

GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE--FALL, 2012

Introduction:

Evangelism has been at the heart of Great Commission Churches from the beginning of our movement in 1970. We are called to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Mark 16:15. We exist as an association of churches because of this desire to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in our cities, states, nation and the world.

In 2013, GCC will be launching the "Just Sow It!" initiative. This initiative will be explained in greater detail in days to come--but here is the general idea behind "Just Sow It!" It is based on the belief that God wants to use every person in the church to sow the gospel. God wants each of us to simply love and pray for the people in our lives and take the step of sharing Christ with them--and then leave the results up to Him. "Just sow it...and let God grow it!"

Someone said once "No matter who you are, you are the best Christian that somebody knows." I also appreciate this quote: "It does not take a perfect church to introduce a man to the perfect Christ." (Richard Woodsome). This was seen in 1st Thessalonians 1:6-8 in which newly saved believers were sharing Christ so much that the whole region heard the gospel.

In the New Testament, the pattern was for gifted leaders to bring the gospel to new areas. Small churches were started and began growing. God then worked through the whole church--evangelists, pastors, and church members-- to saturate that area with the good news of Jesus Christ. The gospel spreads because of the "proper working of each individual part" (Ephesians 4:16) as gifted leaders do their part and all the church members do their part in sowing the message of Christ in their area.

In preparation for "Just Sow It!" in 2013, we in GCC thought it would be good for Tom Short to share his insights on evangelism in the New Testament. For more than thirty years Tom has been a bold proclaimer of the gospel, particularly on college campuses. As a gifted evangelist, Tom has not only shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with thousands of people but he has also stirred the whole church to "Just Sow It!" In this paper, Tom gives special attention to the role of the evangelist in advancing the gospel.

Our prayer is that God will use this paper to increase evangelism by raising up more gifted evangelists and by inspiring every member to sow the gospel of Jesus Christ, in preparation for "Just Sow It!" in 2013.

John Hople, GCC Director

New Testament Evangelism in Action Today

Tom Short

Christianity is a missionary religion charged with the high calling of taking the message of Christ to every single person. We worship a God of such great love that he sent His only Son to save the world and we follow a Messiah who promised to make us fishers of men. We make no apology for intentionally and enthusiastically seeking to take the good news to every person – from our neighbor next door to a person half way around the world who has never even heard of Jesus. To do so is both to obey our Lord’s final commission as well as fulfill our moral obligation. This is also life’s highest honor and privilege – to be a co-worker with God in the redemption of mankind.

Such a high calling and responsibility behooves us to do the best we can in effectively communicating the gospel message. Consequently, many modern evangelicals have worked diligently to learn and embrace the most cutting edge communication strategies that allow them to be effective and culturally relevant. While these techniques can *enhance* effective communication, they must not replace or supersede the principles and examples of actual evangelism given to us in the New Testament. This paper is designed to examine evangelism in the New Testament and, where necessary or helpful, to make observations or raise questions of how modern ideas of evangelism may have undermined or distracted us from the principles and examples we are given in the New Testament.

And this is an issue that must be addressed. Our culture is going through sweeping changes in which both the very concept of evangelism as well as traditional ideas of how to evangelize are being challenged. In the last few decades, we have seen all kinds of evangelistic strategies: crusades, gospel booklets, friendship evangelism, servant evangelism, seeker oriented and seeker sensitive church services, Alpha groups, Christian movies, concerts and a whole plethora of other ideas designed to reach the lost. Let us state clearly from the outset of this paper that I am genuinely encouraged by **all** of these attempts to reach the lost and I hope many other creative ideas will emerge that help us evangelize. ***Nothing in this paper is intended to discourage any type of evangelistic efforts***: too few people are doing anything to reach the lost and we affirm all efforts by all faithful Christians to do so.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that something is terribly wrong when it comes to evangelism today. Surveys indicate that the percentage of American’s claiming to be Bible-believing, church-attending Christians has dropped from about 65% of Builders (born 1927 – 1945) to only 4% of Millennials (those born after 1984). (Note: stop for one minute and reread the previous sentence until it sinks in). Personal experience confirms that the number of young people following Christ has dropped dramatically. Multitudes of churches are stagnant, declining or dying. Many growing churches are not seeing new converts, but are simply adding transfers from other churches. While cultural trends like secularism, the breakdown of the family, the rise of sexual immorality, drug abuse and other hedonistic behavior undoubtedly have been huge contributors to this decline in conversions, one has to wonder if there are aspects of

New Testament evangelism that could better unleash the power of the gospel. Are there *principles, examples and commands* in the New Testament that we are ignoring to the detriment of accomplishing our mission?

