

CHAPTER 22

Is an Invitation Necessary for Effective Evangelistic Preaching?

Introduction:

- a. The invitation is very controversial in some circles.¹³¹⁵ How should a pastor or evangelist view the invitation with this kind of continual pressure? We begin with a definition
- b. Definition: The invitation is a definite and clear, step-by-step explanation of what it takes for an individual to become a Christian according to the Bible:
 - 1) Regular use of a sinner's prayer is advisable.
 - 2) The invitation should use of some public sign made to the pastor or evangelist of the person's decision to give their heart to Christ, such as coming forward to the altar or front pew, standing up, or raising one's hand
 - a) The more public the sign, the more public the commitment!
 - b) An public invitation, although not uncommon in culture (e.g. political rallies), in a spiritual sense is counter-cultural, asking the person to step away from peers, in the midst of peers, to follow Christ, and Christ alone
- c. Historically: The invitation is perfectly in line with Evangelical Christianity in the history of the church. For example, note the words of the German Lutheran Pietist August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) once said:

“As far as I am concerned, I must preach that should someone hear me only once before he dies, he will have heard not just a part, but the entire way of salvation and in the proper way for it to take root in his heart.”¹³¹⁶
- d. Some introductory verses on the invitation:
 - 1) Old Testament theme verses for the invitation, Psa 95:6-11 (cf. Heb 3:7-4:13)
 - 2) New Testament theme verses for the invitation, 2 Cor. 5:20-6:2
 - a) 5:20 and 6:1, the plea for an invitation
 - b) 6:2, use a Scripture, and from that Scripture
 - c) 6:2, build an invitation.
 - 3) A model invitation, Acts 13:38-41:
 - a) Context of the invitation—forgiveness of sins, faith alone, vv 38-39:
 - (1) Proclamation of forgiveness of sins [following Luke 24:27]
 - (2) Emphasis on justification by faith
 - b) Two part invitation:
 - (1) Warning, v 40, “Therefore take heed
 - (2) Use of Scripture, v 41, [quote of Hab 1:5] “Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish...”
 - 4) Furthermore:
 - a) The summaries of preaching in the Book of Matthew are invitations:

Of John the Baptist: “Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,’” Matt 3:1-2

Of Jesus: “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,’” (Matt 4:17)

Of the disciples: “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Matt 10:7
 - b) The last words of the sermon of Paul in Acts is an invitation, Acts 28:25-28

¹³¹⁵For example Erroll Hulse has written a biblical analysis against the invitation in *The Great Invitation* (Hertfordshire, England; Evangelical Press, 1986). Roger Carswell has heard the invitation called “Protestant Absolution” (Carswell, Roger. *And Some as Evangelists: Growing Your Church through Discovering and Developing Evangelists* [Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2002, 2005], 141).

¹³¹⁶Paulus Scharpff, *History of Evangelism: Three Hundred Years of Evangelism in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States of America*. Helga Bender Henry, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, 1966), 46.

- c) Toward the end of John’s biography of Jesus:
 - (1) John included Jesus’ call for Thomas to believe, John 20:27-28
 - (2) Then John included a call to the reader, John 20:30-31
- 5) Before one rejects the invitation, due to certain deductive arguments of systematic [or philosophical] theology, it would be good to consider:
 - a) How this rejection necessitates the reinterpretation of the examples and preaching in the Bible, necessitating a “dispensational” distancing from New Testament preaching as not applying to the current age
 - b) How this rejection impacts a plenary look at the New Testament in building a theology; the implication being that the rejection of an invitation implies or necessitates the ignoring of some clear aspects of New Testament theology and practice

1. Why Use an Invitation?

- a. “Shaking the dust off your feet” demands that the Gospel be shared to the point of rejection!
 - 1) Christ commands shaking the dust off of one’s feet following a negative response,¹³¹⁷ Matt 10:14-15, Mark 6:10-11, Luke 9:5; 10:10-11:
 - a) This includes a negative response to:
 - (1) Hearing the Gospel
 - (2) The invitation to repent and believe in the Gospel
 - (3) Even being received into someone’s home!
 - b) While numbers of women gathered in Philippi at the place of prayer, only Lydia was recorded as having listened, Acts 16:13-14; the demon-possessed slave girl, on the other hand, knew enough of the message of Paul and Silas to mock them, Acts 16:16-17
 - 2) Rejection is thus confirmed or acknowledged through the shaking off the dust from one’s feet:
 - a) Is this not synonymous to Isaiah’s calling the heavens and the earth as a witness *against* Israel, Isa 1:2-3?
 - b) Or asking Israel to sing a song as a witness against themselves, Deut 31:19
- b. Sharing the Gospel to the point of warning someone:
 - 1) Two verses:
 - a) “When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die’; and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand,” Ezek 3:18
 - b) “Yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself,” Ezek 3:19
 - 2) What does sharing the Gospel to the point of warning mean for an invitation?
 - a) Sharing the Gospel is more than informing
 - b) Sharing the Gospel also includes telling negatives
 - c) Warning implies telling the person how to avoid the danger—this is where the invitation comes in
- c. Similarly, the command to preach repentance implies an invitation!
 - 1) “And that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed,” Luke 24:47
 - 2) The preaching of repentance is found throughout the book of Acts, e.g. Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20 (cf. Acts 13:38-39)
 - 3) Perhaps the preaching of repentance is what led antagonists of apostolic proclamation to use the verb *καταγγέλλω* [protesting or countermanding], Acts 4:2; 16:17, 21; cf. Acts 17:13
- d. And as a parallel, preaching for someone to “turn from their wicked ways” implies decisional preaching:
 - 1) Three examples of this should suffice, Isa 55:6-7; Jer 35:14-16; Eze 18:29-32; Acts 26:20
 - 2) However, interestingly enough, false teachers avoid preaching repentance and turning from sin, Jer 23:14, 17, are these not sometimes the same ones that are also against an invitation?

