

CONFRONTING KINGDOM CHALLENGES

A CALL TO GLOBAL CHRISTIANS TO
CARRY THE BURDEN TOGETHER



GENERAL EDITOR
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Confronting Kingdom Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

The articles in this volume are edited versions of presentations given at the Second General Assembly of the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) in Johannesburg, South Africa, March 7-10, 2006.

The World Reformed Fellowship is a growing network of church denominations, associations, local congregations, institutions, agencies, and individual leaders working together to complete Christ's Great Commission. It seeks to link those in the historic evangelical Reformed tradition of Christ's church in order to facilitate communication, collaboration, and cooperation for mutual encouragement, support, and advancement of kingdom concerns.

The WRF is not a council but rather, as the name affirms, a fellowship. Leaders and groups within the evangelical, Reformed tradition of Christ's church get to know and trust one another within this fluid network of relationships, developing mutually beneficial partnerships and assisting local believers with their vision of reaching their regions or nations for Christ. In many ways the WRF fulfills the dream cherished by John Calvin in the 1500s, the Westminster Divines in the 1600s, and George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards in the 1700s of truly worldwide cooperation among the Reformed branches of the church.

The WRF seeks to embody one of the clearly stated but often neglected themes of the great Reformed confessions of the church. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith (XXV, 2) affirms that there is "a visible universal church" that "consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion." The Belgic Confession (Article 27) emphasizes that the "one single catholic or

universal church . . . is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or certain persons. But it is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world.”

While specific regional or national expressions of the universal church do, in many ways, embody characteristics of the body of Christ, there are other characteristics of that body that transcend those expressions. It is those other characteristics that the WRF seeks to set forth in its commitments and in its activities.

The World Reformed Fellowship affirms that:

The essence of “the true religion” is adoration and worship of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . .

This Triune God is worthy of the praise and service of all of creation. . . .

Christians in many places and many denominations who share these first two commitments will find their worship and service of the Lord God enhanced by contact with others of like mind.

Therefore, the WRF seeks to provide:

A network for communication and sharing of ministry resources among such Christians

A forum for dialogue among such Christians on current issues

Opportunities for such Christians from one region of the world to share their unique spiritual and theological perspectives with such Christians from other regions of the world, all within the framework of the evangelical Reformed faith

Regular occasions, some for such Christians in specific regions of the world and some for such Christians worldwide, to come together for worship and dialogue and resource-sharing

The formal doctrinal commitments of the WRF are as follows:

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the God-breathed Word of God, without error in all that they affirm;

The following creeds represent the mainstream of historic orthodox Christianity: The Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Definition;

Every voting member of the WRF affirms one of the following historic expressions of the Reformed Faith: The Gallican Confession, The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Thirty-Nine Articles, The Second Helvetic Confession, The Canons of Dort, The Westminster Confession of Faith, the London Confession of 1689, or the Savoy Declaration.

The articles in this volume represent well the kinds of issues with which WRF members are concerned. The theme of the Second General Assembly, at which these papers were delivered, was “*Masibambisane*,” a Zulu word meaning “Let us carry the burden together.” We invite you, the reader of these materials, to join us in carrying the burdens and in seizing the opportunities described herein.

To give you some idea about the present membership of the World Reformed Fellowship, below is a list of members as of May 21, 2007.

Membership in the WRF is free; for information about joining, contact me at samueltlogan@aol.com or at 430 Montier Road, Glenside, PA 19038 USA.

I hope you enjoy and benefit from these materials, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Samuel T. Logan Jr.
Executive Secretary

PART ONE

**THEOLOGICAL
FOUNDATIONS**



CHAPTER ONE

THE EVANGELISTIC CONTEXT OF BURDEN SHARING

PETER JENSEN

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

ACTS 13:48, NIV



Last Christmas a friend of mine gave a couple of his non-Christian friends a gift. They unwrapped it and found that it was an evangelistic book, a book about Jesus. He was watching their faces, and they seemed so disappointed, as though they had rejected him and his gift. Despite their rejection, it was what I call “a mission moment.”

There are times in the history of the church when there seems to be a hunger for the gospel, and fruit falls easily off the tree. But, in the West at least, we are not living in that sort of moment. Many times, though, we may come across a mission moment like the one my friend experienced, if we are involved in evangelism. In fact, most of us don't like getting involved in evangelism because most of us like to be liked, and most of us prefer a quiet life.