In this paper, we will look at a number of keys to New Testament evangelism. Be ready. Some of these may appear to be quite radical. Some may step on your toes and cause you some discomfort. Please don't despise them, but consider them carefully. While not all of these points may apply to your personal or church situation, they are offered in the hope that God will raise up many soul-winners in our churches and that unbelievers will be converted to Christ in numbers we have never seen before. And, if we have any hope of reaching our world for Christ, that is exactly what we need!

10 Characteristics of New Testament Evangelism

1. New Testament Evangelism was Led by Leaders, Particularly Apostles and Evangelists

When reading the New Testament, one cannot help but recognize that God raised up leaders to lead out in evangelism. Jesus, Peter and Paul stand out for their life-long evangelistic focus. Phillip the Evangelist (Acts 21:8) and Apollos (Acts 18:24-28) were other leaders whose reputation for evangelism was well known. Timothy, a young man to whom Paul was passing on the baton of his leadership, was urged to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5).

Certainly, there is reason to believe that most New Testament believers testified to their faith in Christ. As the persecution of the Jerusalem church forced the saints to scatter, it seems as if all who were scattered preached the gospel (Acts 8:1-4) (although the focus even in this chapter is on the preaching of Phillip the Evangelist). Undoubtedly, the Twelve Apostles taught their converts the Great Commission and those converts would have caught the evangelistic spirit of those early apostles.

Thus, the New Testament model of evangelism is that leaders publicly led and were seen evangelizing the lost by the rest of the flock, and that the flock, motivated by their leader's example, also actively witnessed about their faith in Jesus Christ.

How does this compare with modern evangelistic efforts in the 21st century church of America? Are the leaders in your church models of evangelism?

The administrative, sermon preparation and counseling demands on the typical pastor today – demands that require him to spend hours in his office – make it extremely difficult to both reach out to the lost and to model this to his flock. Other than offering an invitation at the end of his Sunday message, most of those in our congregation never see their pastor involved in evangelism. They may *hear* a message on it and they may be *exhorted* to do it, but do they *see it being modeled*? Do they hear their pastor sharing real-life, recent examples of their evangelistic conversations with lost people? Do they see

new people coming to church that were won to Christ by their pastor? Do they hear in his prayers a passion for lost souls to be saved? Does the pastor have a *current, active heart* for evangelism and do his people *catch that spirit* of desire to win the lost?

If we are to model New Testament evangelism in action today, our leaders must do more than talk about it and teach it – they must figure out ways to model evangelistic zeal before their congregations. Never forget: more is caught than taught.

2. New Testament Evangelism Unleashes Powerful Evangelists

As we saw in point #1, leaders led out in evangelism. Those whose evangelistic activities were highlighted in the New Testament most likely had the gift of evangelism. While the New Testament does not specifically define what this gift is, it would be reasonable to assume a person with this gift has a special passion to win the lost and a greater effectiveness in communicating the gospel. The gift may exhibit itself in any number of ways: a dynamic public speaker like Billy Graham, a one-on-one communicator like Bill Faye, or an effective trainer like Bill Bright may all have a gift in evangelism.

At a recent leadership retreat, I asked a group of over 75 leaders how many believed that they had the gift of evangelism. Two or three hands went up. I asked how many wished they had this gift. Well over half the hands went up! Though this *gift* is seldom discussed, people sincerely desire it because they want to be effective soul-winners!

Does your church have any evangelists? Do you know who they are? What are you doing to encourage, equip and empower them? Are you asking God to raise up evangelists in your church? Are you praying for *workers* in the harvest field? Is there anyone in your church who is *fully given* to the work of evangelism?

