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The Evangel of Evangelicalism: What it is, and How it Works

*Simple thoughts on a great subject, humbly written by a
Minister of the Gospel to his brother Ministers.*

THE REV. A. E. HUGHES, M.A.

THE Evangel, the Gospel, is indeed a great subject. The word simply means good spel, good news, good tidings. Each of us can think of many pieces of news, each one of which would be good, and so a Gospel. But there is one news so pre-eminently the best possible news, that for nearly 2,000 years it has been called not merely a Gospel but *the* Gospel. It is rightly so called, for it as nothing else meets man's deepest need. That need is God Himself. Sin has separated man from God. Man needs something that so deals with sin that he and his God may be brought together again, that he may come to know God. The news of such is to him *the Gospel*. Through it he learns to know the living God as his God ; God the Son as his Saviour, God the Spirit as his Sanctifier, God the Father as his Father.

Concerning this Gospel we note five things of importance.

(1) It is revealed in a *great Book*.

Our Lord said, "Search the Scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me."

The Apostle Paul wrote, "The Holy Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation."

It is the Gospel which makes us wise unto salvation, and shows us the way of eternal life. We are assured by these texts that that Gospel is found in the written Word of God. The writers were men moved by the Holy Ghost. They were so inspired that what they wrote was God's message rather than their own. The Scriptures referred to by our Lord and His Apostle were the Old Testament

Scriptures. Our Lord endorsed them as the Word of God. Indeed we have the Gospel in them. In familiar Chapters we have the Gospel according to Moses, the Gospel according to Isaiah, the Gospel according to Ezekiel. But the fuller revelation, the clearer Gospel message is in the New Testament. Here we have no mere types and prophecies, but their fulfilment. The Spirit of Truth, as promised, guided the writers into all truth. John xvi. 13.

(2) The Gospel centres in a *Great Person*.

The New Testament commences with the Gospel according to four different persons. It is the one and only Gospel, while given with the additional testimony of four men, all inspired while personally independent. And they are alike in this that before we reach the end of the first Chapter in each we have our attention fixed upon one central Person, Who is unique among men. While perfect man, He is at the same time more than man. He is *God of God*.

Thus the Gospel centres in a great Person, Son of God and Son of man, the Saviour.

Matthew describes Him as "*Emmanuel, God with us.*" Mark writes, "*the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" Luke gives us the words spoken to the blessed virgin, "*That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*" John writes, "*The Word was God. The Word was made flesh.*" And by that One so made the word of Nathaniel was accepted, "*Thou art the Son of God.*"

Again, Luke gives us the first Gospel Sermon preached when Christ came into the world. The audience was the shepherds of Bethlehem. The preacher was the angel from heaven. His words, "*I bring you good tidings of great joy,*" might be translated, "*I preach the Gospel.*" Then he told what that good tidings, that Gospel was. It was no mere tidings of a Religion, a Doctrine or a Church. It was tidings of a Person, and that Person a Saviour.

(3) The Gospel is founded upon *Great Facts*.

The Birth of Christ was a Gospel. But it was that because of what was to follow. The Incarnation was a needful step towards Redemption. Salvation was not won by the Incarnation, but by the atoning death. So the Apostle describes the Gospel he had received, and preached at Corinth, "*Christ died for our sins, and was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures.*"

We notice also that all the four Gospel stories lead up to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ as the great climax of His birth and life.

Thus the Gospel is founded upon the great historic fact of our Lord's death on the cross and rising from the tomb.

(4) The Gospel sets forth *Great Truths*.

The words just quoted link with the historic fact the doctrinal truth: "Christ died *for our sins*." His was no ordinary death. It was the bearing of sin.

The truths of the Gospel are most clearly set forth in the Epistle to the Romans, which might be called a Sermon on the words *The Gospel of Christ*, Romans i. 16.