Even the business of giving our friends an evangelistic book is sometimes, so it seems to us, a bridge too far. And yet, those mission moments, those evangelistic moments, have a sort of typical quality.

As we commend Christ to the world there is a typical quality of disturbance. The gospel of Jesus Christ asks so much of us that when we commend it truly we create turmoil.

Indeed, we can trace this experience of the mission moment right back through history to the New Testament itself. There is nothing strange about it. So the passage that appears at the beginning of this chapter, Acts 13, is at that point a typical mission moment. It was unique, of course, but it is also commonplace.

It was unique because there were unique persons in a unique place at a unique time. But it was unique in another sense: it was primary, it was the first time, it was the early days, when evangelism was just beginning to occur, and every evangelistic opportunity was more or less a first time. It was also one of the moments when decisions had to be made about whether the gospel was for the Jews only or also for the Gentiles. Of course, it became perfectly clear that the gospel had to go to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. This was the moment when the Christian faith was ceasing to be merely a Jewish thing and began to be a worldwide thing.

The point of issue, you'll find as you look back further in the passage, was that those Jews rejected the teaching of the Lord Jesus. The apostle says in verses 38–39 (NIV) of this passage, “My brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses.” Here is a moment in which the Law of Moses came under attack as a means of justification. The apostle made it perfectly clear that what Jesus offered by way of forgiveness of sins was something that could not be offered under the Law of Moses. The consequence was that this whole gospel movement was going to spill out over and beyond those who gave adherence to the Law of Moses, into the world. What we are looking at here is a little snapshot of the beginnings of a “grace-quake.” An extraordinary event was just occurring here with effects that go on and on to this very day.

It was unique, and yet, on the other hand, it is commonplace. After all, what we have here is the Word being spoken, the speakers of the Word, Paul and Barnabas, and the listeners to the Word. In every mission moment we follow the same pattern as they did. We too speak the disturbing Word, perhaps beginning with an evangelistic book as my

friend did, or perhaps by saying the Word that will lead someone to say, “Yes, I believe in Christ.” In any case, there are a messenger, a message, and a hearer. What they did there has been successively done down through the years and down through the generations. They started that which we are continuing. You can trace all the way back to where they were from where we are. We are simply doing what they taught us to do. This unique event is also a commonplace event.

As we think about what a mission moment may entail then, let us see what they did and learn from them, the pioneers. I note three things in particular: First, that this mission moment was verbal—there was much human speech; second, that it involved interaction—there was much human listening; and third, that despite all the human activity, the mission moment belonged to God.

First, it was verbal. I make such an obvious point for a key reason. Many Christians have lost their nerve when it comes to words. When the Bible came under sustained assault in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many Christians found their authority in religious experience. They preferred the path of mysticism—of a wordless encounter with the divine that can only be described, if at all, in stumbling, error-filled, human words. Commending the way of Christ is turned into living the life, without words. The result is that there is no gospel to preach and no assurance or certainty about the things of God. Not surprisingly, in many Western countries, Christianity appears to be in its death throes, since the Christians do not understand that we make Christians through the verbal gospel, and we may have confidence in the words that God himself has spoken.

Acts 13 reveals that a lot of words were spoken in this classic mission moment. Indeed, the reason they were able to preach the gospel was that the ruler of the synagogue invited them to speak, to have a message of encouragement. As a result, Paul gave the most extraordinary message of encouragement that those hearers had ever encountered. He announced that the Son of David, Jesus, had come, and although David was still in his tomb, this One had risen from the dead. Here was a new and living King demanding a full allegiance. He finished in the most startling way, by saying that through Jesus there is forgiveness of sins—you may be justified from all the things that you cannot be justified from by the Law of Moses. It was an electrifying, turbulent sermon.

The apostle himself called it the word of the Lord. Look at verse 44, for example: “the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.” Verse 48 as well: “when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.” It is also called “the word of God” in verse 46 of the passage. Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly, “we had to speak the word of God to you first.”

Here is a word of unsurpassable authority. The Word of the Lord, the Word of the living God—there is no other word greater or more authoritative than this Word. When the Christian evangelist shares the gospel, whether in a quiet one-to-one occasion or before a large crowd, it is shared as a Word of the Lord. It doesn’t come with some lower authority; it doesn’t come tremulously as though it is just an opinion. On the contrary, this gospel we share is the Word of the Lord, or it is nothing, and it comes therefore with his authority. In that we may take great confidence in our evangelistic work.

