



How Shall We Then Evangelize?

BY DR. RON J. BIGALKE JR.

When discussing evangelism, it is important to begin with an understanding of both the divine and human attitude. In 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 the divine attitude is revealed. Verse 18 teaches that God is the *Author* of reconciliation; verse 19 teaches Jesus is the *Agent* of reconciliation; and, verse 20 teaches the Christ-

ian is the *Ambassador* of reconciliation. The responsibility and privilege of the Christian in God's work of reconciliation could not be clearer. Furthermore, it is evident that evangelism begins with God. Evangelism is more about the glory of God than about those who are separated from Christ or those who are proclaiming the Gospel.

Romans 1:1-17 reveals the human attitude. The “I am” statements from the Apostle Paul should be true of every Christian. His statement “I am under obligation” in verse 14 stresses the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel. The “I am eager” statement indicates the proper attitude to characterize all Gospel preaching. The “I am not ashamed” statement indicates the proper testimony of every witness for Christ. These three statements should be characteristic of every Christian.

The foundational attitudes taught in these verses should immediately result in the development of a strategy for proclaiming the Gospel. Michael Green wrote, “Christianity is enshrined by the life, but it is proclaimed by the lips. If there is a failure in either respect the gospel cannot be communicated.”¹ The Gospel is proclaimed in both word and deed.² Understanding the divine and human attitudes in evangelism is foundational for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Various Approaches to Evangelism

It appears that there are four types of biblical evangelism: household, personal, proclamational, and literary evangelism (it must be noted that these types of biblical evangelism are not mutually exclusive, and one particular approach is not mandatory for each and every believer). Understanding the proper attitudes and various approaches to evangelism will assist the church in fulfilling her responsibility to proclaim the Gospel.³ The *first evangelistic approach* to be used by the local church is household evangelism with a distinction between the people and the place.

There are several values of home evangelism deeming it appropriate for the local church. The small numbers, within a casual and hospitable atmosphere, allow for genuine and informed dialogue regarding spiritual issues. Home evangelism may avoid artificial isolation with the listeners, and avoid temptation to gain approval by crude or obvious means, as in a public place. The early church met in homes, “devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer . . . and the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42, 47b).

There are also several New Testament examples indicating the value of home evangelism. The embryonic church met in the upper room (1:13), which may have been “the house of Mary, the mother of John [Mark]” in

Jerusalem “where many were gathered together and were praying” (12:12). It is possible that Lydia’s house and the jailer’s house at Philippi were important places



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for the proclamation of the Gospel (16:15, 32-34). It is likely that Jason’s house at Thessalonica was a prominent meeting place, which resulted in the Jews forming a mob against him (17:5). Paul found safety in the home of Titius Justus (18:7). “The house of Philip the evangelist” at Caesarea appears to have been hospitable for seafarers (21:8). Stephanas’ house in Corinth was used “for ministry to the saints” (1 Corinthians 16:15-18).

There is much evangelistic emphasis upon the household in Scripture.⁴ For example, the conversion of the head of the household often results in God drawing the entire family to faith in Christ. Cornelius “called together his relatives and close friends” to hear Peter (Acts 10:24). When Peter entered the house, he “found many people assembled” (10:27). Lydia, “a seller of purple fabrics,” is another example of an entire household being converted (16:15). It seems that Lydia was unmarried at the time; therefore, she would have been the head of the household. Similarly, the Philippian jailer and his household are brought to faith in the Lord (16:33). Sometimes, the conversion of the wife would result in the husband being “won without a word by the behavior of [his wife]” (1 Peter 3:1; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:14; 2 Corinthians 6:14). The conversion of slaves even had some influence upon the household (Romans 16; Philippians 1:13; 4:22; Philemon).

The *second evangelistic approach* to be used by the local church is personal evangelism. Personal evangelism occurs through the personal encounter of a believer proclaiming the Gospel to an unbeliever with the intent



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of a response of faith in Jesus Christ; it is dealing with a lost person on an individualistic basis. The personal contact between a believer and an unbeliever was essential for the spreading of the Gospel message.

