

Chapter 4 – The Unifying Cause

Put on the Spot

“I’ve been a Christian for twenty years,” he said, “but I must admit that there’s something missing in my life. Can you tell me what it is? Can you tell me if there’s something more?” There I sat in his living room, only two months into my first pastorate, with a great chance to do the things I had been prepared for—and I really bombed!

“Have you tried a private devotion time, Bill—you know, fifteen minutes a day for Bible study and prayer?”

Yes, he did that regularly.

“Is there sin in your life? For instance, are you a kind husband and father? Maybe you harbour bitterness toward someone.”

He was clean on all counts.

“Well, have you discovered the Spirit-filled life? What role does the Holy Spirit play in your walk with Christ?” His two-minute response told me he had the facts down straight and was truly seeking all God had for him in this area. As his pastor, I knew he attended church faithfully and tithed, so I couldn’t offer that solution. He did admit he wasn’t the witness to his neighbours he ought to be, but he wanted to change this and was praying for them regularly.

So I read some Scripture with him, offered a brief prayer, promised I’d give it some more thought, and walked away . . . into many similar sessions with other frustrated Christians until I finally learned what my friend was searching for.

The cause belongs to Christ. Our mission in the Gap is because of Him, through Him, and about Him.

Quite simply, despite all the good points, *Bill lacked a cause*. He needed something bigger than the issues we discussed that day, to pull together everything else in his daily life and send it out to bless the ends of the earth. He needed to get beyond pea-sized Christianity, to put his Bible study, or prayer, or family life, or evangelism into a world dimension He needed to see His Saviour reigning victoriously in the midst of a global cause.

Christ’s Global Cause Defined

First, world missions springs from a cause: the reality of the Gap. To use the dictionary terms for a cause we could say the Gap is the “basis for motivation and action” in the Christian life. At this moment of history it is the “aim and purpose” for all we do as disciples. Until the unreached billions are reached it must have “highest priority” for the whole Church. World missions, then, is the activity of being so concerned with this cause that we actually stand in the Gap; that we persistently seek Jesus’ Kingdom, and His righteousness, wherever it has yet to break through.

Secondly, the cause belongs to Christ. Our mission in the Gap is because of Him, through Him, and all about Him. Our efforts depend on His concern and His provisions for each unreached person and for their societies. He is the One the Church proclaims to the nations, the One we invite them to trust and worship, and the One who will be eternally glorified by all who cross the Gap through Him.

Thirdly, since the Gap exists worldwide, the cause is global in scope. Many today pursue global activities that unify all their other concerns: communists, Muslims, oil cartels, IBM, the United Nations, and Coca-Cola. How much more should we think globally about Christ's cause. After all, the scope of His mission encompasses all tongues, all cultures, all people-groups, all nations, and all places where humans dwell. It includes people like us, true. But it also includes people very different from us. God's focus goes far beyond the minority who can make an intelligent verdict for or against Christ. He is targeted on earth's majority who have too little information to reach any verdict. We should be so targeted as well.

Christ's global cause. How can something of this magnitude not be the integrating factor for everything a Christian does. We must de-compartmentalize our discipleship by taking missions out of the closet where we've stored the bits and pieces picked up along the way, things which never seemed to relate to anything else we were in Christ. We must give the cause of missions' grand sweep centre stage in the Church's life and in our lives in this generation.

I should have asked Bill the crucial question for all of us in the Gap: "Bill, what is your cause? To what end are you dreaming what you dream, wanting what you want, and doing what you do? For example, to what end do you have Quiet Time, Bill? Is it to learn more about the glory of Christ, extent of His global reign and how to get better involved in His cause? Or is it merely for a temporary spiritual 'fix' to help get you through today's eight-hour grind at the office?"

To what end does your small group from church meet? Do you discover more about Christ and His global cause in order to equip one another to get more effectively involved in it? To what end are you going to the Christian businessmen's retreat this fall? Will it strengthen your commitment to Christ's mission to the nations, and to nothing less? To what end do you care for your family's needs day by day? Is it to build, encourage, and help them move out with a larger vision of God's Son and a greater hope about God's purposes for the ends of the earth?

Bill, that's what's missing! You need this kind of unifying cause or your life will continue to seem splintered and unfulfilled."

Acts 1:8 Says It All!

As past generations of disciples, we too have been given a global cause for our moment in history. I can see Bill sitting back, reflecting on his new understanding. Quietly I would study his face, enjoying his moment of discovery with him. Then, to help him nail it down with Scripture, I would pick up my Bible.