We are not simply sharing human opinions, but we are sharing that which has come to us from the Lord himself and is all about the Lord. It is the Word of the Lord because it comes from the Lord, and it is the Word of the Lord because it is about the Lord. He is the content of this Word as well as the author of this Word. And yet it comes through human messengers.

How did they communicate it? I’m sure they did it with a smile. I’m sure they did it with their lives. I’m sure they were aware of the limits of their knowledge of God. But in the end you communicate the Word by speaking.

There are a number of different words used in and around this passage describing verbal communication:

They spoke the word of the Lord;
they talked to people.

There is an interesting word in verse 43: “the congregation was dismissed,” and “Paul and Barnabas talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.” They “urged” or “persuaded” them to continue in the grace of God. Here is a sense of urgency, of strong speech.

Or look at verse 46: “Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly.” They spoke with great assurance and great boldness.

Of course, they had to speak thus because it was in the face of contradiction and rejection. They spoke, they talked, they persuaded, they urged, they spoke boldly. Look more widely in the Book of Acts, and you will see all sorts of words used for this activity of transmitting the Word of the Lord. They debated, they lectured, they preached, they spoke boldly, they chatted, they conversed. They were immensely flexible in method; they used all sorts of words to serve the Word of the Lord and to bring it home to the listeners. But, of course, it remained a word, and the Word of the Lord at that.

When they spoke, God spoke. When they gave his Word, the listeners, if they responded favorably to the Word, if they were persuaded by the Word, heard not the human messenger but God himself speaking. They received not, as it were, simply the word of human beings, but they received it as the Word of God himself.

And yet this Word of the Lord didn't come, so to speak, from the heavens. As we know, the way in which the Lord almost always speaks is through human messengers. He uses ambassadors—ambassadors for Christ—to transmit his messages. We see in the apostles, and the apostles' friends and their fellow missionaries, all sorts of different words used in the service of the Word of the Lord.

That is to say, it is God's usual method in dealing with us to use human messengers and to use the human resources of the human messengers. He makes full use of the way in which we human beings communicate with each other. He doesn't bypass us in this, but gloriously he incorporates us. How graciously he does so. We don't think for a moment, presumably, that God needs us to transmit his message. God is the master of language. He invented language. I take it that if God wished to evangelize the world using his own voice, so to speak, he could do so whenever he pleased. But in the kindness and mercy of God in his plans for how the world is to be evangelized, he takes up and uses and incorporates our foolish efforts in his great work.

A small number of people have spent their lives translating the Scriptures into some of the languages of the Australian Aboriginal people. They have been giving their lives to the transmission of the Word into the languages of what is, after all, only a small group of people. This is one of the most loving of projects. Does God need it? I don't doubt that God knows all the languages and is able to speak as

he will in any language directly. But in his grace and mercy he uses our feeble efforts and even overrules our feeble efforts. Feeble though they are, he still enables us to be the bearers of his good news.

What a mercy from God! What a privilege we have to be the bearers of his gospel. How foolish we are when we become shy, and diffident, and unwilling to speak. How foolish we are when we fear rejection. How foolish we are when we want to be liked and therefore we don't speak. How foolish we are when we don't trust God's words, and don't trust God to bring salvation through his words. How much we deny ourselves the enormous privilege that God has given us to be part of his work. In this, we are not following the apostles. *The mission moment was verbal.*

Second, notice that the whole occasion of this mission moment involved very human interactions—the audience did not sit still. There was listening, and there was response. The speakers were met with acceptance, as verse 42 tells us, for example. The people invited them to speak further about these things the next Sabbath. There was a great deal of interest in what they had to say. They were met with hearing. On the Sabbath “almost the whole city” gathered together, we are told in verse 44, to hear the Word of the Lord. What a thrill that must have been, to see everybody there to hear the Word of the Lord.

They were met with a welcome, but they were also met with contradiction and slander. Look at verse 45—“when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.” They contradicted and slandered the Word of the Lord. So amidst the words of this gospel, the Word of the Lord being spoken, there is this human anger being expressed, human jealousy, nasty words, malicious words, strong words against what was being said, not just against the messengers, but also against the message.

And then later there was an incitement to persecution. If you look at verse 50, the “Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city.” They stirred up persecution against Paul. All these words were being spoken too. There is a lot of talk going on in this whole passage, and some of it is pretty nasty talk. There was an incitement to persecution. They did not like the Word of the Lord. And eventually, of course, as we know, there was rejection of Paul and Barnabas, and they were actually expelled from that region.