That Epistle recognises the great underlying fact, universal sin, guilt and condemnation, iii. 23. But for the sinner the Gospel tells of wonderful blessings provided. These are some :

(a) *Justification*. The sinner can stand reckoned righteous by God, and that, not for any merit of his own. It is given by grace iii. 24, obtained by blood iii. 24, 25, v. 9, accepted by faith v. 1.

(b) *Freedom from condemnation*. viii. 1.

(c) *An indwelling Christ*. This living power within is the secret of the new life. viii. 10, 4.

(d) *Adoption*. The one-time stranger and enemy is thus brought into God's family. viii. 15, 17.

(e) *God at work*. God makes all things work together for good to those who love Him. viii. 28.

(f) *The eternal bond*. God's love in Christ never fails. The Chapter which begins with *no condemnation*, ends with *no separation*. viii. 35-39. (Thus the Gospel sets forth *Great Truths*.)

(5) The Gospel effects a *Great Experience*.

It is the power of God unto Salvation. Romans i. 16.

To the trusting soul the truths just mentioned are no mere items of true doctrine ; they are matters of living experience. Christ Himself is One definitely and personally known : "I know Him in whom I have put my trust."

In Him to stand before God justified, accepted, adopted ; to use His enabling power through His indwelling presence for the new life ; to rest in the assurance of His everlasting love ; to be kept in His perfect peace ; all these, and many more, are blessed realities. The Epistle to the Romans is

indeed the Gospel according to Paul. It is a message of life.

Religion without truth is a jellyfish Religion ; no bones, no stability.

Religion which is only truth is a skeleton religion, only bones. Ezekiel xxxvii. 1, 2.

Religion which is only activity is a dead Religion ; movement, organisation, but lifeless. Ezekiel xxxvii. 7, 8.

But, when the breath of God is breathed into the dead all is changed. There is life. Ezekiel xxxvii. 9, 10. Bones and body, truth and activity are needful. The Gospel leads to these. But it also gives life.

What life there was in one who wrote, "I am crucified with Christ ; nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me !"

So we sum up.

The Gospel

Is revealed in a Great Book ; the Bible.

Centres in a Great Person ; Jesus Christ.

Rests on a Great Fact ; Christ Crucified.

Sets forth Great Truths ; Epistle to the Romans.

Effects a Great Experience ; Salvation.

It is indeed "the good tidings of the glory of Christ." And it is a message for all. The order is "Preach the Gospel to every creature." The time is the everlasting Now.

The Evangelical is the man who holds this Gospel, or Evangel. He believes its truth. He has proved and knows its power. He gives to the crucified, risen, living Christ His right place as centre of heart and life and work. Doing so, all other things fall into their right place. There is nothing in his faith and conduct and ministry that is detached from, or outside the influence and control of this living power. We see its work in every department of life and ministry.

(1) *Preaching.* The true Evangelical cannot keep to himself the good news of the glory of Christ. With a firm conviction of the truth of every word he utters, and with an urge that cannot be restrained, he preaches the Gospel. "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," so said Peter and John. "I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," so said Paul. The true Evangelical

cannot but be an Evangelist. Again and again he sets forth the way of salvation, and calls, pleads with, and beseeches men to be reconciled to God through faith in Him "who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree."

The Gospel is present in every Sermon. That does not mean that every Sermon is entirely a message to the unsaved. The Gospel includes far more than the forgiveness of sin and salvation as sought, found and realised by the sinner in his first acceptance of the Saviour. The unsearchable riches of Christ contain much that the most advanced of His disciples has yet to appropriate. The Gospel, while simple enough for a child to understand, has depths which the ripest saint has not yet fathomed. The preaching of a full Gospel requires exposition as well as exhortation. But in every case Christ is lifted up, Christ as revealed in Holy Scripture, Christ as experienced in personal life.

