

VOLUNTEERS FOR JESUS

Curtis Pugh
Poteau, Oklahoma

Most so-called evangelical Christians preach and practice what they erroneously call “soul winning.” They can be likened to recruiters for the military service. They have a sales pitch prepared by which they try to get sinners to volunteer for salvation: whatever it takes, by hook or by crook! If these religious recruiting officers can just get sinners to make a move they can turn it in on their report. They can carve another notch on their gospel gun. A one-time prayer for salvation is all it takes with most of them. Others try to include making some kind of commitment which they often call ‘making Christ Lord.’ Still others have in their recruitment scheme a necessary step they call baptism. Whatever their requirements, their aim is to secure volunteers for Jesus: hence our title. They think by their methods to make disciples for Christ. They think their scheme produces genuine Christians headed for heaven.

As a boy growing up in Oklahoma I attended various “singings,” community “homecomings,” cemetery “decoration days” and “revival” services as well as regular church meetings. I remember singing the song “As A Volunteer.” The chorus of that song goes “A volunteer for Jesus, A soldier true, Others have enlisted, Why not you? Jesus is the Captain, We will never fear, Will you be enlisted as a volunteer?” That song is probably out of fashion today as so called “gospel music” has gone through various phases in its downgrade. But the philosophy behind that song is as popular as ever. After all the Bible says “**evil men and seducers shall [continue to] wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived,**” (2 Timothy 3:13 – brackets added). And volunteerism for Jesus is a deception! All this volunteerism, of course, is based upon the notion that sinners are capable of volunteering. We say again: volunteering for Jesus is based upon the misconception that sinners have the ability to come to Christ in a saving way without any interference from God.

Today, most of what is called “evangelical Christianity” has done away with the draft. They no longer believe that God has a conscription policy by which He selects and inducts into His service whom He pleases. Various objections as to the fairness of God’s conscription program continue to be raised by those who believe individuals have the ability to volunteer for Jesus. God’s answer to such as object to the way He drafts His soldiers was written by Paul in Romans 9:20-21: “**Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?**” In other words, If we may paraphrase, Paul says to all those volunteers for Jesus, ‘Just who do you think you are, daring to question God? God has the right to do whatever He wants with His creation.’ Paul had just previously stated these words: “**What shall we say then? Is**

there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy,” (Romans 9:14-16). But modern Christianity has espoused the idea of individuals volunteering for Jesus. They will not be divorced from that notion even by God’s Word! They think the new birth comes about by an act of man’s will. It matters not to them that the Bible says, **“it is not of him that willeth.”**

Is there Scripture to substantiate our claim that God does not accept volunteers? We believe that there is. Christ’s rejection of volunteers was complete. As far as the New Testament record is concerned, there is not a single instance of Christ accepting a volunteer. Let us look at four instances of volunteerism in the Gospels. In each of these the Lord Jesus spoke words – demanding words – which caused the volunteer to go away from Him. Jesus did not mistakenly say things that caused these men to give up their volunteerism. We can say that with full assurance because the Lord Jesus **“needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man,”** (John 2:25). His words were direct, pointed and achieved what He intended them to accomplish.

First consider these excerpts from the meeting of the rich young ruler with Jesus. **“And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?... Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions,”** (Matthew 19:16 & 21-22). This young man claimed to be blameless as far as the Old Testament law was concerned. (Paul made that same claim in Philippians 3:6). He was no doubt a fine young man. He was volunteering to do whatever Jesus told him to do – he thought. But the Lord Jesus, knowing his heart, told him to do that which the young man could not bear to do. Christ told him to sell all that he owned, give the proceeds to the poor and then come and follow Him. The young man’s volunteerism was short lived. The Scripture says **“he went away sorrowful.”** Christ never required any other person in the Scripture to sell all their possessions. But He pointed His words at the true love of the young man: his riches. Many professing Christians today – volunteers – are willing to follow the Lord as long as they can keep their comfortable affluent lifestyle. As long as their kind of following after Christ does not affect what they have, they are willing to volunteer for Jesus. But Christ did not accept that kind of volunteerism then and we have no reason to believe that He accepts it today.

Another instance of volunteerism which Jesus rejected is seen in these verses: **“And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain *man* said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to**

lay his head,” (Luke 9:57-58). Here was a man who seemed quite enthusiastic. He openly declared that he would follow the Lord wherever it took him. But he seemed to think that following the Lord would eventually result in ease. Perhaps he was expecting the Lord to immediately receive His kingdom. Perhaps he thought he would be elevated to a higher position: one of power and wealth. The Lord’s pointed words about His own poverty seem intended to cause this man to reconsider and leave. The context gives us every reason to believe that this man gave up his volunteerism.

In proximity to the last two quoted verses we have another two which tell of a similar volunteer. We read: **“And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,”** (Luke 9:61-62). This man had such ties with family and friends that he was willing to put off following the Lord for a time of farewells with them. Perhaps he expected a going-away feast or party. Again we point out that the Lord Jesus knew all about this man. And based upon what He knew He spoke pointed words of rebuke to him. It seems clear that this was the end of his volunteerism.