The gospel word is a gracious word. The gospel word is a word of God's love. The gospel word is a word to be spoken where possible with grace. But the rejection of the gospel is an immensely serious matter. There comes a moment of decision against the hearers: "so they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium." That phrase "they shook the dust from their feet" was a sort of reverse sacrament. It was a visible word of the judgment of God.

The gospel preachers, with the gospel of the grace of God on their lips, also spoke the word of judgment. For the gospel word of grace only makes sense in the context also of judgment. And when the people rejected the preachers, and expelled them, and did not want to hear them anymore, then the judgment of God came upon those who expelled them. They judged themselves, and in judging themselves they were paving their way to the judgment of God himself.

The words in which we deal are not just words. They are mighty and powerful words. They are tremendously significant words. They are words of make or break. They are words of life-changing significance. They are words on which eternity hangs. The rejection of the words, and the rejection of the minister of the words, is not personal. It is really, in the end, a rejection of God himself. And the rejection of God will lead to the judgment of God. The issues are that significant.

Yes, evangelism is hard, isn't it? It's hard for us. Here is a mission moment, and it is pretty typical of mission moments around the word, full of tension, full of disagreement, full of joy as people become Christians, but full of anger as well. Full of welcome, but full of rejection. That's very typical of mission moments. That is why we don't want to get involved, because we don't like hostility, and we don't like rejection. We want to be liked.

We ask ourselves sometimes, why is it so hard to share the gospel with others? Why is it so difficult? Why doesn't God come right in and make it a great deal easier? There doesn't seem to be any detour. But remember there was no detour back then either. It wasn't as though Paul drew himself up to his full height and said, "I'm an ambassador of the living God, stand back. I'm staying here whether you want me or not." It wasn't as though Paul had a 100 percent rate of converting people. You know as well as I do that his missionary efforts were marked with rejection, with pain and suffering, with shipwreck, and

sore feet, and being stoned and imprisoned. In all that he was simply following the path of his Master.

In the end, you see—and this is the third point—the mission moment, like the gospel itself, does not belong to us, even if we think that we have initiated it or spoken it. God graciously allows us to be part of it, but it belongs to him.

Even the nature of the gospel itself stands as a testimony, not to human effort, but to the kindness of God, the grace of God, both in giving us the gospel and in sending forth the gospel. Remember, the gospel was a message of the grace of God. We have seen that already in those verses I've quoted. "Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. . . . Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you." That is the message, the essential message, the essence of the message of the grace of God in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ who died as our substitute on the cross to take away our sins. That is the most wonderful message in all the world. It is the message of the grace and mercy of God. It only makes sense, of course, if you understand the judgment of God.

The very word "justified" reminds you of that. How are you going to be justified? Only through the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who bore the punishment for sin, bore the judgment that we should have borne.

Receiving this means continuing in it. Look at what the apostle and Barnabas say in verse 43—"who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God." *Continue* believing in the forgiveness of sins. *Continue* believing in the love of God. *Continue* believing that you are justified, despite the fact that you cannot be justified by the Law. You are justified by the grace of God through the simple act of faith in God, repentance. The gospel is a gospel of grace. Receive the gospel, continue in the grace of God in the gospel. *Continue* trusting in your heavenly Father who has been revealed to you through the powerful Holy Spirit in the gospel of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Continue* in grace. The gospel, of course, belongs to God because it was under his command.

Here we see that for all the human turmoil and speaking and acting and accepting and rejecting, the whole mission moment belonged

to God and was under his control. The Jews, even the Law-abiding Jews, did not deserve the forgiveness of sins and the mercy of God. The Gentiles—so far outside the boundaries of the mercy of God, so degenerate and idolatrous—certainly did not deserve any part in the forgiveness of sins and the mercy of God.