(2) *Defence*. Like the Apostle, the true Evangelical stands, not only for the proclamation, but for the defence of the Gospel. The faithful pastor must guard his sheep, watching against errors that would find entrance within and injure the flock. Those errors must be exposed and resisted. In the same way that the Apostle was, the Gospel preacher must be a controversialist. He is pledged "to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word." But this will be no mere negation. The resistance to every error is needed just because error detracts from the great positive message, and from the glory of Christ. Every false view of other priesthood and sacrifice than that of Christ, every unscriptural and exaggerated faith in the Sacraments, every doubt in the authority of Scripture, inspired by God's Spirit, and endorsed by Christ, everything that weakens faith in the Person of Christ as *Very God of Very God*, is a dishonour to Christ, and for Christ's sake must be resisted. A full Gospel has no room for error.

Yet such contention for the faith must always be carried on in the spirit of Christ. To be at war against error in no way means to be at war against those who hold it. The same chapter that says, "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," says, "The servant of the Lord must not strive." The Gospel Minister speaks the truth. But he speaks it in love.

(3) *The Church.* The true Evangelical recognises in a common Gospel a true bond of union. Far deeper is his union with all others who hold it than anything that can be effected by uniformity of organisation. *All one in Christ Jesus* overmounts the fences which divide one Denomination from another. The Evangelical recognises in all who belong to the same Saviour other stones in the same spiritual house of which Christ is the Foundation, other sheep in the same flock of which Christ is the Shepherd, other members of the same body of which Christ is the Head, others forming the same Bride of whom Christ is the Bridegroom. The Church to him is something vaster, deeper and more alive than any organised body.

At the same time he does not think lightly of the outward and visible expression of that spiritual body. He recognises that that expression may take different forms. It may be Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Methodist, etc. These differences do not concern the fundamentals of faith.

While this is so, as a Church of England member and minister he takes his place as such without hesitation. He may well doubt if some, whose faith is unscriptural, have any legitimate place in the Church. For himself as an Evangelical there is no doubt. He is loyal to his Ordination vows, to the faith expressed in the Creeds and to the interpretation of the Scriptures in the Articles of his Church and underlying its worship as prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, and that to a degree which none but an Evangelical can be. He does not regard Evangelicalism as making its contribution to the Church along with other different isms which make theirs. He takes his stand in a Church which he knows in all its doctrinal standards to be distinctly Evangelical.

(4) *The Ministry.* The true Evangelical recognises that from its earliest days there has been the appointment of certain men to be Ministers in the Church. This has been "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." He recognises that it is for each section of the visible Church, seeking God's guidance, to have one form of ministry or another. It may be episcopal,

or presbyterian, or otherwise. To all such ministers he gives their true place and purpose. They are there for order and administration, for teaching and preaching. There is no idea of a special nearness to God conferred in ordination, or of a priestly position between the people and their God. The minister's calling is not to a sacerdotal office. The priesthood that does exist in the Christian Church is that of all believers alike. The offering of spiritual sacrifices is common to all. There is no priest between the worshipper and his God, or between the sinner and his Saviour.

(5) *Sacraments.* The true Evangelical accepts the Scriptural value, no more and no less, of the two, the only two, Sacraments given us by our Lord. They are to him no mechanical charms or conveyances of life and grace, but precious means of Grace as creating or increasing that faith which claims and receives grace. He sees in them no miracles, but simple and helpful parables, picturing and, where conditions are fulfilled, assuring blessings of regeneration and redemption and sanctification and dedication. He sees in them nothing mysterious, but simple illustrations helping him to grasp the great mysteries of the new birth and union with Christ. The Lord's Supper is to him not a sacrifice but the memory of a completed sacrifice once for all offered and accepted. It leads his faith to Calvary, and is itself a Gospel Sermon, showing the Lord's death till He come.

(6) *Church Ritual.* The true Evangelical realises that doctrine is taught not merely from the pulpit, but in the practices and observances connected with worship. So in his Church his Communion Table will never have the appearance of an altar. Nor will he ever adopt Eastward Position, or wear Mass vestments, or allow anything in his ministry signifying a priestly office. His practice at the Communion Table will conform to his preaching from the pulpit.