It may be possible that one of our core values is unwittingly working against the raising up on effective evangelists. We believe every member is a minister and every member is to evangelize. We don't want a "professional clergy" where *only* the leaders (or those who get paid) do the hard work of evangelism. Therefore, we want to make evangelism easy enough for anyone to do it. This is good and something we must continue to diligently cultivate. But in this process, we don't want to "dumb evangelism down" to such a degree that we fail to affirm and challenge the gifted evangelists in our midst. Doing so could cause these evangelists to lose motivation or even find other places where their gifts are more appreciated.

Sometimes good illustrations may send a subtle message that discourages evangelists from being raised up in our midst. For instance, I have often taught the difference in growing by multiplication verses addition. If everyone will reach just one person every year, we will reach the world in a bit over 30 years. Contrast that to an evangelist who wins a thousand people to Christ every day: he would not even reach the state of Ohio in that same 30 years. But, let's be careful what are we saying here: Multiplication (reaching/discipling one per year) is the only real way to do things and

should be pursued; addition (reaching 365,000 per year) isn't wise and won't get the job done. But do we really think it is "not the best" if someone leads a few million people to Christ but doesn't have time to follow them all up. And what about all those examples of preaching to crowds that the Spirit chose to include in the New Testament? Could it be that God wants that evangelist to go ahead and win thousands of people and include others in the follow-up – others who might be less effective in evangelism but are excellent in loving, grounding and enfolding the new converts into the body?

We must make sure that the evangelists are freed up to focus on their evangelism and not be distracted by other ministry. For instance, suppose an evangelist in your church leads someone to Christ. Are they encouraged to now do all of the follow-up as well? Might it not be better to team this evangelist with someone who has a pastoral gift so that the evangelist can keep on fishing? All too often, our evangelists see someone come to Christ and then get so involved with follow-up and leading a small group that they are effectively distracted from doing more evangelism.

Furthermore, it is possible that we have defined the work of evangelist in such a way as to cripple his effect. Ephesians 4:11-16 tells us that God gave gifted men (including evangelists) to equip the saints for the work of service until the entire body is built up to maturity. Often, it has therefore been taught the role of a gifted evangelist "is not to evangelize but to teach the saints how they can evangelize." But perhaps the primary way that evangelists build up the body of Christ is by actually evangelizing! Perhaps they are meant to bring the numerical increase into the church! Just as the role of a teacher is to teach and a pastor is to pastor, an evangelist is to evangelize! Set them free! Encourage them! Affirm them! *The evangelists are key to new converts being won and added to our church.*

Of course, it is the evangelists who can and should train our congregations in how to effectively evangelize. But, if we are to model New Testament evangelism in action today, we must figure out ways to identify, affirm and empower the evangelists in our midst to give themselves fully to evangelism while at the same time not communicating that they are the only ones who are to evangelize.

3. New Testament Evangelism Boldly and Courageously Penetrates New Networks of People

With very few exceptions, New Testament evangelism went *to* the people. In the overwhelming number of examples given to us in the Bible, evangelists had *no previous relationship* with those to whom they were taking the gospel, nor did they take time to build relationships with lost people before evangelizing them. (Note: The closest example of this would probably be Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well in John 4. However, the brief conversation Jesus had with her before communicating direct gospel truths can hardly be used as a model for modern day "friendship evangelism" which encourages investing days, weeks and months in building a relationship with non-believers before engaging in meaningful evangelistic interaction.) Perhaps this is part of why Paul's prayer request when it came to his own evangelistic efforts was that he would

have boldness to speak up and clarity so that he would be understood. (Colossians 4:3-4, Ephesians 6:19-20).

It is true that in the New Testament we see people winning their friends and family to Christ. It is also true that, in many times and places, the most explosive gospel expansion occurred along relational lines. But in the New Testament (and also in the church growth studies where the gospel has expanded rapidly on the mission field), those relationships *already existed before* the person spreading the gospel was saved.