New Testament examples of personal evangelism would include the ministry of John the Baptist "with two of his disciples" (John 1:35-37). Andrew was "one of the two who heard John speak, and followed [Christ]" (1:40); he brought his brother, Simon Peter, to Christ (1:41-43). Jesus found Philip (1:43), who then brought Nathaniel to Jesus (1:45). There are several examples of personal evangelism from the ministry of Christ, as He met with Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10), Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), and the Samaritan woman (4:1-42). Many of His healings were personal encounters with the lost (Mark 1:21-28; 2:1-12; 3:1-6; 5:25-34; 7:31-37; 8:22-26, etc.) or direct contact with individuals (e.g. the disciples, Lazarus, Mary and Martha, et al). Other examples would include the personal encounter of Peter and John with the lame beggar at the Temple (Acts 3:1-10), and Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). The Apostle Paul had several references in his Epistles that were personal in nature, which would assume the personal nature of proclaiming the Gospel.

The means of personal evangelism can be divided into two types. The first type may be called the unplanned or "defensive" type. This type of evangelism occurs when someone asks about the Christian faith. First Peter 3:15 instructs Christians to be ready always to give an answer to such questions. The second type of personal evangelism may be called the planned or "offensive" type. The term offensive here does not refer to being obnoxious; it refers to the type of evangelism where a Christian takes the initiative to approach the lost with the intent to share the Christian faith.

The *third evangelistic approach* to be used by the local church is proclamational evangelism, which can include five strategies. While personal evangelism was used in the spread of the Gospel, proclamational evangelism was equally important. The first strategy is synagogue preaching (the modern equivalent would be preaching in religious centers). The intent of this preaching is to reason from the Scripture that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The Apostle Paul used this strategy consistently, as can be see in Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1-2, 10; 17:17; 18:1, 4, 19; 19:8 (cf. Apollos in Acts 18:26).

The second strategy is open air preaching. Jesus used this strategy consistently, as is evident in His discourses. Open air preaching is generally an unplanned meeting where a number of people are gathered or will potentially congregate. Biblical examples of this strategy include Peter in Jerusalem (2:14), Philip in Samaria (8:5), and Paul in Lystra (14:8) and Athens (17:22-33).

Teaching and apologetics are a third strategy of open air preaching. There is a strong relationship between teaching and preaching since all preaching has teaching in it, and all teaching has some preaching in it. Paul "was reasoning . . . with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day" in Athens (17:17). In Ephesus, he reasoned "daily in the school of Tyrannus" (19:9). Paul's teaching was so effective for the two years in Ephesus that "the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater" (19:31). Not only was Paul's teaching effective, but also his defense of the faith was evident (24:12).

The fourth strategy of open air preaching is the testimony of praise to God for what He had done in salvation. Relational (testimony) evangelism is a strategy that is focused on being used of God to lead an individual to

faith and repentance, as a natural result of a relationship that has developed over a period of time. The relationship with an individual becomes a primary factor (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12). However, there is a need for caution with this strategy, as Machen indicated.

From the beginning Christianity was a campaign of witnessing. And the witnessing did not concern merely what Jesus was doing within the recesses of the individual life. To take the words of Acts in that way is to do violence to the context and to all the evidence. On the contrary, the Epistles of Paul and all the sources make it abundantly plain that the testimony was primarily not to inner spiritual facts but to what Jesus had done once for all in his death and resurrection. Christianity is based, then, upon an account of something that happened, and the Christian worker is primarily a witness. But if so, it is rather important that the Christian worker should tell the truth. When a man takes his seat upon the witness stand, it makes little difference what the cut of his coat is, or whether his sentences are nicely turned. The important thing is that he tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.⁵

The fifth strategy of open air preaching is prophetic preaching (1 Corinthians 12:10, 29). Although the gift of prophecy was temporary and foundational to the church (Ephesians 2:20), it does indicate a profound effect of Scripture upon the lost.

Proclamational evangelism is a strategy of evangelism that is focused on proclaiming the Gospel in a context where a large number (generally) of listeners are present and are exposed to the truth. The context in which the truth is presented becomes a primary factor (cf. Acts 17).

The fourth evangelistic approach to be used by the local church is literary evangelism. It is essential not only to preach the Gospel, but also to write about the Gospel. Literary evangelism is an approach for transmitting the Gospel when geographical locations may prohibit. John's Gospel is one example of this approach (John 20:31). Midnight Call Ministries, as another example of literary evangelism, is a nonprofit missionary organization, dedicated to proclaiming the entire Bible as the unfailing and eternal written Word of God, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and is the unerring guide for the Christian faith. Quite simply, the objective of Midnight Call is to use radio, literature, and missionaries to call people everywhere to Christ, to proclaim the Second Com-



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ing of Christ, to prepare Christians for His coming, and to uphold the faith and warn of false doctrines.