¹³¹⁷See more extensive treatment in the notes above titled, “When do you shake the dust off of your feet?” following Chapter 19.

2. Historical (Part One):

Introduction: Often a historical view combined with a theological understanding provides clarity for how or why methodologies develop

a. The Eucharist as Sacramental Invitation!?

- 1) In sacramental churches, parishioners are asked to come forward every week, row by row, family by family, to receive the Eucharist:
 - a) In the Anglican church they receive both kinds (wafer and wine)
 - b) In the Roman church they receive one kind (wafer), with a brass spatula held under the wafer to make sure that the “Body of Christ” does not fall to the ground
- 2) In the case of those not wanting to receive the eucharist (in the Episcopal/Anglican tradition):
 - a) They move out of the row, into the aisle, and return to their seat after everyone else has left the aisle, or
 - b) They go forward and cross their arms as a signal to the priest/pastor, so that he/she knows to bless them (pray for them) rather than to give them the wafer
- 3) This method of giving the elements is clearly public invitation with a very long history (the Gallican Missal was canonized by Gregory I [590-604] for the entire Western or Latin church):
 - a) It is public; it is personal; it is individual; it is voluntary (while there is peer pressure to join in with everyone else)
 - b) It is accompanied with a liturgical reenactment of the Gospel, through:
 - (1) The liturgical prayer of confession of sin
 - (a) While this prayer may warm the heart of a truly born again person, the unsaved repeat it as they would a Mother Goose rhyme (especially when it was in Latin)
 - (2) The affirmation of the audience receiving absolution of sins
 - (3) The reciting of the Apostles Creed
 - (4) A “Gospel” reading from one of the Gospels
 - c) It provides for a universalistic salvation to all who come forward for the element(s):
 - (1) The 1 Cor 11:27-31 warning is often not given
 - (2) Grace is deemed bestowed through receiving the elements *ex opere operato*, regardless of the spiritual condition or contrition of the person administering the sacrament or the spiritual condition of the person receiving the sacrament
 - (3) Therefore, the mere coming forward along with the reception of the Eucharist is deemed to bestow grace
 - d) It corresponds with a non-conversionistic sacramental theology of salvation as discussed in Chapter 8 and 17, whereby one is not saved by hearing and believing, but by submitting to a prescribed ritual of the church, be it Roman, Anglican, Lutheran, or Orthodox.

b. Medieval Preaching for Military Crusades:

1. Urban II (1088-1099) and Innocent III (1198-1216) or their legates preached in the open air to large crowds calling them to come forward for a public commitment to fight in the crusades, at which time they received a cloth cross which they were to sew to their garments until they had completed their crusade vow.¹³¹⁸ This was [falsely] called, “the preaching of the Cross.”
2. Likewise, Bernard of Clairvaux (who took his monastic vows in 1113), was sent by Papal Legate and Cardinal, Bishop of Ostia Albéric to “preach the cross” (i.e. stamp out the “heretics”) in Southern France, and particularly to preach against the “heresy” of the not-yet-titled “Albigenses.”¹³¹⁹ His [fanatical] anti-Albigensian and pro-Church-of-Rome views led

¹³¹⁸Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?* 3rd ed (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1977, 1992, 2002), 37-43.

¹³¹⁹Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: La Religion des Cathares* (Toulouse, France: Privat, 1976), 227-33.

him to ask a crowd to raise their hands as a sign to show that they would repress the “heresy” of the Albigenses.¹³²⁰

Conclusion: Yes, there are documented improper uses of invitations in the history of the churches; this fact in itself, however, does not automatically negate the proper use of public invitations; Satan, the angel of Light, often seeks to take what is holy and discredit it through profane use!

3. Biblical Overview:¹³²¹

a. Biblical Examples of Invitations—exemplary, not exhaustive:

1) The invitation is the evangelist extending [voicing] God’s call to sinners:

a) Sample invitations in the Old Testament:

(1) Torah and Historical Books:

Gen 3:9, “Where are you?”

Exod 19:12, “You shall set up bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.’ [a geographic boundary]

Exod 32:26, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!”

Num 16:21, 24, “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.” “Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.” [a necessary change in geography]

Num 21:8, “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.’”