Contrast the New Testament example with what is commonly taught and practiced in the evangelical church today. The “friendship evangelism” model and the “servant evangelism” model have been fully embraced while, at the same time, discrediting and discounting “cold-turkey” or “initiative” evangelism. Studies have been produced showing that most people come to church because a friend – as opposed to a stranger -- invited them. We’re told that crusades, televangelism, door-to-door, and other forms of aggressive evangelism simply don’t produce much fruit. In fact, such efforts have often been ridiculed and declared to not only be ineffective, but *counterproductive*. The use of tracts and evangelistic literature has been discredited. Friendship evangelism books such as *Gentle Persuasion* and *Lifestyle Evangelism* not only presented a new model of evangelism that was simple enough that anyone could do it, but in the process of seeking to redefine what evangelism looked like, criticized and discredited more traditional forms of straightforward, direct, aggressive evangelism.

Thus, today, evangelism is often simply “building relationships” with lost people. We are told we must “earn the right” to share the gospel with someone and that we dare not even bring up Christ until we have “earned the trust” of those to whom we are seeking to witness. And while no one would argue that we shouldn’t lovingly reach out and build bridges with lost people, this is certainly not the *only way* to evangelize nor is it what is *primarily* modeled in the New Testament. The unfortunate result of exalting and embracing these other models is that the New Testament example of directly, boldly and courageously taking the gospel to people – of leading with the gospel – is often looked down upon, criticized and rejected.

Therefore, if we are to model New Testament evangelism in action today, we must affirm the use of aggressive, bold initiative evangelism. Obviously, we must learn to do this with kindness and respect for others. And while we will always be seeking to demonstrate love, build bridges and look for open door opportunities with relatives, people in our community and those with whom we work, we can not rely solely on these networks, but must seek to reach into new networks of lost people in order to win them to Christ.

4. New Testament Evangelism is Powerfully Anointed by the Holy Spirit

Effective New Testament evangelism involves weak men declaring a God-inspired message in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The evangelists in the New Testament were obviously anointed by the Holy Spirit in a powerful way. On the day of Pentecost, the church was born and 3,000 were added after the disciples “were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak” (Acts 2:4). When Peter spoke truth to the powers that be, he did so while filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8). When the church was threatened with persecution, they prayed and “the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). Stephen’s powerful defense of the gospel was possible because he was a man full of the Holy Spirit and his opponents were unable to cope with the power of that Spirit (Acts 6:5,10). Philip was led by the Spirit to approach the Ethiopian eunuch’s chariot at just the right time to explain the gospel to this man who sincerely wanted to know the truth about God (Acts 8:29). The evangelistic and apostolic ministry of Saul (Paul) and Barnabas was in answer to the call of and sending forth by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2-4). Paul’s rebuke of those opposing the gospel and the corresponding fruit was as a result of being filled with the Spirit (Acts 13:2-4) and even when they *didn’t* evangelize, it was because the Holy Spirit forbade them from doing so (Acts 16:6-7).

Over a century ago, E.M. Bounds astutely observed, “the church is looking for better methods, God is looking for better men – men of prayer.” Undoubtedly, men of prayer will also be men anointed with the Holy Spirit. The New Testament apostles were, as we have seen, men filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit; they were also men “*devoted to prayer and the ministry of the word*” (Acts 6:4). As a result, the word of God spread and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly (Acts 6:7).

Jesus’ promise to those with whom He entrusted the Great Commission was “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had taught His disciples “It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing” (John 6:63). Paul stressed that his preaching was in “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:5). These are vital truths that all soul-winners must believe and embrace. While we should sharpen our axe with as much communication wisdom as possible (Ecclesiastes 10:10, Proverbs 15:2), we must also never lose sight of the absolute necessity of being humble men, filled with, empowered by and anointed with the Spirit of God, for ultimately, the Spirit blows where He wishes and gives life to whom He chooses (John 3:8).

5. New Testament Evangelism Sows the Word Abundantly

A vital spiritual law is this: If we sow the word abundantly, we will reap abundantly. In Acts 6:7, Luke wrote: “And the word of God keep on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem...” If you don’t sow very much seed, you won’t reap very much fruit. Do you want to see more souls saved? Then do more evangelizing!

