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# VERITAS

*Equipping Christians to live by truth—  
veritas—from God.*



***True*** —  
***Evangelism:***  
The Necessity of God's  
Work in Saving the Lost  
by Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost

DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR



*Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost*

**Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost** is Distinguished Professor of Bible Exposition, Emeritus, at Dallas Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 1955.

“Dr. P.,” as he is affectionately known on campus, graduated magna cum laude from Hampden-Sydney College and from Dallas Seminary, where he holds both the Master of Theology and Doctor of Theology degrees. He is also the author of numerous books, including his groundbreaking work on the subject of eschatology (future things) titled *Things to Come*.

Dr. Pentecost also served as a pastor for many years, including pastorates at Saint John’s Presbyterian Church in Devon, Pennsylvania, from 1946–1951, and at Grace Bible Church of Dallas from 1958–1976.

Dr. Pentecost has traveled extensively to teach God’s Word, including to Argentina, Australia, Brazil, the British Isles, Chile, Colombia, Ethiopia, Europe, Haiti, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Latin America, Mexico, the Middle East, New Zealand, Paraguay, the Philippines, Spain, Taiwan, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Zaire.

He and his late wife, Dorothy, have two married daughters and two grandchildren.

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The photos that accompany this article are from a historical slide show created by Dallas Seminary for a presentation in the early 1980s. In each photo, DTS professor Reg Grant is seen portraying Seminary founder, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer.

***D**r. J. Dwight Pentecost says that in order for us to have a clear understanding of evangelism as taught in the Scriptures, we must grasp two critical truths. First, we must understand the helplessness of people apart from Christ to do something to save themselves; and second, we must understand that genuine conversion is the work of God. Dr. Pentecost's important message, originally delivered at a Dallas Seminary chapel service, will help clarify the true nature of evangelism and encourage you in your efforts to reach people for Christ.*



One of the books I have on my shelf is a small volume that only cost one dollar when it was published. This book, titled *True Evangelism*, brought a thunderstorm of criticism against the author, who was Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Seminary.

Dr. Chafer never went to a theological school to learn theology. Rather, he enrolled in the Oberlin Conservatory of Music to prepare for service to the Lord as a musician, both vocal and instrumental. His bride was also an accomplished pianist, and as a team, the Chafers were asked by evangelists to lead the music in their campaigns.

Dr. Chafer was turned toward a teaching ministry when they set up classes for those who professed faith in Christ as a result of the campaigns. He moved from the platform to the classroom to teach these new converts. It was while doing this that he came to the attention of Dr. C. I. Scofield, the author of the notes in the famous *Scofield Reference Bible*, who at that time was pastor of the First Congregational Church here in Dallas.

Dr. Chafer joined with Dr. Scofield in ministry and also began to write. Having worked with evangelists for 20 years, Dr. Chafer had become disillusioned with many of their messages. Because they held a defective view of sin, many evangelists did not deal with the issue of salvation biblically.

By that I mean they did not have a proper biblical concept of human depravity, so they presented a hope of

salvation that so often rested on what the lost person did. They did not understand what it was to be dead. They did not understand the nature of the blindness that Satan imposed on those who were in sin. Therefore, their presentation of the gospel always ended with an appeal for people to do something.

As he studied and taught the Scriptures, Dr. Chafer came to understand that salvation is a work of God's grace apart from any human effort. So he wrote *True Evangelism* to explain the nature of the gospel, and to the end of his days, he was under constant attack from publications, articles, and religious newspapers because of his views on evangelism.

**Salvation is a work of God's grace apart from any human effort.**

When we would suggest that Dr. Chafer respond to some of the vicious attacks that were leveled against him, he would just shake his head and smile. That was his response.

### **TRUE EVANGELISM INVOLVES BEING CALLED BY GOD**

But it is my conviction that Dr. Chafer had discovered for himself the lesson that Jesus sought to teach the apostle Peter in a post-resurrection appearance the Lord made to seven of His disciples in John 21.

Early in His ministry, Jesus had called Peter and his brother Andrew, along with the brothers James and John, to leave their fishing boats, their nets, and their businesses to come and follow Him. I believe that in calling these men to be His disciples, Jesus was choosing some of the wealthiest men in Galilee to leave their businesses and to follow Him.