Num 25:1-9, command to slay idolaters

Deut 11:26-28, “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known”

Jos 24:14-16, “‘Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.’ And the people answered and said, ‘Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods...’” (cf. Jos 24:24-27)

1 Kgs 18:21, “Elijah came near to all the people, ‘How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people did not answer a word” (1 Kgs 18:37-38)

2 Kgs 23:1-3, called all the people to Jerusalem to hear the Word of the Lord.

(2) In the Psalms (just a few examples):

Psa 34:11, “Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.”

Psa 46:8, “Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has wrought desolations in the earth.”

Psa 46:10 (NKJ), “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

Psa 66:5, “Come and see the works of God, Who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men.”

Psa 95:1-2, “O Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.”

Psa 95:6, “Come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

Psa 100:4, “Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name.”

Psa 114:7, “Tremble, O earth, before the Lord, Before the God of Jacob.”

¹³²⁰ Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: Histoire des Cathares* (Toulouse, France: Privat, 1979), 205.

¹³²¹This section amalgamates ideas from R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1980; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), a message by Dr. Lane Adams, “Extending the Invitation” (preached at the Billy Graham School of Evangelism on June 20, 1990 at Wheaton College), as well as my own observations from Scriptures and practice.

(3) Latter Prophets:

Isa 1:18, "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.'"

Isa 55:1-6, "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." ... "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

Jer 21:8, "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death."

Jer 31:22, "How long will you go here and there, O faithless daughter?"

Jer 35:15, "Turn now every man from his evil way and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to worship them. Then you will dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your forefathers; but you have not inclined your ear or listened to Me"

Ezek 18:32, "Therefore, repent and live." Ezek 18:32

Ezek 33:11, "Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?"

b) Select invitations in the Gospels:

Matt 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'"

Matt 4:19, "And He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men'"
(cf. Mark 1:17)

Matt 7:13, "Enter by the narrow gate"

Matt 8:22, "But Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead'"

Matt 9:9, "And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, 'Follow Me!' And he rose, and followed Him" (cf. Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27-28)

Matt 11:28, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"

Matt 14:29, "Come!"

Matt 16:24, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'"

Matt 19:21, "Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (cf. Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22)

Matt 22:4, "Come to the wedding feast" (cf. Luke 14:17)

Matt 25:6, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet *him*"

Matt 25:34, "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'"

Matt 28:6, "Come, see the place where He was lying."

Mark 1:14-15, "And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent** and believe in the gospel'"

Mark 3:3, "And He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Rise and *come* forward!'" (cf. Luke 6:8)

Mark 5:30-34, "Who touched My garments?"

Mark 6:12, "And they went out and preached that *men* should repent"

Mark 6:31, "And He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.'"

Mark 10:14, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (cf. Luke 18:16)

Luke 5:32, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"

[teaching] Luke 9:23, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (cf. Mark 8:34; Matt 10:38; 16:24)

Luke 9:59, "And He said to another, 'Follow Me!'"

Luke 13:3, "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (cf. Luke 13:5)

Luke 17:16-19, "Go and show yourselves to the priests!"

Luke 19:5-7, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house."

John 1:39, "Come, and you will see"

John 1:43, "Follow Me!" (cf. John 10:27)

John 1:46, "Come and see"

John 4:29, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done; this is not the Christ, is it?"

John 11:43, "Lazarus, come forth!"

John 21:12, "Come *and* have breakfast"

John 21:19, "Follow Me!"

John 21:22, "Jesus said to him, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me!'"

c) Sample invitations in the Acts:

2:38-39, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself."

3:19, "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"

3:26, "For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of *you* from your wicked ways."

8:22-23, "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

13:38-39, "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses"

16:31, "And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.'"

17:30, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent"

26:19-20, "Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but *kept* declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance"

26:24-28, "And while *Paul* was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind! *Your* great learning is driving you mad.' But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.' And Agrippa *replied* to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.'"

d) Sample invitations in the Pauline Letters:

Rom 12:1-2, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God ..."

Rom 15:30, "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ ..."

Rom 16:17, "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those ..."

2 Cor. 5:20, "... we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

2 Cor. 6:1-2, "We also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain"

2 Cor. 10:1ff., "Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..."

Phil 4:2, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord."

Col 4:17, "And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.'"

1 Thess 4:10, "But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more."

1 Thess 5:14, "And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men."

1 Tim. 1:3-4, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines ..."

1 Tim. 6:13-14, "... Therefore, I want younger *widows* to get married, bear children, keep house, *and* give the enemy no occasion for reproach."