Unfortunately, much of our current “evangelism” isn’t sowing seed at all. Current methods encourage spending weeks, months, even years “building relationships” with the

lost before we have “earned the right” to talk with them about Jesus. Acts of kindness, service projects and “letting our light shine” have replaced the clear presentation of gospel truth by which a person can be born again. Even when we do speak up, often an invitation to church has somehow replaced an invitation to salvation through Jesus Christ.

It has become popular to quote St. Francis of Assisi who advised to “preach always; if necessary, use words.” But is this scriptural? Words are necessary and without words, the gospel is never being preached! Acts of kindness and Christian love are wonderful and should characterize our lives, *but they are not evangelism*. A church may be led to do service projects. A church may desire to show the love of Christ in tangible, physical ways in its community. It may do things to change stereotypical misunderstandings that people have of Christians. There may even be (and often is) fruit born from such PR or service projects, but these activities must never *replace* or be thought of as “evangelism.” Evangelism is bringing the good news that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This good news is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16). This gospel contains *information* that must be *believed* and people cannot believe it unless they *hear* it (Romans 10:14).

There are many ways to sow the seed of the gospel. People (especially evangelists) can be taught evangelistic presentations. They should be taught how to answer basic questions about our faith. Learning good transitional questions help us get into gospel conversations. The distribution of literature – especially personal testimony tracts – helps sow the seed. The methods of sowing the seed both individually and corporately are limited only by our lack of imagination. But we must sow *abundantly* if we wish to reap abundantly.

How abundantly is the seed of the gospel message being sown through your church? In the New Testament church, the Lord added to its number daily (Acts 16:5). Are your church members even sharing the gospel each day? Do you think *anyone* in your church gave a gospel presentation and invitation to Christ *today*? How recently do you think your average member has actually presented the gospel to an unbeliever? Do you have any individuals in your church who have presented the gospel *abundantly* this past week – say even to just seven unbelievers?

American culture presents many challenges to abundantly sowing the gospel. People are busy. Cocooning in our homes isolates us from others. But in parts of the world where the gospel is spreading rapidly, the gospel is being sown abundantly. We must figure out ways to do so here in America as well.

6. New Testament Evangelists Speak with Authority and Conviction.

Paul says his message came with “full conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Peter and John spoke with “confidence” even though they were uneducated and untrained men (Acts 4:13). Opponents of the gospel were unable to “cope with the wisdom or the spirit” with which Stephen was speaking (Acts 6:10). Apollos, a man “fervent in spirit,” “spoke out boldly” and “powerfully refuted” those who opposed the gospel message (Acts 18:24-28). The early church, even with the threat of persecution, spoke the word with *boldness*

(Acts 4:31).

Jesus prefaced the Great Commission by telling us He had “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt 29:18-20). The gospel message is not just our *opinion* or what *we* believe. It is a divine mandate given from God Himself. And now, God is “*commanding*” all people everywhere to repent and believe the gospel. We, too, are to speak, exhort and reprove with *all authority* and let no one disregard us (Titus 2:15). We are to do more than *share* the gospel; we are to *preach* it! (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

We live in a post-modern world that *rejects certainty* in the realm of the non-scientific. Certainty is seen as fake and arrogant; uncertainty is seen as authentic and humble. Therefore, postmodern communication stresses personal experience over divine truth. “Sharing” is preferable to “preaching.” “My personal opinion” is preferable to “thus says the Lord.”

Obviously, we need to be aware of and sensitive to these cultural influences. We are not to be arrogant know-it-alls. Wise evangelism seeks to meet a person where they are and communicate with them on their level. A wise bond-servant of God corrects (and converts) others with gentleness (2 Timothy 2:25). Nevertheless, our message must still be presented as something more than my own personal opinion or merely “something that worked for me.” New Testament evangelists knew they were communicating a divine and unalterable message. Ultimately, this was God’s message, they were His spokesmen and they delivered his message faithfully and with unwavering conviction and authority. We should, too.