This is because the Jews depended on fish that came from

**The wonderful thing about doing evangelism God's way is that it brings lasting results.**

the Sea of Galilee, and those fish would be shipped to Jerusalem. The fishermen who supplied those fish would have a prosperous business. When Jesus called Peter and those associated with him, they had to leave their business, their boats, their nets, their servants, and everything else.

But Jesus said, "I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19).

Now Peter had been associated with Christ throughout the years of His ministry. Peter had viewed Jesus as his rabbi. Peter had checked out the tomb to verify the report that had been brought by the women that the tomb was empty when Jesus arose. As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:5, Peter had a personal time alone with Jesus on the day of Jesus' resurrection. He had been in the upper room when Jesus showed Himself alive to the Twelve. A week later, Jesus appeared again in that same upper room. Peter had come to the absolute assurance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That meant he had a message to proclaim.

This is where true evangelism begins: with a person who is called of the Lord to "fish for men" and who has a message to proclaim.

### **TRUE EVANGELISM IS CASTING THE NET**

Knowing how impulsive Peter was, I can imagine that he was anxious to get about proclaiming that message. But before he could truly be useful to the Lord, Peter had another important lesson to learn there on the Sea of Galilee that day described for us in John 21.

We read in John 21:3 that Peter said, "I'm going out to fish." Now usually Peter was not known for occupying himself

with something as mundane as that, when he should have been about bigger things.

But in this case, I don't think that this expressed desire on Peter's part was an accident; I think it was by divine arrangement. Peter was going to have to learn a lesson before he would be able to proclaim the message of the gospel. So he and six other disciples went fishing, and they worked all night. But, according to verse 3, "they caught nothing."

Without doubt, Peter must have thought, "*This is my occupation, this is my business, this is my experience, and this is something I am qualified to do.*" Yet despite all of his background as a fisherman, he couldn't hook a fish. At that point, a Figure standing on the shore called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" (v. 5).

It must have been embarrassing for Peter and the others to say, "No, we didn't catch anything."

That Figure, who of course was Jesus, could have responded by saying, "Yes, and this is the first lesson I want you to learn. You cannot do it by yourself. You cannot do it alone. I have appointed you to be fishers of men, and there is nothing in you that would make it possible for you to do what I am commissioning you to do."

So to teach Peter this lesson, Jesus said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some" (John 21:6). Peter was obedient, and the result was a net so full of fish that they couldn't haul it in.

### **TRUE EVANGELISM IS THE WORK OF GOD**

Now as many times as I have taught this passage, I

had missed the point. When Peter and the other disciples were unable to draw in the net because of the multitude of fish, John said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” (v. 7).

I think John was saying far more here than just identifying the Person standing on the beach. He was saying to Peter,

“Look at what the Lord has done.

This is not what we did. This is the Lord’s work and look at the results.

He has done what we couldn’t do by ourselves. This is the Lord’s work.”

**The Word of  
God is living and  
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to germinate.**

I am suggesting that on this occasion Peter did not catch a single fish. It was the sovereign Creator who provided that large catch of fish. It was not Peter’s

responsibility to catch fish; it was simply his responsibility to be obedient to the Lord and cast out the net. Then the Lord could gather those into the net. Peter had a message, but he had no power.

This was one of the principles of biblical evangelism that Dr. Chafer understood and sought to teach in his book *True Evangelism*. Allow me to share several key quotations from this work:

**“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.”**

**“Saving faith must be defined as a voluntary turning from all hope and grounds based on self merit and assuming an attitude of expectancy toward God; trusting Him to do perfect saving**

**work based only on the merit of Christ. Salvation is a divine creative act.”**

**“While superficial decisions may be secured through human influence and power, there will be no complete response of faith until the way is made plain by the enlightenment of the Spirit.”**

This little volume is permeated with the necessity of the Holy Spirit doing the work of evangelism in response to our casting the net. And that, I suggest, is the heart of true evangelism.

### **TRUE EVANGELISM BRINGS LASTING RESULTS**

The wonderful thing about doing evangelism God’s way is that it brings lasting results instead of superficial conversions. Jesus had sought to prepare Peter and the other disciples for this truth, and Peter definitely got the message. Later he wrote, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23).

That’s why from the very beginning, the motto of Dallas Seminary came to be “Preach the Word.” It’s another way of saying that it is our responsibility to cast the net. It may be proclaiming the gospel to an unsaved person. It may be declaring truth for a believer from the Word. Whatever the situation, the Word of God is living and powerful, but you and I cannot cause that seed to germinate.