2 Tim. 4:1-2, "I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word

Phm 10, "I appeal to you for my child ..."

e) Sample invitations in Hebrews:

Heb 4:1 (NKJ), "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it"

Heb 4:14 (KJV), "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession"

Heb 13:19, "And I urge *you* all the more to do this"

Heb 13:22, "But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation"

- f) In Peter:
 - 1 Peter 2:11, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul”
- 2) Examples in the NT that necessitated some type of an invitation—a separation of respondents from the crowds of listeners:
 - a) Verbal responses, Jos 24:16; John 9:38; Acts 2:37; 16:31; 26:28
 - b) Baptism, Acts 2:41
 - c) Counting the converts, Acts 2:41, 4:4, 6:7, 11:21
 - d) Multitudes coming to Christ, Acts 5:14, 6:1, 7, 8:6, 12, 10:44, 48, 11:21, 24, 12:24, 14:1, 17:4
 - e) Those who believed, Acts 16:33-34, 17:12, 19:18
 - f) Those who became followers or joined the apostles, Acts 13:43, 16:14-15, 17:4, 34
- 3) Other invitations:
 - a) God’s invitation for Moses to remove his sandals, Exod 3:5
 - b) Jesus’ invitation for a man to be healed, Matt 12:13
- b. Biblical Teaching on the Invitation:
 - 1) The Gift of Exhortation:
 - a) For all Christians, 2 Cor 5:18-20
 - b) As a particular gift, Rom 12:8
 - c) A Requirement for pastors and elders, 2 Tim 4:2, 5, Titus 1:7-9
 - d) Encouragement to exhort, Tit. 2:6
 - 2) The Abundant Use of the Word “Come” in the Bible, Isa 1:18; 55:1, 3, 6-7; Matt 11:28; 19:14; 22:2-5; Mark 10:21; John 5:40; 6:37; 7:37-39; Rev 22:17
 - 3) The Concept of Fishing for Souls, Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17; Luke 5:10
 - 4) Teaching Concerning Sowing and Reaping, John 4:35-38 (cf. Psa 126:5-6; Amos 9:13)

4. Reasons for an Invitation:

- a. The Gospel always demands a response, Luke 24:47
- b. Gives an opportunity for response:
 - 1) For people to get right with God
 - 2) For people to make a public Profession of faith in Christ, Luke 12:8
 - 3) For people to make a concrete commitment to Christ
- c. Allows for counseling with the penitent, e.g. Luke 3:10, 12, and 14; Acts 2:37
- d. Prepares for a verbal declaration of Christ, Rom 10:9-10
- e. Provides an example for the congregation:
 - 1) Of the need for salvation
 - 2) Of people coming to Christ
 - 3) Of the pastor’s example in reaching out to the lost
 - 4) Of how to give an invitation
- f. An invitation keeps evangelism, the Gospel, and spiritual accountability before the people.

5. Lack of an Invitation:

- a. May involve scattering the sheep—a characteristics of false prophets, Jer 10:21; 23:1-2; Ezek 34:5-6, 20-24; Zech 11:14-17
 - 1) Matt 12:30, “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters” (cf. Luke 11:23)
- b. May show a lack of emphasis on preaching the Gospel, contra 1 Cor 1:17; 2:2
- c. May show a lack of emphasis on conversion—“You must be born again,” John 3:7
- d. May show a lack of commitment to decisional preaching

6. What an Invitation Does Not Mean:

- a. An invitation does not necessarily imply that the Gospel has been proclaimed
- b. An invitation does not necessarily imply that the Word of God has been proclaimed
- c. An invitation does not necessarily imply belief in the substitutionary atonement, the inerrancy of Scripture, etc.
- d. Nor does responding to an invitation does not necessarily imply genuine repentance and faith.

7. The Anatomy of an Individual Invitation:

- a. Sample (notice this was an individual invitation given before and in the midst of a large group of people, Acts 25:23):
Acts 26:27, “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.”
- b. Here are some aspects of this invitation of the Apostle Paul:
 - 1) The individual invitation is respectful, “King Agrippa”
 - 2) The individual invitation is personal, “Agrippa” (by name)
 - 3) The invitation is in the form of a question, “do”
 - 4) The invitation focuses on the heart issues, “do you believe?”
 - 5) The invitation is related to faith in the testimony of the Scriptures, “the prophets”
 - 6) The invitation is calculated to move the person toward professing Christ, “do you believe the prophets?” He did not say, “Do you believe the Gospel?” or “Do you believe in Jesus?”
 - 7) The invitation comes from the heart of the person giving it, “I know”
 - 8) The invitation is based on perceived knowledge of the individual, “I know that you do”
 - 9) The invitation is expectant of a positive response, “I know that you do”
- c. Notice that King Agrippa understood exactly what Paul’s invitation was seeking to accomplish:
Acts 26:28, “And Agrippa *replied* to Paul, ‘In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.’”
- d. Notice also that Paul was not ashamed of Agrippa receiving this implication from his question!
Acts 26:29, “And Paul said, ‘I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.’”

8. The Invitation and Theology:

- a. Some oppose the invitation because of theological reasons,¹³²² the words of John Owen (1616-1683), a Puritan theologian should be kept in mind:

The mixed distribution of the elect and reprobates, believers and unbelievers, according to the purpose and mind of God, throughout the whole world, and in the several places thereof, in all or most of the single congregations, is another ground of holding out a tender of the blood of Jesus Christ to them for whom it was never shed, as is apparent in the event by the ineffectualness of its proposals. The ministers of the gospel, who are stewards of the mysteries of Christ, and to whom the word of reconciliation is committed, being acquainted only with revealed things (the Lord lodging his purposes and intentions towards particular persons in the secret ark of his own bosom, not to be pried into), *are bound to admonish all, and warn all men, to whom they are sent; giving the same commands, proposing the same promises, making tenders of Jesus Christ in the same manner, to all, that the elect, whom they know not but by the event, may obtain, whilst the rest are hardened.* Now, these things being thus ordered by Him who hath the supreme disposal of all, - namely, first, that there should be such a mixture of elect and reprobate, of tares and wheat, to the end of the world; and secondly, that Christ, and reconciliation through him, should be preached by men ignorant of his eternal discriminating purposes; there is an absolute necessity of two other things: First, that the promises must have a kind of unrestrained generality, to be suitable to this dispensation before recounted. Secondly, that they must be proposed to them towards whom the Lord never intended the good things of the promises, they having a share in this proposal by their mixture in this world with the elect of God. So that, from the general proposition of Christ in the promises, nothing can be concluded concerning his death for all to whom it is proposed, as having another rise and occasion. The sum is: The word of reconciliation being committed to men unacquainted with God’s distinguishing counsels, to be preached to men of a various, mixed condition in respect of his purpose, and the way whereby he hath determined to bring his own home to himself being by exhortations, entreaties, promises,

¹³²²For example, Iain Murray, *The Invitation System* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967) and Erroll Hulse, *The Great Invitation: Examining the Use of the Invitation System in Evangelism* (Welwyn, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1986).

and the like means, accommodated to the reasonable nature whereof all are partakers to whom the word is sent, which are suited also to the accomplishment of other ends towards the rest, as conviction, restraint, hardening inexcusableness, it cannot be but the proposal and offer must necessarily be made to some upon condition, who intentionally, and in respect of the purpose of God, have no right unto it in the just aim and intendment thereof. Only, for a close, observe these two things: - First, that the proffer itself neither is nor ever was absolutely universal to all, but only indefinite, without respect to outward differences. Secondly, that Christ being not to be received without faith, and God giving faith to whom he pleaseth, it is manifest that he never intendeth Christ to them on whom he will not bestow faith.¹³²³

Not, then, any more to trouble the reader with a declaration of that in particulars which he cannot but be sufficiently convinced of by a bare overlooking of these reasons, - namely that this author is utterly ignorant of the way of reasoning, and knows not how tolerably to express his own conceptions, nor to infer one thing from another in any regular way, I answer, - First, that whatsoever the Scripture holds forth as a truth to be believed is certainly so, and to be embraced. Secondly, that the Scripture sets forth the death of Christ, to all whom the gospel is preached [unto], as an all sufficient means for the bringing of sinners unto God, so as that whosoever believe it and come in unto him shall certainly be saved. Thirdly, what can be concluded hence, but that the death of Christ is of such infinite value as that it is able to save to the utmost every one to whom it is made known, if by true faith they obtain an interest therein and a right thereunto, we cannot perceive. *This truth we have formerly confirmed by many testimonies of Scripture, and do conceive that this innate sufficiency of the death of Christ is the foundation of its promiscuous proposal to elect and reprobate.* Fourthly, that the conclusion, if he would have the reason to have any colour or show of an argument, should at least include and express the whole and entire assertion contained in the proposition, - namely, “That Christ is so set forth to be the Saviour of the world, that whosoever of the particulars believe,” etc. And then it is by us fully granted, as making nothing at all for the universality of redemption, but only for the fullness and sufficiency of his satisfaction. Of the word *world* enough hath been said before.¹³²⁴

9. Methods for the Invitation:¹³²⁵

- a. Looking up at preacher
- b. The raising of hands

I was interested to have found an account of the raising of hands in 1145 AD:

“Saint Bernard [of Clairvaux] was better received [later in Albi, France]. He preached on the day of St Peter (June 29), before a crowd whom he brought to unanimously repress heresy by raised hands. But some letters having arrived from Cîteaux [of the Cistercians], led him to make haste in traveling to the north.”¹³²⁶

- c. Standing up (as opposed to bowing down, cf. Dan 3:9-18)
- d. Coming forward:
 - 1) To meet the pastor or another person at the front (see example below of Claude Brousson’s invitation in 1689)
 - 2) To kneel for prayer
 - 3) To go into an inquiry area (cf. Luke 3:10-14)
 - 4) To sit on the “Anxious Bench” (i.e. front pew; often ascribed to Finney)
- e. Filling out a commitment card on the table or in the pew
- f. Talking to the pastor at the exit of the service, e.g. “please come talk to me before you leave today”
- g. Evening home inquiry meetings, as in the time of Jonathan Edwards

¹³²³John Owen, *Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1959), 201-02. Emphasis mine.

¹³²⁴Ibid., 264. Emphasis mine.

¹³²⁵Faris D. Whitesell wrote *Sixty-Five Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945). He gives a solid overview of methods for giving an invitation. Similarly, R. Alan Streett in *The Effective Invitation* speaks of historical and present methods of giving an invitation on pages 81-130.

¹³²⁶Jean Duvernoy, *Le Catharisme: Histoire des Cathares* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 205. Translation mine.