Paul prayed for and sought to speak with courage and boldness when he proclaimed the gospel (Ephesians 6:19, Philippians 1:20, 1 Thessalonians 2:2). He had suffered greatly and he faced the possibility of more suffering whenever he proclaimed the gospel. In our day in our country, physical persecution is rare. But Satan has other tactics to intimidate us into silence. In particular, our secular culture has determined that some topics are not to be brought up in polite company. Religion is one of those taboo topics. Postmodern culture reacts even more strongly to the idea of “converting” someone. Therefore, many modern day, sincere disciples are attempting to “share the gospel in a non-offensive way.” While we certainly don’t aim to offend, the gospel itself is innately offensive. It accuses us and convicts us of being guilty sinners. It tells us there is no hope for us outside of the tender mercies of a God before whom we stand condemned. Jesus so offended people that they crucified Him. Paul offended to the point of being slandered, stoned and driven out of the city. Peter’s message got him and John locked up in jail. Stephen offended them such that they gnashed their teeth at him. Can we figure out a way to better communicate than these men whom we are called to imitate modeled for us in Scripture? Can we be “more loving” and “non-offensive” than they?

Indeed, the unwillingness to suffer or to step outside of what is culturally acceptable is, perhaps, the primary reason more people don’t bear witness of Jesus Christ. We fear men; we don’t fear God. No wonder those unbelievers whom we desire to see saved don’t come to Christ; our very example and attitude tell them that acceptance by

the world matters more than being reconciled to God. They have no fear of God in their lives (Rom 3:18) and they don't see it in ours either. Boldness and courage is inspiring, so if we want to win men, we need to become more fearless in our love for men.

7. New Testament Evangelism Goes to the People

God sent His Son to us. He came into our world. He commanded His disciples to go into the world. He sent them to the people – onto their turf. Paul spoke where the unbelievers were – the synagogues, the city square, the marketplace, down by a riverside. Wherever people gathered and talked, Paul was there.

Likewise, our early Great Commission Churches were born out of a strong evangelistic zeal that took the gospel *to* the people. The college campuses provided ample opportunity to meet people in the dorms, in the union, in the classroom and just hanging out outdoors. The campus community also provided excellent opportunity to take our disciples with us and train them in evangelism. Consequently, we spent a lot of time in the highways and byways imploring people to come to Christ.

As we moved off campus, we found that “going to the people” became far more difficult in the community setting. Many churches adjusted their strategy to focus on inviting people to come to church. With some, perhaps especially with church where the lead speaker has an evangelistic gift, this strategy has worked well; with others it hasn't and growth has leveled off or even declined.

There's certainly nothing wrong with inviting people to church. It's an easy first step many people can take. But it is terribly deficient to build our *entire* evangelistic strategy on inviting people to church. There are multitudes of people who simply won't come to church – and who wouldn't be all that interested in our services even if they did. After all, they aren't saved yet, they are dead toward God, the Holy Spirit is not in them and they just might not be all that excited about worshipping God. Additionally, as our culture becomes more secular and anti-Christians have a growing effect of poisoning people's minds and attitudes toward Christians, people may well be less inclined to even consider going to church to find God.

This is not to exclude invitation events as part of our evangelistic strategy. Whether inviting them to our church, into our home, having a “Matthew Party,” Alpha groups, presentations on interesting topics, concerts, etc – all of these can be used to invite those who our people are reaching out to. However, our strategy **MUST** include ways in which we are going to the people – on their turf – rather than waiting for them to come onto ours or we will never see significant conversion growth.

8. New Testament Evangelism Proclaims Christ

A careful study of the book of Acts gives us clear direction concerning what the Apostles actually preached to the people. It is interesting to discover both what the Apostles preached that we must be preaching and what they didn't preach which perhaps should not be central our gospel presentation. Briefly stated, the New Testament proclamation was that Jesus the Christ came to earth to establish God's kingdom, He was

crucified by godless men, but God raised Him from the dead and made Him Lord of all. We are to embrace Him in humble, repentant faith and, in so doing, we enter into the Kingdom of God for both now and eternity.

