

Modern Methods of Evangelism

Are they valid?

5 Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour.

9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building.

(1 Cor 3:5-9)

The world is full of different methodologies that claim to be successful in local church evangelism, all of them different and all of them popular. Some have become international movements, such as the Seeker-Sensitive phenomenon. But do any of these have any Biblical credit? What does the Bible teach about man's involvement in evangelism?

This passage is critical in such a study; note what it says:

- The different powerful ministers (preachers) that are involved are nothing. (v5, 7)
- One minister does one thing, another has a different function. (v6)
- The actual life derives from God. (v7)
- Men receive a reward for their part. (v8)
- The building work is all of God. (v9)

This is a crucial text. Despite the great usefulness and gifting of Paul as an evangelist and apostle, he is nothing. The power of witnessing does not depend upon him, his spiritual status or his gifts. Despite the talents of Apollos, which were very different to those of Paul and very popular in Corinth, he is nothing either. Even together with one planting the seed and the other watering, they are both nothing in terms of a person being brought to life in the Gospel.

This is hugely important to understand. The power of God is what causes people to be regenerated, not men. Now this is obvious to all when stated bluntly, but it is overlooked in practice. Not even the massive gifts of a great and godly preacher actually determine anything, it is only the power of God that gives life. This means that a heavenly gifted man is not a guarantee of spiritual effectiveness. The best a man can be is a spiritual channel through whom God chooses to work at a particular time.

For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Gal 6:3)

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God. (2 Cor 3:5)

It also means that particular methods have no warranty either. Man's methodologies have no power of themselves. In practice, history shows that a successful method used by one person fails to work later by another, even though it was assiduously copied. But even practices that appear to work have no warranty if they are not sanctioned by the Bible. If God gives no guidance on this or that technique, then we have no authority to indulge in it. This is all the more important if God actually gives instructions about achieving church growth that have nothing in common with man's methods in practice today.

God's method

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ -- from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph 4:11-16)

Though we could examine several texts, this is enough for our purposes as it is so clear.

God gives gifts of men to the church, specifically apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (who function as elders in the local church). These people edify the church, they build up the church in what they do. The apostle plants new churches as a representative of the home sending church and identifies initial leadership potential; the prophets bring the word of the Lord (this was before the Bible had been established or circulated and was thus critical at this time); evangelists lead the people into witnessing (they don't just do all the work), while elders teach and pastor (shepherd) the flock.

The prime function of these men is to enable believers to find their ministry and grow into it so that they can function also. Leadership locates and develops ministry first and foremost. Leaders do not grandstand, they nurture. Consequently, the church is equipped to function effectively, i.e. the whole body ministers to itself and to outsiders. Part of Biblical leadership is to warn and guard against false doctrine which comes like the wind, first here then there; at one time gently at another in a great rush of power. Christians damaged by false teaching will be ineffective, so leaders ensure the members are prepared.

As members grow in their ministry the whole body grows up into Christ and every joint of the body (i.e. the meeting place between two members) supplies what is necessary to each other. In other words, as members are being matured they fellowship with each other and supply what others lack. The lack of one member is met by the gift of another. The need of one person is aided by the ability of another. Every member is working, every member is effective and every member operates in love, overwhelmingly dominated by the desire to help and work for the benefit of others. These actions ensure unity of life and purpose. Paul says categorically that when this is operating it **causes growth of the body**. Growth takes place, both internally in membership maturity and externally in numerical growth, when normal Biblical relationships ensure normal church life and normal discipleship.

If the local church is meeting and functioning in a Biblical fashion, and if its members are walking in godliness, there will be definite numerical growth because God will ensure it. In these circumstances he gives power to witness and power to believe.

God's method illustrated - a healthy church life

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

Notice what is being said: the church learned doctrinal teaching from the apostles, God's word was opened up; they broke bread and prayed regularly in intimate fellowship with one another; the needy were financially assisted; they worshipped God and the apostles performed miracles. Following all these things, the numbers in the church grew every single day.

So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. (Acts 5:11-14)

The constituents here are: miraculous works by the apostles, meeting in public unity and fear as a result of the instant death of Ananias and Sapphira for lying. The result was significant growth. Remember, however, that the miraculous works done by the apostles were always in the context of witnessing to Christ, with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 4:33).