Evangelism and Discipleship

Acts 1:8 states that every Christian has been given a command to be a witness for Christ. Mark 16:15 states each Christian has been commissioned to make known the Gospel message to the lost of every generation. However, the greatest reason one should witness for Christ is that He commanded it of His church. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is not a challenge or an option; it is the Lord Jesus Christ's command to the disciples of every generation.

The fundamental imperative of the Great Commission is to make disciples. Evangelism is an event in the process of making disciples (cf. 1 Corinthians 15). The Greek word *matheteusate* is an imperative of command, which means literally "to make a disciple of, teach." Matthew 28:19 in the KJV reads "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." The word teach means literally to "make disciples" as in the NASB. The Greek word meaning "to make a disciple of, teach" is the only verb in the commission; therefore, it emphasizes the most important detail of the passage. The words go and baptize in verse 19 and the word teaching in verse 20 are all participles, which means they inform the church how to make disciples, that is, how to teach. Before one can become a disciple, he or she must first understand the Gospel, which is the need for evangelism, and is certainly implied in the word go.

On a basic level, *matheteuo*, which is translated as “disciple” means to believe another’s doctrine. However, there is a much deeper meaning, which is not only to learn but also to commit oneself as the teacher’s follower in both doctrine and lifestyle. Furthermore, the word *mathetes* (“disciple, adherent”) refers to the disciple as an adherent who receives the teaching communicated to him and makes it his standard of conduct. What are the curricula then for this teaching?

Second Timothy 3:16 states that the result of the inspiration of Scripture is to make it “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” The word “teaching” is *didasklian* from *didasko*. Teaching is a synonym for doctrine. It is undoubtedly mentioned first because a Christian’s understanding (doctrine) must chronologically and logically precede practice of the Christian life. It is crucial to living the Christian life. Doctrine without practice is dangerous. However, practice without doctrine is deadly. One cannot isolate doctrine from the practical, which would cause both to suffer. Sound doctrine is essential. The remaining three (“reproof, correction, and training in righteousness”) of the four profitable uses of the inspired (“God-breathed,” as literal as though God had a physical body and spoke the words of Scripture through His mouth) Scripture are the corollary (i.e. the effect, the result) of sound doctrine. The desired result (verse 17) is “that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Paul commended Timothy because he continued in the things he learned, and internalized the learning (i.e. the learning became a part of his life). Timothy was committed to the sound doctrine he had learned from childhood.

There is a tendency not to understand all components of the Great Commission. For instance, no Christian can claim obedience to the Great Commission until he has “made disciples” through preaching the Gospel, “baptized” converts in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and “indoctrinated” converts in the whole counsel of God’s Word. It is not to say that every Christian must accomplish all components of the Great Commission in his own personal ministry. God has given various gifts, ministries, and offices among His people. However, it is certainly the will of God for each Christian to support actively and prayerfully that group of Christians which is wholly dedicated to this task. There is no biblical indication of a “streamlined” Commission

that consists in merely preaching a “simple” Gospel and then allowing converts to decide for themselves into “the church of their choice.” Sometimes, of course, circumstances leave one helpless to do this (such as witnessing on an airplane when only a short amount of time is available), but it is no excuse for ignoring the full statement of the Great Commission or forgetting the ultimate goal as given by our Lord.

Not only is there a tendency not to be obedient toward all components of the Great Commission, but also there is a tendency to ignore the truth that Christ and His apostles gave utmost emphasis upon indoctrination of converts in “the whole counsel of God’s Word.” For instance, in the New Testament, one reads that the apostles won converts, baptized them, and organized them into local churches for the purpose of doctrinal and practical edification and observance of all biblical commands. Although evangelism and communicating to a lost person the reality of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone are vitally important components of the total responsibility of the local church, the church must be continually reminded that the New Testament places the utmost emphasis upon the feeding (teaching) of those who are already Christians! Indeed, it may be said that the indoctrination of converts in the whole counsel of God’s Word is the basic New Testament pattern for world evangelization. Apart from this emphasis, Christian evangelism will soon become ineffective and superficial. (MC)

Dr. Bigalke is Pastor of Coastal Bible Chapel (coastalchapel.org) and Director of Eternal Ministries (eternalministries.org).

ENDNOTES

- 1 Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (England: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 300.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 273-299.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 300-355.
- 4 Noah and his household entered the Ark (Gen 6). Terah and his household left Ur for the land of Canaan (11:27-12:1). God covenanted with David and his house (2 Sam 7:16). David was gracious to Mephibosheth because he was of the house of Jonathan (2 Sam 4:4; 9:1-13). The command of Deuteronomy 12:12 (cf. 14:26) assumes the importance of the household.
- 5 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 53.