(7) *Daily Life.* The true Evangelical remembers that his life day by day is seen and read. Many who hear no sermon and read no Bible see his daily conduct. So he seeks that in all things his life be of one piece with the book he loves. His joy is in all things to adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour, to show forth the beauty of Jesus Christ and the joy of His Service, never repelling from but always attracting to Him. His message and ministry is for the glory of Christ.

Here is his great test. He refrains from everything, he allows no self-indulgence which is not for the glory of Christ. Following in his Master's footsteps, he would himself be an example to the flock. To all in their manifold needs he is a loving sympathetic friend. Thus through him the Evangel is not only heard but seen.

(8) *Parish Work.* The true Evangelical realises that a crowded Church, with elaborate Services and eloquent ethical discourses may yet be a failure in the sight of God. Services which some praise as dignified may in reality be utterly formal and lifeless. He is not content with such. He recognises the twofold business of his Church.

It is the spiritual home of God's children, where they offer united worship and together feed upon the Bread of life, and receive spiritual help. It is also a lighthouse, shedding its light upon the dark seas of human life, and making known in the Parish and as far as possible throughout the world, the good tidings of the glory of Christ. It is no mere society for those within. It is a Mission to those outside. His own calling at his Ordination was "to teach, and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for His children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever." He was not ordained, nor is his Church called, to entertain. He and his Church have a far higher purpose to fulfil. All that would weaken his Gospel Ministry or damp the true life of his Church and zeal of its members he avoids. He welcomes indeed innocent recreation among his Church's activities but only in so far as it promotes and does not hinder spiritual life and gospel witness.

(9) *Citizenship.* The true Evangelical does not think that the Church as such is to take the place of the State. His Master's teaching leads him to be loyal to the rules and laws of the State, rendering to Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's. When and where possible he uses his influence in the State to promote all that is Christian in spirit, and resist that which is contrary to righteousness, purity and peace. Taught to fear God, honour the King and love all men, he takes his stand against such evils as slave trade, and national vices and sins, realizing that God is no respecter of persons, and

that Christ died for all. All his public conduct springs from and is hallowed by the Gospel.

(10) *The Lord's Coming.* The true Evangelical is nerved to earnest prayer and effort in his Master's service by the blessed hope of that Master's return. He recognises that, while interpretations of some prophecies differ, the fact of his Lord's coming admits of no difference. He who was taken up into heaven shall so come in like manner as he was seen to go. His Gospel teaches him to look forward with confidence. He has the right to be an optimist. The prospect is certain. The Lord's coming is sure.

As writer or reader lays down this paper let each devote himself afresh to a Ministry of which *Christ crucified* is the great theme and message; "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

WE WOULD SEE JESUS

By the Rt. Rev. C. F. Garbett. (Longmans, Green & Co.). 2s. 6d.

The Bishop of London's Lent Book, written by the Bishop of Winchester, is both apt and timely. Throughout its eight chapters and epilogue there is the atmosphere of the Gospel story of Christ's life and work. Much of what the book presents has been written previously and in various ways, but there is a freshness and a virility about this presentation of the subject which grips and holds, for it is brought into the atmosphere of contemporary life and needs. Perhaps the most helpful parts of the book are the concluding paragraphs of each chapter where the Bishop repeatedly "puts his finger on the spot" of human needs. Of these instances may be cited the following: "The men and women of our time in their desperate need want to see a Christ who will lead and deliver them." (p. 5). "One of the greatest needs . . . is a revival of the sense of evangelistic responsibility, by which clergy and laity alike recognise that Our Lord intends them to exercise their discipleship by bringing others to the feet of God" (p. 45); "The preaching of Christ as Saviour has not been of recent years as strong and uncompromising as once it was. Man has become so confident of himself and his mastery over nature that he is inclined to think that a Saviour is superfluous. He has lost the sense of sin; and until he knows he is a sinner he feels no need of a saviour" (p. 70). The last chapter, "The Risen Christ," shows how the Resurrection has revealed a living Christ Who can meet the human needs of every age, including our own, as He met them in the days of His flesh.

E. H.