

THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF EVANGELISM

The official definition of evangelism, adopted by American Baptist Churches USA in 1984, states that “evangelism is the joyous witness of the people of God to God’s redeeming love, which urges repentance and reconciliation to God and each other through faith in Jesus Christ—who lived, died, and was raised from the dead. Through renewal with Jesus, believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into the church for worship, fellowship, nurture, and engagement as disciples in God’s mission of evangelization and liberation within society and creation, signifying the Kingdom that is present and yet to come.” This implies two levels of evangelism. The first level is personal evangelism. The second level is corporate evangelism.

Since evangelism is the “joyous witness” of the people of God to God’s redeeming love, on the personal level, believers should be excited about their relationship with Christ. This excitement should cause them to want to share their new found faith with others. The old song writer described it this way. “I just couldn’t keep it to myself. I had to tell somebody else, what the Lord has done for me. You ought to been there when He saved my soul. You ought to been there, when He put my name on the roll. I started walking. I started talking. I started singing. I started shouting, what the Lord has done for me.” The Invitation Quotient in the book *“Finding Them, Keeping Them”* (p. 31-32) could be viewed as a measure of the believer’s excitement level. Based on this test, the inevitable conclusion is that most American saints are not genuinely excited about their faith. The Samaritan woman, who met Jesus at the well, is a wonderful example of what it means to be a “joyous witness.”

First, being excited about evangelizing means you must have met Jesus for yourself. From the moment the Samaritan woman left her house, she was on a divine collision course with

Jesus. Secondly, I am excited about evangelizing because I have found that which was missing in my life—Jesus. She realized that Jesus was the “man” she had been looking for all her life. She had been looking for a connection. She thought that it could be found in a horizontal relationship. What she was really looking for, and didn’t realize it, could only be found in a vertical relationship. Thirdly, when you are excited about your relationship with God it causes others to want to, at least, check it out and see what all the excitement is about. This woman dropped everything and ran back in town to tell the people “come see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” This woman’s witness caused the towns people to go hear Jesus for themselves. Although I cannot save anyone, I can make them thirsty for the Savior. Jesus said, “Ye are the salt of the earth.” (Matt. 5:13) The result of the woman’s evangelizing efforts was “many more believed because of His own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.” (John 4:41-42). Her witness resulted in reproduction. Believers today are also responsible for reproduction.

As a member of the body of Christ, I have the wonderful privilege of working together with other believers to win people to Christ. Sharing the Good News is not an option because our Lord commands us to evangelize. Corporate evangelism means that the church must develop a strategy for reaching souls for the kingdom and training them to reach others. The command to evangelize and the biblical paradigm are given in Acts 1:8.

The call to the church to engage in evangelism is found in the commandment, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me.” The power to be an effective witness would be supplied by God the Holy Spirit. This impartation is a source of comfort and encouragement. The word “martyr” comes from the word translated “witness.” A martyr is a person who gives up his or her life for a cause.

God never promised evangelizing would be safe or comfortable. The call to evangelize is also a call to give up something. It may be time, money, profession or a personal dream. In some countries it means giving up one's life. The life of the Apostles, and the history of the church, is a testimony to the dangers inherent in the call to be "witnesses unto me." The power of the Holy Spirit is imparted unto the believer for witnessing.

The parameters for witnessing are clearly spelled out—"in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Parenthetically, this sets the geographical context for the book of Acts. Contemporaneously, Jerusalem could be your home or the immediate community in which you live. Judea would be the extended community. Samaria could be your city (some see it as the State). The one certainty seems to be we should start in our present vicinity.

The end of Acts chapter one, through chapter two, gives us some keys to effective evangelistic efforts. First, the church was in prayer. (Acts 1:14) Evangelism efforts must be grounded in prayer. The disciples had seen this demonstrated in the life of Jesus and would follow His example. Believers today should spend time in prayer individually and at set times with the corporate body. Secondly, Christ centered preaching is primary. On the day of Pentecost, Peter's preaching was Christocentric. Christ centered preaching is rooted in the word of God. Thirdly, teaching and fellowship are essential. Not only must we reach them, but we must also nurture them. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." A close look at chapter two reveals a process of assimilation that involved assimilation through friendship, small groups, identification and spiritual growth. The Apostles provided oversight over this process. Churches today should develop a deliberate plan for growth. Church members must be helped discovering, developing

and deploying their gifts and talents. Delegation, under proper supervision, should be provided to make sure growth is taking place.

Finally, Spirit empowered living that exalts Christ is essential to drawing the lost. Consecration is essential. Believers evangelize because we know that without Christ men and women (also boys and girls old enough to be accountable) are without hope (Ephesians 2:12), under condemnation (John 3:36), and destined for destruction (Mark 16:16). Therefore, we must not only tell it, but we must also live it. What a believer does speaks louder than what he or she says. The old hymnist wrote, “Lift Him up by living as a Christian ought. Let the world in you the savior see. Then men will gladly follow Him who once taught I’ll draw all men unto men.” As a result, the testimony of the early churches evangelistic efforts was “these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.” (Acts 17:6)