his disciples "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" To which Peter gave his powerful confession "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 16:13-16). Peter and the disciples made their choice. A decision must always be made. Is Jesus Christ the savior of the world or not? Preach for a verdict!



Gary L. McIntosh is an internationally respected speaker, author, and professor.

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