

Missions at Risk--A Failure of Nerve

America's evangelical Christians are facing a critical testing-time in the twenty-first century. Among the most important of the tests we now face is the future of missions, and our faithfulness to the Great Commission. Just as doors of opportunity are opening around the world, the Church seems to be losing its voice.

At base, the issue is a failure of theological nerve--a devastating loss of biblical and doctrinal conviction. This loss of theological nerve is a fundamental failure of conviction. Put bluntly, many who claim to be Christians simply do not believe that anyone is actually lost.

The most dangerous trend may be found in the pews of evangelical churches, where more and more Christians are willing to reject or compromise the uniqueness of Christ and His atonement, citing the apparent "sincerity" of those who worship other gods, or no god at all. Many American Christians seem increasingly reluctant to believe that their unsaved neighbors will go to hell. The urgency of world missions is a strange concept to a generation seemingly preoccupied with feel-good religion and self-help courses.

Where will the Church stand? A report released just a few years ago indicated that only a third of the participants at an Urbana missions conference (bringing together thousands of college-aged evangelicals) indicated a belief that "a person who does not hear the gospel is eternally lost." Should these trends remain unchecked and uncorrected, the missions cause--and the Church itself--will be in serious trouble indeed.

Let us make our convictions clear. Evangelical Christians must take our stand for the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone has made atonement for our sins. In a day of pluralism, we must point to the only Gospel that offers salvation. We must learn again to define the true gospel in terms of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This is the sum and substance of the genuine gospel--and the true gospel is always a missionary gospel.

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