"Bill, from the day you and I entered the Kingdom we've had Christ's cause as our high ceiling. In fact, from the day the Church was born it has been her grand inheritance. Listen to Jesus' summary of the cause in Acts 1:8 (and I read to him): 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'"

"Let me tell you what this passage means to me." I proceed to show Bill that the "you" and "upon you" are plural: the cause is given to the whole Body of Christ and is fulfilled through them together. I point out that the "Holy Spirit" refers to the living God indwelling His people in order to unite us to Christ and to one another, to transform us, and lead us forth as Christ's ambassadors to all nations. Only the Spirit can take us beyond the security and comfort of our little groups into the overwhelming challenge of the Gap which He continues to close through those who stand there with God's Son — and for His name, His fame and His reign.

“Power” designates the Spirit’s primary ministry in fulfilling the cause through us. He gives us ability, authority and effectiveness—all this is wrapped up in the word *power*. Even more, His power means love-without-limits, both in how far it reaches and how fully it meets others’ needs. Not just any love, either. Christ’s love! Nothing is more powerful than “fresh revelation” of the majesty and supremacy of God’s Son to God’s people by God’s Spirit.

“My witnesses,” I would explain to Bill, “describes the ultimate impact of the Church’s worldwide mission. As “witnesses” we bring other people to such a clear understanding of who Jesus really is that they can render an intelligent *verdict* for (or against) Him. What a courtroom witness does for a judge and jury we do for those who have never heard of Christ. Bill, what more strategic impact could any of us ever make for Christ’s cause?”

It would be foolhardy to unite all we are and have around a cause of this magnitude unless its triumph was sure.

Finally, I would show him how “the ends of the earth” defines the cause as nothing less than global. The disciples weren’t to stop with those near to them geographically, culturally, or theologically, nor with those relatively close at hand, like the Samaritans. There was “something more” for them! Christ wanted them (and us) to embrace a cause that would sweep to the ends of the earth before it finished. He wanted them to serve Him in the world dimension.

I can see Bill’s growing excitement. He sits up on the edge of his chair: “If this is so, then no cause the world has ever known should be more consuming or more satisfying!” Right, friend. And knowing this, the Lord Jesus put rock-bottom stability into His challenge with a two-fold promise: “You *shall* receive power” and “you *shall* be my witnesses.” In the swirl of such an overwhelming task, His Word of certitude secures us.

Frankly, it would be foolhardy for Bill, or me, or anyone else to unite all we are and have around a cause of this magnitude unless its triumph was sure. The One who paid the ultimate price for its fulfilment and reigns over the nations to lead it forward guarantees the victory in this two-fold assurance. His promise gives us the right, in the words of William Carey’s famous directive, not only to “expect great things from God” but also to “attempt great things for God.”

“Bill, this discovery of the cause can end your search. If your life seems incomplete because it is sectioned up like a *Time* magazine—if our church seems sluggish because it is fragmented into twelve equal but unrelated programs—then Acts 1:8 provides the new ‘cover’ to bind up all those themes into the adventure for which we were made. Christ only asks you to ‘staple’ the whole thing together with your faith—faith working through love.”

Actually, the apostle Paul sums it up in much simpler, more beautiful words: “Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14). Love—God’s love for those on the other side of the Gap. Faith working through that love. Faith and love that result in worldwide missionary activity. That is at the heart of Christ’s unifying cause.

The love we need is not only for those nearest to us and like us, but also for those at the widest end of the Gap. It’s love for those very much *unlike* us. Love for those who have never heard of Christ and have no one to tell them. Love for those far away from us and far from the good news we could give them about our Saviour. Love for those who will never know of us or listen to us unless you and I and other believers together love them enough to make those radical efforts that put us and the gospel into their part of the Gap. Love that acts especially on behalf of these. That is the unifying cause that gives wholeness and harmony to all the rest of life.

“It’s like this, Bill. God’s will for us can be put into a single word: *CHRIST*—the people *for* whom CHRIST wants us to give our lives and the people *with* whom CHRIST wants us to give our lives. By making the act of love called world missions our unifying cause we’re saying that the fame and reign of CHRIST is our all-consuming passion, which turns us toward the people for whom He came—this is a cause and focus that is world-sized because it is Kingdom-sized. Therefore in my love for God’s Son I also want to know who are the people are at the widest end of the Gap *for whom* God wants me to give my life for Jesus’ sake. And in order to effectively face that challenge, I must also seriously consider who are the other Christ-followers God wants me to give my life *with* in order to reach them.”



Update Note: To explore how my thinking has expanded the past thirty years – in terms of how I see Christ, His global cause, the hope He sets before the nations, what it means to be a World Christian in today’s world, how to mobilize a renewed missions movement – be sure to look at my most recent book (by visiting www.ProclaimHope.com): **CHRIST IS ALL! A Joyful Manifesto On The Supremacy of God’s Son** (New Providence Publishers).