But look: here was a crucial, pivotal moment in the history of the gospel because it was in and through these events when the Jews stirred up controversy and rejection that the Gentiles began to hear the gospel. Have a look at verse 46: “Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.” They judged themselves, didn’t they? Those particular hearers did not consider themselves worthy of eternal life, and the judgment of God would follow upon the judgment they laid upon themselves. But even in the catastrophe of judgment and rejection we see the triumph of God’s mercy. For this is what the Lord has revealed, that it was in the rejection by those who heard first that the light of the gospel went forth to the rest of us—“I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

We are looking here at another of those little crucial moments in the history of God’s people, where suddenly the gospel is going to spill the banks and go forth until the whole world is encompassed in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that it even reaches Tasmania. The gospel has reached to the ends of the world, and here we see the beginning of that process as those people rejected Christ, and in their rejection there came the spilling out of the gospel among the Gentiles. And God directed it. The apostle says, yes, it’s happened, and God said it would happen. You see, even the rejection of the gospel, painful still to hear about and painful for the apostles to experience, did not frustrate God. Just as he did at the cross, God used the rejection itself to set his great saving work forward.

He has directed that the Jewish apostles now go to the Gentiles, that from Israel would come the saving truth. And why did this happen? Because it was the nature of the gospel itself. Because the gospel is grace: “you are justified from the things that you cannot be justified from by the law of Moses.” Because of the absolute gracious heart of the gospel, it could not be for the Jewish nation alone. It had to be for men and women of all nations all around the world.

And that, dear brothers and sisters, is precisely why we are here at this General Assembly of the World Reformed Fellowship. We are here not just to feed our souls and to enjoy our fellowship. We are here because we are committed to the gospel going to all the world. Our love ought to reflect the love of God in the gospel and therefore be for all people. The gospel belongs to God. And ultimately we come to the text in verse 48: “when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and they glorified the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”

Yes, in the end, it is true that God graciously uses us. Yes, it is true that we have to bring our best to his service. It is true that we have to spend thirty years translating the Bible into the language of just a few peoples, relatively speaking. Yes, it’s true that we must give our best for this. Yes, it’s true that he graciously uses our feeble efforts and our somewhat better efforts sometimes to bring people to himself.

But the truth of the matter, the underlying truth, is that it is all his work. Note this: “all who were appointed for eternal life believed.” Not all; it wasn’t universal. There were many who still rejected it, and the apostle says they don’t count themselves worthy of eternal life—they bring their rejection upon their own selves. But underneath it all, by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit of God, in line with his determination before the foundation of the world, his elect are being summoned home. And when God summons the dead to life, they come to life, not by any power within themselves, but by the mighty power of his Holy Spirit taking his Word and bringing his Word to life in the hearts and souls of people. When we see the Gentiles full of joy and glorifying God’s Word, we know it is not because the better people have chosen God, or the cleverer people have chosen God. No, we know it is because God has chosen them.

If you are here tonight as a believer, as one who belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ and rejoices in the grace of God and glorifies the Word of the Lord, if you are here tonight as one who has chosen the Lord, I trust you realize you have chosen the Lord because he has first chosen you. You belong to the Lord because he has chosen that you belong to him, because he has appointed you to eternal life. If you are here tonight rejoicing in the grace and mercy of God, that he has saved you, unworthy as you are, then you must see too that there is no point

thinking that there is a little bit of worthiness in you, namely, that you chose him. Indeed, your choice only reflects his choice of you. Continue in that grace. All is of grace, dear brothers and sisters. All is of grace. In the end it has nothing to do with you. God chose you, and that is why you chose him.

*O the love that drew salvation's plan!
O the grace that brought it down to man!
O the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary.
Mercy there was great and grace was free,
Pardon there was multiplied to me,
There my burdened soul found liberty—
At Calvary.*

I hope you have lots of mission moments. I hope you take courage. We live in desperate times. People need to know about Jesus, and God's appointed method is to use you and to use me. I hope you have lots of mission moments in the next month and the next year. Despite the fact that you don't like rejection, and the fact that you do like to be liked, and the fact that you like a quiet life, I hope you won't let those fears stand in the way.

How are you going to be encouraged to do it? What's going to keep you going in the face of rejection and hostility and people looking at you with that look when they unwrap their Christmas present? What's going to keep you going? Only God's grace. Only the fact that it is God's gracious gospel that has saved you. God's grace has captured your heart, and you want others to know that grace—not because you are better or because you are a spiritual giant or because you are a wonderful person or a moral person. None of these things is true. It is just that you have received grace, and you want others to receive it too.

And what will keep you going is that you can trust God for it all. In the end you are not going to convert anybody. In the end it is not your business. It is God's. He will use you, but he will use you graciously to allow you to be part of his purposes as he brings home his own people. In the end, the mission moment doesn't rely on us, but on him: For as many as were appointed unto eternal life *will* believe.