

Biblical Evangelism

How did the early Church set out to evangelize and make new converts? When comparing their approach with ours today, we begin to notice the glaring differences. Here are just three that seem to stand out most:

- random outreach programs
- preaching a Gospel without repentance
- preaching a Gospel without POWER

RANDOM OUTREACH PROGRAMS

The popular outreach programs in most Churches today are almost entirely random. They are devoid of spiritual direction and organized arbitrarily. Here is a typical scenario to demonstrate my point:

Cornerstone Bible Church on Fourth and Main is heavily missions oriented and conducts several local outreach programs throughout the week. Monday evenings they send out a team of five men to their local penitentiary for one-on-one evangelism with the prisoners. On Wednesdays they distribute several hundred Gospel tracts within a 50 mile radius of their Church. And on Friday nights they reserve a two hour time slot open air preaching in the center of town square. But for all of their dedicated outreach efforts they have only managed to make one new convert in the last three years and their sole “convert” has not yet been baptized because of a persistent alcohol addiction. Sounds familiar??? Believe it or not, most outreach methods are carried out in the same random fashion over and again, year after year with little or nothing to show for it. So why is that? To uncover the answer we must study the outreach efforts of the first century Church and then compare our practices with theirs. For instance, it’s important to note that the Apostles never engaged in any type of random outreach. In fact, they were expressly forbidden to by Christ:

*... behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves... And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house... And in the same house remain... **Go not from house to house** (Luk 10:3-5).*

***And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence** (Mat 10:11).*

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you (Mat 7:6).

So if the first century Church did not engage in random evangelism, how *did* they evangelize? It is clear from Scripture that **they were led by the Spirit in every decision they made and so their evangelism was Holy Spirit directed**. As a result, many of their evangelistic missions were guided supernaturally by God and were the product of **divine appointment** as seen in the following scriptures:

*On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: **And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.** And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, **the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee** (Act 10:9-19).*

***And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.** And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. **Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.** And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him (Act 8:26-31).*

*As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, **the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them...** So they,*

being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus (Act 13:2-4).

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, ***and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia***, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: ***but the Spirit suffered them not***. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. ***And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.*** And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them (Act 16:6-10).

And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, ***Paul was compelled by the spirit***, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ (Act 18:5).

Clearly, everything done by the Apostles in terms of evangelism was Holy Spirit directed and therefore greatly successful. This meant that they didn't have to:

- argue with others in a loud voice
- use the 10 commandments as a hammer
- spend 10,000 words attempting to prove God's existence
- rationally defend against opposing worldviews

Sadly, these are the common tactics employed in many evangelical Churches today. Because we lack spiritual direction and clarity we try to be as persuasive as possible with our opponents. **We use an intellectual approach rather than a spiritual one.** And instead of waiting on God to orchestrate His perfect timing by granting us divine appointments, we rush ahead to get the job done. **But one thing we should note. In all of the above examples, the Holy Spirit was working in tangent with the Apostles. He had already prepared the harvest field for them and therefore their efforts were not in vain. He had gone ahead, creating a spiritual hunger within the hearts of those who were then led to faith. This teaches us that we should not be motivated to evangelize based on seeing the need only, but rather because we have received clear guidance from the Holy Spirit concerning to whom we should minister.**

Share Your Faith When Prompted (1 Peter 3:15)

1 Peter 3:15 gives us the following instruction:

*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and **be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear** (1 Pet 3:15).*

According to the above instruction, we should not attempt to cram the Gospel down the throat of every individual we encounter. Rather we should wait to minister to individuals who **ask about our faith from a genuine desire to learn about God**. This will save us a lot of time and heartache. And if we pray that the Lord sets us up with divine appointments and be attentive toward the opportunities that He does bring our way, we will do a far greater service for His Kingdom (Mat 9:38).

PREACHING A GOSPEL WITHOUT REPENTANCE

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When trying to decide how to share Christ with someone, the starting point should be the same as that of John the Baptist and Jesus Himself. Matthew 3:2 tells us that John began his ministry with the words “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Repentance refers to a “change of mind,” which implies sorrow for past offences (2 Corinthians 7:10), a deep sense of the evil of sin as committed against God (Psalm 51:4), and a conscious decision to turn from sin to God. The first words Jesus spoke when He began His public ministry were identical to John’s (Matthew 4:17). Later the Apostles would begin their own public ministry proclaiming the same message of repentance (Act 2:38; 3:19; 17:30).

