

# Beloved

The Weekly Pastoral Letter of Dr. T.J. Gentry – June 8, A.D. 2008

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Grace to you and peace, beloved. May the Lord be with you!

We continue to discuss the question, Why evangelize? In my last pastoral letter I said that evangelism is obedience. We evangelize because God commands it; period. (See Mathew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15.) Thus, it is logical to conclude that if evangelism is obedience then non-evangelism is disobedience. Now, this is technically true but without further explanation you might conclude that evangelism is to be viewed as nothing more than bare duty. You say to yourself, “I must evangelize. God demands it. I must obey.” It’s almost comical to think of it this way, sort of like the Duncan Donuts commercial from a few years back where the tired, overworked donut maker repeatedly arrives at the donut shop with the monotone, robotic refrain, “It’s time to make the donuts. It’s time to make the donuts...” As with making donuts, so with evangelism when it is perceived as nothing more than bare duty, a cold and calculated response to the commandment of God. “It’s time to share the gospel. It’s time to share the gospel...” Of course, this isn’t what you should conclude by first acknowledging that evangelism is obedience to the command of God. Biblical obedience is never the bare action of some Christianized drone, doing the bidding of the master like a henchman in a low-budget horror film. To the contrary, Biblical obedience is motivated by love of God. It is the Spirit-enabled and Spirit-led response of a renewed heart and mind. It is the glad choice of a born-again soul, eager to show love to the altogether lovely One who gave His life for them. In terms of our evangelism, this means that we obey God’s command to evangelize because we love God and want more than anything else to please Him. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15, NKJV) He also said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” (John 14:21, NKJV) Obedience is the fruit of love, and love is the fuel of obedience. Neither one is possible without the other. I don’t love God if I

don’t obey His commands, and I won’t obey His commands if I don’t love Him. Obedience is possible for the Christian precisely because the “love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:5, NKJV) We can and will obey God’s commands because we have His love in our hearts. This is a cause for rejoicing! There is no task too difficult for the Spirit of God within you, the Spirit who passionately loves the Father and the Son and ever lives to bring them glory. Not one. Especially not evangelism! Augustine said, “Love God and do what you want.” No, he wasn’t teaching some radical form of faith without works. He simply understood that when I love God, I will do what He wants because what He wants is what I will want. As King David said, “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4, NKJV) Like Augustine, David understood that my desires are intricately related to the object of my love. When I love God, I want to obey God. So, to build on Augustine, I say love God and you will want to evangelize. To apply King David’s words, I say delight in the LORD and He will give you the desire to evangelize. All this brings us to a point of personal searching and application. If you and I struggle to obey God’s command to share the gospel, then we may have a love problem. Our love for God may be waning or hindered by some unconfessed sin or unwise association. When we can’t come to the point of submission to God’s will in the area of evangelism it probably relates to a love that is growing cold. Let us commit to rekindle our first love. *Evangelism will follow.* Let us fan into flame a passionate longing for the person and work of Christ. *Evangelism will follow.* Let us remove any obstacle to intimacy with the One who is closer than a brother. *Evangelism will follow.* Let us begin today to love our God supremely, with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. *Evangelism will follow.* We evangelize primarily because God commands it. We obey His commands because we love Him. We love Him because He first loved us. Today, let us love God and share the gospel. – T.J.