The *gospel* is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16). Paul describes the gospel as being of *first importance* – Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried and raised again (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). Paul proclaimed the unfathomable riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8, Colossians 1:29). Jesus Christ – the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again from the dead – is the One God sent to be Lord and Savior of all. *He* is our message. Salvation is to embrace Jesus by genuine saving faith. Nothing short of this will save.

One of the greatest hindrances to effective evangelism is the large number of people in our society who have professed Christ but were never truly born of God. Some maintain their profession but their hypocrisy and dead religion cause multitudes to not even consider Christ as a potential object of faith. Others “tried Jesus” and found “it didn’t work;” their negative testimony of their Christian experience undermines our message and witness. Thus, it behooves us to diligently work for genuine salvations and not simply accept faulty professions that inflate our evangelistic results but are not genuine or lasting.

The issues surrounding genuine conversion and growth to spiritual maturity are myriad and more than can be addressed in this short paper. But one vital point is to understand that *salvation is when a repentant sinner comes to genuine saving faith in Jesus Christ*. While at one point in recent evangelical history, non-Christians might have mistakenly thought that becoming a Christian was only about changing one’s moral behavior, today we run the risk of implying that salvation is merely assenting to certain doctrinal statements. Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior and we must endeavor to help people understand *Him* and deliberately place their faith in *Him*. This may be an ongoing process and we should not assume a person really gets it just because they prayed a prayer of salvation. Nor should we be assuring a person of their salvation before they begin to show fruit of genuine faith (this is the message of the entire book of 1 John). While being born again and passing from death to life occurs at a specific time, the necessity of effectively proclaiming Christ as both the author and finisher of our faith and helping a believer know the depths and riches of who He is, is an ongoing process. Consequently, some people who are responding positively but are not yet saved might actually be born again later after they have a deeper understanding of Christ. After all, they cannot believe what they do not know (Romans 10:15). Prematurely assuming salvation without allowing the Spirit to bring a person to genuine saving faith in Christ may produce false professions, discouragement among the prematurely picked fruit and ultimately cause a person to fall away. Be careful to make sure your fruit truly knows Christ and is saved

The previous paragraphs should not be construed to imply a lack of urgency in people responding to the gospel. In the New Testament, people were urged to come to Christ *today* (2 Corinthians 6:2). There was an expectation that Christ could come again

soon and people should be prepared to meet Him in judgment if they had not been saved. The sheer truthfulness of the message and the awesome reality that God's kingdom was at hand motivated evangelists to proclaim Christ with a sense of urgency. Such urgency can all too often be lost in modern day evangelism. Sometimes, evangelism that assimilates a person before they are actually saved blurs the line between pre and post salvation so that actual *conversion* is downplayed if not downright ignored.

Another motivation to urgency in evangelism is the sheer hugeness of the task before us. If my evangelistic goal is to win a handful of my neighbors and the few folks I see at work each day I will have a totally different sense of urgency than if I believe I am to play a significant role in reaching an entire world for Christ. If we believe in the Great Commission, time is of the essence. Not that we are to twist people's arms to coerce a false profession, but neither are we to go to the other extreme of thinking our task is such that we can approach it with lethargy.

New Testament evangelists proclaimed the fullness of who Christ is, called people to fully embrace Him by simple faith and felt it important enough to do so that they urged them to repent and believe without delay.

9. New Testament Evangelism Warns of Coming Judgment

Both Old and New Testaments have strong and persistent warnings of a coming judgment and these warnings were intended to motivate the people to return to God with all their heart. John the Baptist introduced the ministry of Jesus by warning the people of coming judgment (Matt 3:1-12). Jesus often warned of coming judgment, specifically the eternal judgment of hell (Matt 20:28, 23:33, 25:31-46, etc.). Judgment was a significant part of the evangelistic messages of both Peter (Acts 2:40) and Paul (Acts 17:30-31). How much is it a part of your message?