A fourth instance of volunteerism in which the words of Jesus caused would-be followers to leave Him is seen in this passage: **“But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him,”** (John 6:64-66). These words of Jesus were spoken to some who were actually viewed as His disciples. They are called that. Again the supernatural knowledge of the Son of God is stated. Jesus knew not only that Judas would betray Him, but He also knew from the beginning who believed not. Some of these unbelievers were viewed as disciples of His, but they were not true believers. No doubt they considered themselves to be followers of the Lamb. Notice the word “therefore.” The adage is “whenever you read a wherefore or a therefore ask yourself what is it there for.” The word “therefore” connects what Jesus said with what He knew in this case. In other words, it was because Jesus knew those who were unbelievers that He aimed His words at them. He knew what the results of His words would be. And He said them in light of that knowledge. And what were the results of Jesus speaking of man’s inability to volunteer to be His disciple? They left Him and never came back! Volunteers for Jesus do not stick! They are not genuine!

Revelation 17:14 speaks of those who will be victorious over the ten kings. It says **“they that are with him [Christ] are called, and chosen, and faithful.”** (Brackets added). No volunteers in that army! God called them. God chose them. And as a result of His working in them they are steadfast! Neither do Paul’s words speak of volunteering for Jesus. He wrote in 2 Timothy 2:4: **“No man that warreth entangleth**

himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” No volunteering for Jesus in this army either! Paul wrote that God’s soldiers are chosen: chosen by God. To the congregation at Rome Paul wrote: **“Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ,”** (Romans 1:6). The saints at Rome had not volunteered for Jesus. They had been called! Their call had been effective – it resulted in their true discipleship. The words of assurance in the first part of Romans 8:28 are **“to them who are the called according to his purpose.”** Volunteers for Jesus have no assurance that all things work together for good to them! The words of the Lord Himself in Matthew 20:16 are these: **“So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.”** No volunteers for Jesus among those who shall be first. They are chosen! Paul himself certainly was not a volunteer for Jesus. God spoke about Paul to Ananias saying, **“Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me...”** (Acts 9:15). Anyone who reads the account of Paul’s arrest on the Damascus road cannot seriously attempt to say that Paul was a volunteer for Jesus! God told Ananias that He (God) had chosen Paul! Furthermore there was not a single volunteer for Jesus who saw Him after His resurrection. Proof: **“Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead,”** (Acts 10:40-41). All the witnesses of Christ’s resurrection were before that time chosen by God! The disciple Rufus was not a volunteer for Jesus for we read Paul’s words: **“Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine,”** (Romans 16:13). In fact, as far as both Paul and Peter are concerned, those who are saved are not volunteers for Jesus. They are all chosen ones! Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:4: **“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”** Peter’s words are similar in 1 Peter 2:9 where he wrote: **“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”** Jude summed it up thus in the first verse of his letter: **“Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.”** Jude wrote to Christians, saying that they were set apart, preserved and then called. No volunteers for Jesus there! God called them!

Can there be anything plainer than the words of Christ Himself in John 6:44-45? He said: **“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”** A sinner can volunteer to go forward. He can voluntarily pray the sinner’s prayer. He can volunteer to be baptized. He can volunteer to preach. He can volunteer to teach and to witness and to pass out tracts. He can volunteer to be a missionary. He can voluntarily do a lot of things. But he cannot be a volunteer for Jesus. He might think that he can. But he cannot! Unless God draws him he will not and cannot

come to Christ in a saving way. Only those who have heard the effectual (effective) call of God which gives life to the spiritually dead – unless he has learned of the Father – unless God has chosen to teach him - to deal with him – he will be just a volunteer for religion. He may think he has volunteered for Jesus. He may sing about it. He may go to hear preaching that tells him that he can be a volunteer. But the truth is he cannot! Merriam Webster defines the word volunteer as “a person who voluntarily undertakes or expresses a willingness to undertake a service.” No sinner ever did that relative to Christ! Not apart from the working of God in him. No sinner ever came in a saving way to Christ of his own accord – that is, apart from the work of God in his heart – the work of regeneration. In this thing the theologians call regeneration – the new birth – a holy disposition is given to the mind. That mind of man which by natural birth is enmity against God must be changed so as to cause the sinner to see himself as hopeless and helpless and to sorrow for his sins. The sinner comes to see himself as an offense to God! That godly sorrow results in repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Romans 8:7-8; 2 Corinthians 7:20; Acts 20:21). So it is God who takes the initiative in those who come to Jesus. If there is any volunteerism in the new birth, it is that the triune God volunteers to save unworthy sinners.

If you, reader, are only a volunteer for Jesus you are yet in your sins. Cease trusting in what you have done. Your prayers, decision, religious rituals, self-confidence, and all that goes along with volunteerism – cast it upon the dung-heap! The only hope of any sinner is Christ! Cast yourself upon the grace of God! Trust only in the finished work of Christ! If you are able – if you are enabled to do so – come to Christ as you are, trusting only in His finished work – it will be God working in you. Consider: “**...how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures,**” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). And may “**the Lord give thee understanding in all things,**” (2 Timothy 2:7).