Only the Spirit of God can cause that seed to germinate so as to produce fruit. Jesus’ word to Peter, and to us

**Our ministry is to preach the Word, cast the net, and then permit the Spirit of God to cause that Word to produce fruit for His glory.**

today, is, “You have a message, but you are not sufficient to generate life. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. Leave it to the Spirit to do what the Spirit has been sent by My Father to do. You cast the net; you preach the Word.”

I remember an occasion when I saw the lasting results of true evangelism and genuine conversion in a person’s life. It was back in the early days when I was a pastor in Dallas. I had been teaching through Ephesians for a little more than a year, and I was about halfway through.

One Sunday morning right in the middle of my message, a woman stood up. She had been coming for a few weeks to our service. She interrupted my message and said, “I have been going to church all of my life, and I responded to an invitation to come forward in a public meeting. I had been baptized and joined the church. But while I was sitting here this morning, I came to the realization that my salvation does not depend on what I had done. I want to say I am receiving Christ, trusting Him for my salvation.”

What she said was so far from the portion of Ephesians I was covering that I knew it was not anything I had said. This was the Spirit at work, bringing to germination a seed that had been sown. That was what Dr. Chafer sought to convey. He would see multitudes come to Christ as he spoke the Word. He viewed it was his responsibility to cast the net. God has promised to bless His Word and to cause His Word to germinate and produce fruit.

The concern of my heart is that we learn the lesson that Peter learned that day on the Sea of Galilee and that Dr. Chafer learned as he studied God’s Word. I encourage you to cast the net far and wide as you share the gospel with others and then trust the Spirit of God to “fill the net” for His glory.

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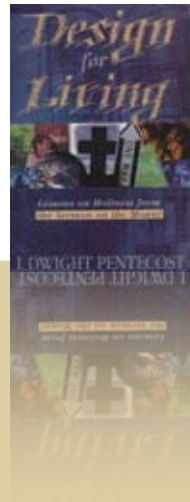
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Dr. Mark L. Bailey

## A Needed Word from a Veteran Teacher

I remember well the day I was walking across the DTS campus back in 1979. It was a weekend, and I had my 3-year-old son Josh with me at the time.

We ran into Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost, who got down on my son's eye level and introduced himself. He demonstrated a real heart for Josh. My son never forgot meeting this great saint and legendary teacher of God's Word at our school, and years later, Josh had the privilege of sitting under Dr. Pentecost as a Dallas Seminary student.

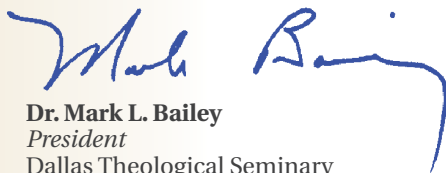
That tells you a lot about this amazing man we all call Dr. P. We deeply appreciate his heart for God, his love for students, and his love of the ministry. He has been teaching at the Seminary longer than I have been alive! Dr. Pentecost spoke recently at a chapel service on the subject of true evangelism, and I am thrilled to bring you his message in this issue of *Veritas*. It is a classic message by a veteran saint whose heart beats with the things that matter most to God.

As Dr. Pentecost points out, Dallas Seminary was launched with a heartbeat for the lost. Our founder, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, was a musician accompanying evangelists when God led him into a teaching ministry and, ultimately, birthed in his heart a dream that became Dallas Seminary. By God's grace, we have carried on that heritage of true evangelism.

I also want to mention an exciting travel and learning opportunity I hope you will take advantage of. Dr. Erwin Lutzer, well-known Dallas Seminary graduate, pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, and the author of *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible*, will be joining us on a special DTS cruise in July 2009 that will retrace the missionary journeys of Paul. Dove Award-winning artist Steve Green is joining us for worship!

You may go to [www.dts.edu/supporters/travel](http://www.dts.edu/supporters/travel) to learn more about this very exciting trip or to reserve your place. It would be great to see you there in July.

Thank you for partnering with us in 2009 to prepare leaders who will follow Christ wholeheartedly, proclaim His message to the lost and equip the body of Christ, and train others to do the same. May God bless you.



Dr. Mark L. Bailey  
President  
Dallas Theological Seminary



**Journeys of Paul Cruise**  
July 3–12, 2009