No one likes to hear about judgment. The people in the Old Testament wanted the prophets to prophesy good to them (1 Kings 22) and in the New Testament, people simply wanted their ears to be tickled (2 Tim 4:3, Acts 24:25). But the reaction to a message of judgment may be particularly severe in our day. The child-rearing philosophy of Benjamin Spock and the psychology of "*I'm OK, You're OK*" has developed a culture of feel-good people whose conscience has been dulled concerning their guilt before God. Even though both personal and societal sins abound, a self-righteous confidence in our own innate goodness seems to abound even more. Nowadays, people are victims who have been hurt by others rather than sinners responsible for how they have offended God. Tolerance is the virtue of the day and "judging" someone as morally wrong seems to be the only behavior universally condemned in our society. Words like "wicked," "sinful," and "evil" have been excluded from the vocabulary of popular society and, unfortunately, most churches as well.

Indeed, while liberal theologians and popular preachers like Rob Bell and Robert Schuler directly challenge the idea of judgment and hell, other evangelicals just don't speak about it. Many evangelicals seem to be ashamed and embarrassed to speak of God's judgment as if He was that way in the Old Testament but by the time Jesus came

around, He had become kind, forgiving and tolerant. Some church growth experts counsel against preaching on such negative topics. Andrew Carnegie, in his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* advised, “Bees are attracted to honey more than vinegar.” Many a pastor has taken this advice to “sell” the gospel only in “positive” terms. Indeed, popular culture and contemporary preachers alike have so mocked the idea of “hell-fire and brimstone preachers” that no one would like to be stereotyped in this way.

And, yet, not only is this a vital message in the Bible, but nearly everyone I know who has followed Christ for any length of time can state how, prior to their salvation, they were deeply aware of their guilt and feared eternal judgment. Perhaps this is why the devil and the world so despise and mock the preaching of coming judgment. They know it works. And warning of coming judgment is not a scare tactic; it is simply a statement of truth and reality.

Awareness of coming judgment has so many benefits. It appeals to and connects to our God-given conscience (Rom 2:14-16). It reveals our need of salvation (Acts 17:30-31). It magnifies the work of Christ in taking our judgment upon Himself (1 Peter 3:18). It turns our thoughts away from the temporal joys of sin and onto eternal realities (Luke 12:19-20).

Accountability to God and eternal judgment is a reality that our culture seeks to ignore. It is a powerful, necessary and truthful tool in our evangelistic arsenal. Failure to use this tool is a critical mistake and might just mean we have the blood of those we fail to warn upon our hands (Ezekiel 3:18, Acts 20:26-27).

10. I leave point 10 for you. There are plenty of other aspects of New Testament evangelism and being a New Testament evangelist that I simply don't have time or room to address in this brief paper. Can you think of other principles that we might be missing in our quest to win souls for Christ? If so, write them down, pray about them, discuss them and, most importantly, implement them. Drop me an email (tomkshort@gmail.com) with these suggestions as I, personally, want to be all that God has prepared for those of us who are set apart by God to bring the gospel to the world.

Concluding Questions

1. How have you or can you, as a leader, model evangelistic zeal in such a way that your people catch a spirit of evangelism?
2. What are you doing or can you do to identify, affirm and unleash evangelists in your church? Is asking God for evangelists a regular and fervent prayer request of yours?
3. What are some strategies you can develop and implement to boldly enter new networks of people?
4. As you examine your own prayer life, devotion to God and yieldedness to the Holy Spirit, to what degree do you sense your evangelism is anointed by God? What can you do to be more accessible to His power and blessing?
5. Do you and does your church sow the Word abundantly or sparingly? What are several things you can begin to implement that will help assure you sow the Word more abundantly?
6. To what degree do you speak with the authority of God versus just offering another opinion? How can you learn to speak with more authority?
7. Are you *going* to the people? If not, are you satisfied with the degree to which they are coming to you? If not, name a way in which you can take the Good News *to* someone this week.
8. Are there things you tend to proclaim in your outreach other than Christ? If so, what are some of these things? Is it wrong to talk about these things? If not, how do you assure you stay focused on Christ Himself?
9. Do you warn people about the judgment to come? If not, why not? Be honest, do you really believe God is going to judge lost sinners? Do you personally feel as if you are free from the blood of all men?