- h. Combinations of the above, for example, two classic “two step” invitations are:
- 1) Raised hands and come forward:
 - a) Have persons raise their hands for prayer
 - b) Pray for those who raised their hands
 - c) Ask those who raised their hands to come forward as a public testimony to their commitment (whatever that is corresponding to the message)
 - 2) Look up and come forward:
 - a) Have the audience bow their heads in prayer
 - b) Ask those who have been convicted by the message to look up
 - c) Pray for those who looked up
 - d) Ask those who looked up if they would like to make their commitment public through coming forward
- h. Care ought to be taken that fleshly coercion be avoided for the sake of bragging about numbers; the invitation is a holy time with holy ends, and it ought to be kept holy!

10. Historical (Part Two):

Introduction: Much like Francke’s quote above, many seem unaware of a public invitation prior to Charles Finney (circa 1820), or perhaps even prior to the First Great Awakening (circa 1740), for example:

“If one accepts that the altar call was not used prior to the eighteenth century, and, as has already been stated, it does not seem to have been, with the possible exceptions of isolated incidents, it becomes necessary to ask, did the great evangelists of the seventeen hundreds use it?”¹³²⁷

a. The Invitation in the 1230-1330 Cathar “Ritual”:

Introduction: Bound at the end of a small handwritten New Testament, titled “Waldensian Bible,” at the close of a second Gospel presentation on baptism in the Spirit and separation from the world, was the following call to decision:

[Last sentences of Gospel presentation, which began “If he must be consoled in the field”]: “And Jude brother of James says for our instruction in the epistle (verse 23): ‘Hate this soiled garment which is fleshly.’ And by these testimonies and by many others, you must keep the commandments of God, and hate the world. And if you do well up until the end, we are assured that your soul will have eternal life.”

“And may he say, ‘I have this desire, pray God that he gives me the strength for it.’”

“And may one of the ‘good men’ make amends [Occitan: *meioirer*; French: *melioramentum*], with the believer, to the elder, and may he say: ‘*Parcite nobis*’ [a short prayer, titled ‘spare us’]”

“Good Christians, we pray you by the love of God that you accord this good that the God has given you to this friend present here” [speaking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands]

“And then may he make amends, and may he say: ‘Spare us. For all the sins that I may have done or said or thought or accomplished, I ask forgiveness of God, and of the church, and of you all.’

“And may the Christians say: ‘By God and by us and by the church may they be forgiven you, and we pray to God that he may forgive them of you.’

“And then they must console him. And may the elder take the book and place it upon his head,¹³²⁸ and the other ‘good men’ each with his right hand, and may they say the *parcias* and three *adoremus*, and

¹³²⁷David Malcolm Bennett, *The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage*, foreword by Mark Noll (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 1. Bennett referred to his treatment of the topic as follow: “Though one cannot discount the possibility of isolated uses of the public invitation in the first sixteen hundred years of church history, there appears to be no justification for believing that the practice was common during those centuries, and may never have been used at all. Certainly, for most of that period the bulk of the church was either calvinistic or sacramentalist, and it would seem unlikely that this form of evangelism would have found favor with either party. Calvinists strongly emphasized the role of God, rather than the convert in Christian conversion, and one would not expect to find them using a form of evangelism which so strongly emphasized human response. In the case of sacramentalists, if grace conveyed through baptism marks the entry into the church, then there is little room left for a distinct conversion experience. Thus it would seem unlikely that this method of evangelism was used prior to the eighteenth century, at least not in a regular or systematic way. Some research was done on the practices of the Anabaptists (sixteenth century) and the early Baptists (seventeenth century), on the grounds that something akin to the altar call might have been used by them in their efforts to identify suitable candidates for baptism, but nothing was found to indicate such a practice. Neither has any other solid evidence of it being used by anybody else prior to the eighteenth century been discovered” (*ibid.*, xiv-xv).

then: '[in Latin] *Pater Sanctu, suscipe servum tuum in tua justitia, et mitte gratiam tuam et spiritum sanctum tuum super eum.*' And may they pray with the preaching, and the one who guides the holy service must say in a quiet voice the '*sixaine*';¹³²⁹ and when the '*sixaine*' is said, he should say three *Adoremus*, with the preaching out loud, and then 'the Gospel' [a Latin version of John 1:1-5, 10-17]. And when the Gospel is said, they must say three *Adoremus* and the '*gratia*' and the '*parcias*.'

"And then they must make peace between themselves (to hug) and with the book. And if there are believers, they must also make peace, and may the believers, if there are any, make peace with the book between them. And then may they pray God with 'Double' and with '*veniae*', and they will have delivered him [the preaching].¹³³⁰

b. Claude Brousson (1689):

The following is the translation of a 1689 invitation given by the French Huguenot Claude Brousson, a trained lawyer and a Reformed *église du désert* (underground church) preacher/revivalist/missionary (1689-1693, 1695-1696, 1697-1698). On his third mission trip from Switzerland into France, Brousson was betrayed, tried for preaching the Gospel (labeled as insurrection against the king, much like Jesus [Luke 23:14] and Paul [Acts 24:5]), and died by strangulation and then being stretched on a wheel in France:

"When Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes on October 17, 1685, making it illegal to be Protestant in France, Brousson fled to Switzerland. Several years later, because of his concern for all the churches and believers in France, Brousson returned to revive the underground church. He went from city to city preaching in fields and forests, and reorganizing the Reformed [Huguenot] churches. He was hunted like a criminal on his three missionary journeys. Finally, on his third missionary tour, a traitor denounced him, and he was captured at his hiding place. He was sentenced to be broken alive on the wheel November 4, 1698, but the judge secretly ordered that he be strangled first. Here is a first-hand account of the public invitation he gave to his hearers during his first trip to France, restoring "apostates" who had recanted to Catholicism:

"When the sermon was over, the preacher asked whether there was any among his hearers wishing to be reconciled to God and His Church, and to re-enter the communion of saints ... Then, any who were so minded came forward and knelt before the preacher, who began to remonstrate with them and showed them how enormous was the sin they had committed in forsaking Christ. That being done, they were asked to say whether they did repent, and would henceforth live and die in *the Reformed faith*, in spite of the allurements and threats of the world; whether they heartily renounced the errors of the Church of Rome, the Mass and all thereto appertaining.... (This was done in much detail.) They had to answer Yes to all these questions, each individually. After this, they had to promise not to attend Mass any more, and to take great care not to pollute themselves with Babylon, either by marriage or in other ways; not to allow their children to be trained in it, but, on the contrary, to instruct them in the principles of our religion. Each having duly promised, the minister then proclaimed the

¹³²⁸It appears that the usage of the "book on the head" parallels Rome's ordination of a Bishop, going back to the end of the 5th Century (DS326). Some differences are: (1) in the case of Rome the book consists of the Gospels; in the case of the Cathars it consists of a New Testament; (2) in the case of Rome the ritual is to ordain a Bishop; in the case of the Cathars it is for the conversion of a layman.

¹³²⁹"Sixaine" or "sizain" is likely a reference to a poem with six lines (*Dictionnaire Larousse*). This may, for example, refer to the six blessings of Number 6:24-26: "The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace."

¹³³⁰"Rituel Provençal," translated from Occitan into French by L. Clédât, in *Le Nouveau Testament traduit au XIIIe siècle en langue provençale suivi d'un rituel cathar [The New Testament translated in the 13th Century in the Provençal language followed by a Cathar ritual]*, edited by L. Clédât (Paris, 1887; Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), ix-xxvi. Translation from French into English mine. Clédât in this text published Manuscript #36 [PA36] from the *Palais des Arts* of the Municipal Library of Lyons, France. Both Clédât and Duvernoy (<http://jean.duvernoy.free.fr>) provide a history of the provenance of this manuscript.

Several things must be noted in light of this manuscript. It is [to my research] the only known "Cathar Ritual" available contemporaneously. As such, the 200 year Cathar civilization (~1105-1305) has been extirpated from historical knowledge. Notice, for example, the sarcastic words of Sabatini: "A serious heretical outbreak had been occurring in Southern France. There, it would seem, all the schisms that had disturbed the Church since her foundation were gathered together Arians, Manichaeans, and Gnostics to which were added certain more recent sects, such as the Cathars, the Waldenses, and the Boni Homines, or Good People" (Rafael Sabatini, *Torquemada and the Spanish Inquisition: A History*, 2nd ed. [London: Stanley Paul, 1913], 32; available at: http://www.archive.org/stream/torquemadaandthe00sabauoftorquemadaandthe00sabauoft_djvu.txt; accessed 4 Jan 2010; Internet). Therefore, one must ask the question, why has this manuscript survived? Nevertheless, it provides valuable information on this civilization of Christians, some of whom appear to have been thoroughly biblical and Evangelical.

remission of their sins, saying, ‘In the name and authority of Jesus Christ, and as a faithful minister of His Word, I declare to you the remission of all your sins, and there is now no condemnation for you, since you are in Jesus Christ.’ Then followed a prayer on their behalf. ...

“Forty-two of us were admitted in this manner, the rest of the flock having been received back at previous gatherings. The number of the communicants was about two hundred and fifty, men and women.

“Tell our former pastor, M. Modens, that nearly half of his flock are now restored, and by God’s grace the rest will soon follow. The churches at Uzès, Nîmes, Sommières, etc., have all received the same blessing and are now restored. Our foes may say and do what they will, the Holy Spirit has had mercy on us and has reconquered our souls.”¹³³¹

c. Another Call to Commitment: Listen to Spurgeon’s appeal in the tract, “Ark of Safety”:

“Sinner, I have a word from the Lord for thee: if you feel your need of a Saviour, that blood is able to save you, and you are bidden simply to trust that blood, and you shall be saved. If you can rely simply on the blood of Christ, that blood is able to save. Leave off doing altogether; get Christ *first*, and then you may do as much as you like. See the Saviour hanging on the cross; turn your eye to Him, and say, ‘Lord I trust Thee; I have nothing else to trust to; sink or swim, my Saviour, I trust Thee.’ And as surely, sinner, as thou canst put thy trust in Christ, thou art safe. He that believeth shall be saved, be his sins ever so many; he that believeth not shall be damned, be his sins ever so few, and his virtues ever so many. Trust in Jesus *now*, Jesus only.”¹³³²

