

## What Is Needed Most in Today's Missionary Movement

By Steven Shepard

**"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day..." (John 6:44)**

What are the "hot topics" normally discussed these days at missions' conferences and in books about missions? You hear about the results of a lot of research – heaps of statistics about unreached peoples, demographics, religions and trends. Also discussed are missions' methods – topics such as contextualization, cross-cultural communication, orality, church planting movements, indigenous methods and much more. While these things are useful and have their place, I believe that today's missions' movement has neglected what is most important of all – and that is to have a proper biblical understanding of conversion and the message that God uses to bring about conversion.

Conversion is the goal of biblical missions, and simply means the turning of a sinner to Christ. But how does this happen? Not understanding how conversion happens leads to methods that don't bring about the desired result. We ask people to come forward, pray a prayer, be baptized or join a church. If we get people to do these things, we say they have been converted. But achieving these outcomes does not necessarily mean that conversion has taken place. True conversion involves a change of heart – from having a heart with a sinful nature at enmity with God to having a heart that embraces God in loving submission. Only God can cause such a radical change to occur. This is why Jesus says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." We must be drawn, "taught by God," and called by His Spirit. Every conversion then is God's miracle. And we can only know that real conversion has happened when we see the evidences of a changed life. (Rom 8:7-8; John 3:3; Matt 16:17; Rom 8:30; Acts 2:38-39; 1 John 3:7-10)

The method God uses for bringing about conversion is His message of the gospel. But in today's missions' movement, very little attention is given to what this message actually is. In fact, all too often the content of the message that we are supposed to proclaim doesn't seem to matter – as long as Jesus is mentioned in some way and some sort of "church" is being planted. But if we don't proclaim the right message, we are probably getting people to make only an outward response. There will not be real repentance or faith, because God has not changed them on the inside. (2 Thess 2:14; Rom 10:17; James 1:18)

But what is the right message, or in other words, what is the gospel? It is the message of who Jesus is, that He is God who became a man, who died for our sins and was raised from the dead. It is the message of His promise to whomever believes of forgiveness and eternal life. What should we then say when we give the gospel call? We should not merely tell people to make an outward decision. Nor should we say that their problems will all be solved if they come to Christ. Rather we should explain about sin, who Jesus is, and what Jesus has done. We should call people to repentance and to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. (1 Cor 15:1-5; Mark 1:15; Luke 24:47) In conclusion, we need a missiology that is driven first and foremost not by statistics, trends and human methodology, but by a biblical understanding of conversion and the gospel.