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Now in those days, when *the number of the disciples was multiplying* ... (Acts 5:42-6:1)

After initial stages of growth, church numbers began to multiply, that is grow exponentially rather than simply by addition. The cause of this was that there was an unceasing teaching and preaching of Jesus Christ. Note that this is not just evangelising or preaching the Gospel, but it is also a teaching of Christ, that is an exposition of truth and doctrine about Christ. In other words, doctrinal and Biblical exegesis.

Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

When the word of God increased, church numbers were multiplied. There is a direct correlation between a faithful preaching and understanding of doctrine and church growth.

Then the churches throughout all Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied. (Acts 9:31)

Here multiplication of growth follows: peace, an edified church, and members walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Spirit. 'Comfort' is *paraklesis*, [Strong's 3874] which means: a calling near, a summons, especially for help.¹ It means that believers had a close association with the Spirit who helped them and gave them strength to walk wisely.

When he [Barnabus] came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. (Acts 11:23-24)

¹ Subsidiary meanings of *para,khlsij* include: supplication, entreaty, exhortation, admonition, encouragement, consolation, comfort; persuasive discourse, admonitory or conciliatory discourse .

Barnabus encourages the church and urges the members to follow Jesus purposely. Following his exhortation, the church grew.

Perhaps, as a general observation, we can note that, **great grace was upon them all** (Acts 4:33).

If we leave out the miraculous works of the apostles, which are not being evidenced anywhere today (despite the false claims of Charismatics), from these few scriptures we can see that the following items were vital to a healthy witness to the Gospel:

- An emphasis upon doctrinal teaching representing the apostolic revelation of Christ.
- An emphasis upon exposition of the Bible as God's word.
- Proper NT church meetings that included a focus upon edification, breaking bread, prayers, sharing and meeting the needs of the poor.
- Biblical praise and worship (notice there is no mention of music or emotionally manipulated large meetings; all fellowship meetings were in houses).
- The fear of the Lord.
- Walking in the Spirit.

In other words, this is all simple, normal NT discipleship and church meetings. When the church obeys God in the way it assembles together and the way believers conduct their lives, the normal Biblical result is church growth.

When the church is disobeying God in the way it meets and when Christians are failing to walk in a godly manner, then all sorts of methods and gimmicks are required to try to drag unbelievers into meetings that are naturally unattractive to them. This is done by making church more worldly and appealing to the flesh - using loud music, drama, audio-visual shows, entertaining worship, rousing short messages full of sound-bites and so on. Even if numbers increase for a while, the fall-out rate is catastrophic over time because the whole thing is superficial and unspiritual. God's work done man's way does not pay.

Conclusion

The church does not need the clever ideas of men, or even the daft ideas that so frequently tarnish modern churches. The jamborees, advertising campaigns, crusades, gimmicks, binding of demons, worldliness, and para-church organisations (not matter how much good they may do) are not required. God has allowed some historic para-church organisations to prosper (such as missionary societies) simply because the church is not functioning correctly and men and women gifted by God to preach the Gospel were often spurned by the church. In times like these, God encourages a Hudson Taylor to establish the China Inland Mission or a CT Studd to found the Heart of Africa Mission (later WEC). Their faithfulness shames the church which should be reaching out itself.

However, considering the modern practices which are foisted upon the local church to encourage growth, we can say with assurance that all man's ideas are of no value, whatever they are, especially any that pander to worldly ideas. All that is required is for the church to assemble and function Biblically, and for individual believers to walk in the Spirit. This places a large focus upon the word of God so that believers can grown in their understanding of Christ. Teaching/preaching is not a dead or stale work but a means of developing Christ-likeness in those who mature in knowledge and love. The church is thus the place where truth and love are daily worked out in various practicalities.

As believers grow in Christ and learn to minister, they become more effective witnesses to the truth that fills their hearts. They share the Gospel everywhere they go, with their neighbours, friends, relatives and work-mates. When everyone in a church is focused upon Christ, filled with his truth and walking in his Spirit, then you have the most powerful evangelistic tool in the universe.

This is how the early church overtook the Roman Empire - they just got on with witnessing individually day by day. The apostles established the early churches until they died out, largely by about 70 AD (though some, like John, lived longer); and then the churches completed the work. Though no apostle (that we know of) made it to Southern England, there was a thriving church here (as well as in Ireland, Iona and Northumbria) before the Bible was complete. (The church thus went further than the Romans.) Ordinary believers just got on with it. Ordinary believers can still change the world. Will they rise to the end-time occasion?

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