



## *PERSPECTIVE ON EVANGELISM*

“Evangelism!” A word that can raise blood pressure, increase frustration and guilt, or bring joy to one’s life. Why can this one word strike a note of terror or triumph?

Looking at the Book of Acts, we see Paul and others going boldly into pagan lands and opening up new frontiers. Unfortunately, the evangelical community has associated the work of Paul in the Book of Acts with every believer. No wonder terror strikes when the word, evangelism, is discussed. We tend to think if we are not aggressively, overtly, seeking out, confronting, and saving unbelievers at least eighteen hours of the day, we are guilty of the unpardonable sin. Guilt and anxiety come to such a pitch that we pump ourselves up, try to get excited, and then basically attack some unsuspecting person with four-steps to heaven. And we wonder why we are perceived of as odd and why God has not blessed our efforts. As a result, we crawl back to the protective surroundings of other believers; hesitant to share Christ again, while assuring ourselves we have done our part in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Why can the word, evangelism, strike terror in the believer? The primarily reason is a misunderstanding in *how* to share one’s faith with others. The missionary journeys in the Book of Acts are *not* intended to be the *norm* for the believer.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter answers a question and about three thousand believed in Christ. Acts 2:42-47 tells us what this new body of believers did.

<sup>42</sup> And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Notice that verse 47b describes everything from God’s perspective. He was adding believers to the body of Christ. The question that needs to be asked is “What was the body doing that God used to bring others to Christ?”

Verse 43 of Acts 2 states that the apostles were performing many wonders and signs, which authenticated their message. Verses 44-47a tell us of the love and unity, which was present within this new group of believers. They had experienced the reality of Christ when they believed. They also experienced the reality of His life as they ministered to one another. The natural, spontaneous overflow of possessing the reality of this new life was sharing

it with those who did not know the Savior. By both the apostles and the entire body, “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (v 47b).

Now consider the events in Acts 8. When persecution began, the apostles remained in Jerusalem, but the rest of the body was “scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (v 2). Acts 8:4 tells us that all “those who had been scattered went about “preaching (*euangelizo*) the word;” evidently there were no exceptions. In particular, however, Philip, an evangelist (Acts 21:8), was “proclaiming (heralding, *kerusso*) Christ” (Acts 8:5). Because of Philip’s association with the apostles and their authority, he also was performing signs that authenticated his message (v 6). Note that Paul by God “was appointed a “preacher (herald, *kerux*) and an apostle and a teacher” (2 Tim. 1:11). The term *herald* seems to refer to the ministry of the corporate gift of the evangelist who proclaimed the good news of Christ. Obviously, the ministry of the apostles and evangelists was different from that of the average believer in Christ. But as the believers permeated the region of Judea and Samaria, they had a significant ministry by declaring the word. Probably the same means as in Acts 2—by life and by word.

This is exactly what Paul’s instructions were to the believers in Colossians 4:5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

Paul had just asked for prayer, on his behalf, that he might have opportunities to proclaim Christ (vv 3-4). Then he teaches these believers about normative evangelism. His words to them are his words for us today. Our life is to be lived with wisdom (skillfully), for it demonstrates the reality of Christ in our lives. Our speech is to be gracious and tasteful, because it is the means for sharing the message of Christ. Colossians 4 states that our speech and our life both work together to create interest in Christ. Obviously, this is not accomplished apart from friendships in which believers and unbelievers interact, providing opportunities for the gospel.

Normative evangelism is demonstrating and sharing the reality of Jesus Christ in your own life. This is done primarily within the context of our sphere of influence—those with whom we work, live, and go to school. As a result, it should be a lifestyle—a natural, spontaneous overflow of the reality of Christ.

Why are we not sharing our faith with others more often? Why isn’t it our lifestyle? Why are new believers more excited about sharing Christ? These are questions with which the church wrestles and there seem to be four basic causes:

- The reality of the Christian life has faded
- Evangelism is portrayed as taking place when the church is gathered
- Evangelism is portrayed as taking place when a special program or campaign for evangelism is instituted
- Friendships with unbelievers are not cultivated

Why do believers lose the reality of the Christian life? Primarily, because they do not know what Christ desires in their walk with Him and do not understand the importance of fellowship with other believers. The Word of God states very clearly what He desires and we can choose to obey or not. Yet, the knowledge of God apart from meaningful connections with other believers is foreign to the Word of God.

The dynamic of the first century church was mutual concern and ministry for one another. God met the believer’s needs, spiritual, physical and emotional, through people (other believers). The Christian community came together to minister to one another through meaningful connections and meaningful interaction. This was the pattern of Acts 2:42-47

## Non-Normative Evangelism

### *Faded Reality*

and Hebrews 10:24-25. The result of this one-another ministry is the transformation of lives from getters to givers. As we grow in our understanding of our position in Christ and grow in our fellowship with other believers, we gain fulfillment and satisfaction in life. The love that is manifested toward us by God and by His people is the factor that transforms motivation from our own needs to the needs of others. We begin to love (serve) others (believers and unbelievers) because we are experiencing biblical reality, having gained a spiritual perspective of life.

Believers naturally, spontaneously share their faith only when they are experiencing biblical reality themselves—one cannot effectively share that which that one does not possess. This is why it is imperative that the church function properly. Apart from the mutual, reciprocal ministry within the body of Christ, there cannot be normative evangelism by the body. To say it another way, the proper functioning of the body is the key to affecting with world for Christ.

When some hear the statement that the internal growth of the body results in evangelism, they reject the idea offhand. The reason is they have a mistaken belief when it comes to understanding what the Scripture has to say about growth. Unbiblical “in-growth” results in a sterile church—a holy huddle. However, “biblical in-growth” is dynamic. Evangelism is the natural outgrowth of biblical internal growth of the body. On the other hand, if the body does not function properly, evangelism will be hindered. We need to remember, believers will not naturally share Christ when they are not experiencing biblical reality in their own lives.