11. Concerning Abuses:

- a. Regarding the belief that a geographic movement saves anybody—rather it is an opportunity to deal with hearts tenderized by the Word of God
- b. Extensive Emotionalism, especially non-biblical pressure (e.g. “Old Yellar”)
- c. Prolongation, moving into human (psychological/emotional) pressure for a response
- d. Routine, always using the same invitation (rather than using an invitation from the text from which comes the message just preached)

12. Ideas for the Invitation:

Introduction:

- 1) Prepare and memorize six different versions of the invitation¹³³³
 - 2) Alternate use of these invitations along with the emphasis of the passage you are preaching
 - 3) Always use a sinner’s prayer
- a. John 3:16
 - b. The ABC’s:
 - 1) Admit you are a sinner (Rom 3:23);
 - 2) Believe in Jesus only (Rom 6:23); and
 - 3) Confess Christ before men (Rom 10:9-10)
 - c. Call on the name of the Lord to be saved, Rom 10:13
 - d. The Roman Road:
 - 1) All Have sinned (Rom 3:23);
 - 2) the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23);
 - 3) Christ has paid the price of sin (Rom 5:8);
 - 4) We must be justified by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:5);
 - 5) Confess and believe (Rom 10:9-10)

¹³³¹From Matthieu Lelièvre, *Portraits et Récits Huguenots*, 274-82; translated and quoted by Rubens Saillens in his *The Soul of France* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1917), 85-87; emphasis mine. See also Léopold Nègre, *Vie et Ministère de Claude Brousson, 1647-1698* (Paris: Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1878), 71-73.

¹³³²C. H. Spurgeon, “Salvation and Safety,” *Royal Dainties*, no. 169 [Minneapolis: Asher Publishing Co., affiliated with The Union Gospel Mission, n.d.], 4; found at <http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/tract01.html>; Internet, accessed 4 January 2001.

¹³³³The advice to memorize six different invitations and rotate them came to me from Bill Mackey, as he was training revival preachers for the simultaneous revival called “Celebrate Jesus 2000,” at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in May 2000.

- e. John 1:12
- f. Col 2:13
- g. Rev 3:20
- h. 1 John 1:9-2:2
- i. Please note Keith Fordham's advise to Sunday School teachers.¹³³⁴

13. Closing advise on the Invitation:¹³³⁵

- a. Be honest in the invitation. Honest about the commitment.
- b. Don't use an invitation in public unless you can give private invitations!
- c. Your sermon should always have an invitation and pressure.

¹³³⁴“When you come to the close of your lesson, please have all members of the class to bow their heads. Ask for those who have trusted Christ as their personal Savior to raise their hands. Comment on how wonderful it is to bear this testimony. This will make it easier for those who have not trusted the Lord to respond to the invitation, which follows:

“Then ask your class, as their heads are bowed, if there are those who feel themselves backslidden and feel the need of rededicating their lives to raise their hands for prayer. Then explain that being a member of the Sunday school is not being a member of the Church. If there are those who have not transferred their church membership, they need to do so this morning. Then ask those who would desire to take that step to indicate it by raising their hand. (Some have members of their families who are already members of the church and their families ought to be complete in the church.) Those who are Baptists elsewhere should keep the solemn agreement that they made when they joined the church where their membership now is (Ephesians 3:21, 5:24). Have prayer for these who have raised their hands, if any.

“Now make one final appeal to the unsaved of your class. Show the necessity of confessing Christ (Romans 10:9, Matthew 10:32-33). State the importance of doing it right now (James 4:14, 2 Cor.6:2). Ask if they will pray with you. Then pray aloud, asking God to give them the faith and repentance. Ask God to help them pray the prayer of Luke 18: 13 [“God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”]. Repeat the words, if necessary, so they will know what they need to pray. Then ask each one to pray what he feels in his heart he should pray. Pause a moment as they pray.

“Ask the class to continue with bowed heads and those who will this morning, right now, confess Jesus as Savior, stand to their feet. Have prayer of thanksgiving for God's love and willingness to take care of us and to answer our prayer for salvation, rededication and surrender. Note the ones who stand so you can deal with them individually. Give each one who makes a decision the assurance that the whole class is concerned and rejoices with them in their decision. Briefly fill out a decision card for each one. Get complete details later. Get name and decision made. Tell them if they have trusted the Lord that they should make it public and follow Him in baptism. Use Romans 10:9-10 and also verse 11. Explain the meaning of baptism if necessary. The baptismal service will be that night or at their earliest convenience, but they should make their public profession today. Ask them to sit with you in the closing assembly of the Sunday school in the auditorium and as the pastor gives the invitation to go forward with you, making their decision public. At the time for the morning service, go with your department to the auditorium. Ask those who have made decisions to sit next to you. Keep your class quiet in case there is a delay in moving to the auditorium. KEEP PRAYING!” (Keith Fordham, Email attachment, 5 Jan 2006).

¹³³⁵Lane Adams, “Giving a Public Invitation,” Billy Graham School of Evangelism, held in Wheaton, IL, June 1990.