Biblical evangelism – The good news and the bad news

The word "gospel" means "good news." While many well-meaning Christians begin their evangelistic efforts with the good news of God’s love for mankind, that message is lost on unbelievers who must first come to grips with the extent of the bad news. First, man is separated from a holy, righteous God by sin. Second, God hates sin and is “angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7:11). Third, death and judgment are inevitable (Hebrews 9:27). Fourth, man is wholly incapable of doing anything about the situation. Until the full extent of this bad news is presented, the good news cannot be effectively communicated.

Biblical evangelism – The holiness of God

What is missing from much modern evangelism is the holiness of God. In Isaiah’s vision of heaven, God’s holiness is being extolled by the seraphim around the throne. Of all the attributes of God they could have praised, it was His holiness—not His love—of which they sang. “And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory’” (Isaiah 6:3). When we understand just how holy God is, we can begin to understand His hatred of sin and His righteous wrath against sinners. Zechariah 8:16-17 and Proverbs 6:16-19 outline the sins God hates—pride, lying, murder, false witness, those who stir up trouble, and those with evil in their hearts. We cringe at the idea of God actually hating, because we are more comfortable with Him as a God of love, which He certainly is. But His hatred is real and it burns against evil (Isaiah 5:25; Hosea 8:5; Zechariah 10:3).

The unsaved person stands in mortal peril of the wrath of holy God, as Hebrews 10:31 reminds us: “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” An unbeliever is separated from God by his sin, which God hates, and there is nothing he can do about it. His nature is corrupt and fallen and he is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) with no hope of redeeming himself. He cannot save himself, in spite of good intentions or good works (Romans 3:20). Every good work that man thinks he can do is as “filthy rags” in God’s sight (Isaiah 64:6). No amount of good living will make us acceptable in God’s eyes because the standard is holiness, without which no one will see God (Hebrews 12:14).

So the next time we attempt to share the Gospel with the unconverted, it is best to remember the biblical formula of evangelism. We should begin by reiterating the importance of repentance from sin in light of God’s holiness, before presenting man with the Good news of salvation.

PREACHING A GOSPEL WITHOUT POWER

*And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, ... **heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you*** (Luk 10:8-9).

*And fear came upon every soul: and **many wonders and signs** were done by the **apostles*** (Act 2:43).

And Stephen, full of faith and power, **did great wonders and miracles** among the people (Act 6:8).

Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in **the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands** (Act 14:3).

Through **mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God**; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Rom 15:19).

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, **but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power** (1Co 2:4).

That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, **but in the power of God** (1Co 2:5).

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also **bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?** (Heb 2:3-4)

It is evident that the Apostles did not proclaim a powerless Gospel. Clearly, they relied upon the Holy Spirit to produce the desired results. And so beholding the supernatural acts of God, many Christian converts were made in short time (Act 2:41; 4:4).

So why is there such a struggle to expand the Church today? And why is it so difficult to persuade the world of the reality of God? **Could it be that it's because the Gospel being preached lacks supernatural confirmation?** People thumb their noses at God because they don't see the evidence of His existence in our lives or in our proclamation of the Gospel. But is this a deficiency on God's part or ours? According to Scripture, God is just as capable of doing miracles and saving people today as He's always been. The problem does not lie with Him, but rather with us:

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa 59:1-2).

We can glean an important message from the above passage. God does not hear the prayers of the rebellious sinner, nor does He save those who continue in inequity. But in the same way that He rejects the rebel and sinner, He also does not bless or endorse those who opt to do things **their way** rather than comply with the prescription laid out in Scripture. So while God is certainly able, **He refuses** to stamp His approval on our evangelistic efforts as long as we ignore His requirements, and therefore our labors may proceed in vain.

CONCLUSION

Thus far we've seen that the first century Church did not engage in random evangelism. We've also noted that **all** of the Apostle's outreach efforts were Holy Spirit directed and followed the pattern of divine appointment. And since they were highly successful, the Apostles did not have to waste their time on endless intellectual dialogue attempting to rationalize the existence of God. They did not have to argue their opponents into a corner in order to convert them. Furthermore, they began all of their messages with an earnest plea for repentance prior to presenting the Good News of salvation (Act 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). This tells us that repentance from sin is at the core of Biblical evangelism.

Lastly, we've demonstrated the importance of the power of the Holy Spirit in converting unbelievers through the evidence of **supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles**. It was this same supernatural power that drove many thousands of converts to join the ranks of the Church in such short time. So what can we learn from all of these clear examples? Shouldn't we consider revising our ministry tactics? Perhaps it's time we did evangelism **God's way** and followed the Apostle's example: ***Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you*** (Php 4:9).

In Christ alone,
John A.