The question then arises, “Why are new believers more excited about sharing Christ?” The answer lies in the fact that when a person trusts in Christ as his Savior he understands his brand-new position in Christ. Previously, he was separated from God; now he has a vital relationship with Him and is secure in Christ. That is the biblical reality of trusting in Christ. Naturally whoever has experienced the work of God in his life wants to share it with others. Yet, what typically occurs a year or so down the road? We all know the answer. That enthusiasm he once had has waned. Why? The reality that he once experienced has faded. Why? For the most part, that reality for the majority of the Christians with whom he associates is gone too. Apart from continuing exposure to vibrant fellowship with other believers in a biblically functioning body, that initial glimpse of reality in Christ will pass with time. The flame dwindles to a flicker. Obviously, Satan is actively involved in discouraging Christians, but the local church body often plays the major role, allowing this to occur. As a result, pews are filled with Christians long since saved but unmotivated and immature in their faith. And we wonder why the world is not affected for Christ.

How often it is that revival meetings are used just to rekindle the first glimpse of a reality that once was. Believers respond; they make decisions to live for Christ. But the typical programming of the local church extinguishes that flame again. Do not misunderstand. It is extremely important that one trusts in Christ; it is a matter of spiritual life or death. But as the writer to the Hebrews exhorts, “let us press on to maturity” (6:1). We must move from the basics to a fuller reality in Jesus Christ. This cannot be done apart from *mutual, reciprocal ministries* (Heb 10:24-25) through *supporting connections* (Eph 4:16) within the local body (see Article: *Adopting a Biblical Ministry Perspective*).

As the body of Christ gathers together, the primary reason is to serve one another (Eph 4:11-16). This is accomplished as believers come together to minister to one another. In so doing the body demonstrates love (John 13:35) and unity (John 17:21). These observable qualities create a thirst within the unbeliever for this same reality with God and with His people. As stated previously, evangelism is the natural result when the church functions properly when gathered.

Going back to Acts 2, verse 47 tells us that “each day people were being saved” as people looked upon the body of Christ with favor. Verses 44-46 give us the reason—the body of Christ was demonstrating love and unity. The same thing happened in Acts 5. Verse 14 tells us that believers were being constantly added, and one of the primary reasons was

*Wrong Purpose  
for the Church  
Gathered*

that “the people held them [the body of Christ] in high esteem” (v 13). Obviously, in each account the Word of God played the central role; however, the proper functioning of the body is what created a thirst—they were truly salt to the world.

While remembering that the proper functioning of body of Christ is intrinsically evangelistic, evangelism is primarily to take place when the body is scattered into the community where each believer lives toe-to-toe with unbelievers—where they live, work, and go to school.

### *Evangelistic Campaigns*

How do evangelistic programs or campaigns relate to the progress of the church? First of all, it must be understood that evangelistic campaigns in no way relinquish the believer’s responsibility to live out the reality of Christ and to share the Person of Christ with those where he works, lives, or goes to school. These are a person’s natural sphere of influence and the primary place of evangelistic outreach.

Actually, evangelistic campaigns only provide a local church with the opportunity of extending its sphere of influence, touching those who possibly have never heard of Christ. But, it must be remembered that these opportunities bring responsibilities. We should not be trapped into thinking that an evangelistic campaign is an end in itself. In actuality, it is at best just another step in expanding the church’s sphere of influence and occasions to share Christ.

Except for sending out missionaries as in Acts 13:1-4, there are no other references in the New Testament that even suggest that the first-century church ever organized to share Christ. As has already been mentioned, evangelism was natural and spontaneous, resulting from a transforming life in Jesus Christ. Today we generate evangelistic programs and campaigns because evangelism is not being accomplished naturally and spontaneously. The pastor becomes the promoter of a program that forces the members of the congregation into unnatural situations in which to share Christ. And we wonder why believers involved become frustrated and why the program typically lacks intended results. Remember that the only organization of the early church was the organization for the corporate gathering of the church under the leadership of the elders. There was no need for any other type of organization for evangelism.

### *Uncultivated Friendships*

The last basic reason why sharing of Christ is not a lifestyle is that friendships with unbelievers are not cultivated. In his book, *New Testament Follow-up*, Waylon Moore indicated that 95 percent of all Christian church members never lead a person to Christ.<sup>1</sup> He further observed that 99 percent of those who do bring another to Christ never spend time in following up that person.<sup>2</sup> Moore’s figures are tragic. With the current hit-and-run methodologies of evangelism, we have been told that it is not necessary to develop friendships with unbelievers. It has been suggested that we need only to contact people in a superficial manner to determine their openness to the Gospel. If they are open, we are to share the Gospel, leaving the follow-up to the Holy Spirit.

I would like to recommend that, rather than hit-and-run, we need a care-share-care approach. Unless we develop friendships with unbelievers, we cannot naturally and effectively demonstrate the reality of Christ or share the person of Christ. These friendships provide a natural forum for effective follow-up when one does trust Christ as his Savior. We need to remember that Christ’s command was to make disciples, not decisions. This does not occur apart from developed friendships in our sphere of influence.

### **Conclusion**

Believers are to demonstrate the reality of Christ in their lives and share the person of Christ with their lips. That is what changed the first-century world, and that is what can change the twenty-first-century world.

However, one cannot share a reality he does not possess. It behooves every believer to be in the continual process of being transformed by the Word of God as he grows together with other believers in Christ. Then there will be an increasing reality of Christ in their lives, which can be demonstrated and shared with others.



## **Endnotes**

1. Waylon B. Moore, *New Testament Follow-Up* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 19.
2. Ibid.