



Eight Principles of New Testament Evangelism¹

J. D. Payne

Though there are many evangelism tools and resources available today to assist us in our ministries, there is no better resource than the Scriptures. An examination of the approaches of Jesus and the Apostolic Church to evangelizing their world, included at least eight principles.

They proclaimed an exclusive gospel.

The message of Jesus and the Apostolic Church was not just another message (1 Cor 1:23). It was good news, but an exclusive type of good news. Salvation was found in no one other than Christ, and people had to place explicit faith in Him (Acts 4:12). Jesus was seen as the only way to the Father (John 14:6). Repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus was proclaimed to Jew and Gentile (Acts 20:21). This gospel was proclaimed to those following the Jewish religious ways (John 3) and Samaritan faith traditions (John 4, Acts 8). It was also proclaimed to the extremely religious (Acts 17) and to the God-fearers (Acts 10). It was news of love, hope, freedom, healing, deliverance, reconciliation, and forgiveness. It was a message of God incarnating Himself among people, dying as atonement for the sins of the world, and resurrecting from the dead (1 Cor 15:1-4).

They were intentional in sharing the gospel.

Evangelism did not just happen by coincidence. They were intentional in their efforts. Evangelism was not a backup plan in case the other good deeds of the Church did not work. John records, "And He had to pass through Samaria" (John 4:4, NASB). Though it is easy to miss the gravity of these simple seven English words, it should be remembered that no decent, right-minded Jew would ever travel through Samaria when traveling from Judea to Galilee. Rather than journey through their region, Jewish people would circumvent the entire area. Jesus, however, intentionally entered into this area and encountered the Samaritan woman, who along with her village became believers (John 4:39-42). Following this account, Jesus leaves the area. The point? Apparently the primary reason Jesus traveled through Samaria was to reach these people with the gospel.

They were Spirit-led.

It has been said that the book of Acts should actually be titled, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." From the very beginning (Acts 1:8), He was the one who enabled the Church to be effective witnesses throughout the world. He was the one who provides boldness to share the gospel (Acts 4:31). He worked through the apostles to perform signs and wonders (Acts 2:43). He called out missionaries (Acts 13:1-3).



Following a great awakening in a Samaritan city (Acts 8:4-8), Philip received word from an “angel of the Lord” (Acts 8:26) to go to a southbound road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza and await further instructions. Upon his arrival, the Spirit told him to go up to the chariot of the Ethiopian who was ready to come to faith (Acts 8:29). Also, the Spirit led Peter to evangelize the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:19-20).

They understood the importance of culture.

Jesus and the Apostolic Church knew about the value of culture in the communication of the gospel. For example, in Paul’s Mars’ Hill address, he began his message by stating what would have been a compliment to the Athenians, that they were very religious people (Acts 17:22). Continuing, he then decided to connect with his Athenian hearers, not with a passage from the Old Testament, but rather quoted freely from their own poets (Acts 17:28-29). Later, in his defense before Agrippa, Paul made certain to conduct himself appropriately as any proper orator would have before such a statesman by stretching out his hand before proceeding to speak (Acts 26:1). Being aware of the various cultures of the people to whom they were speaking allowed the early evangelists to connect with their audiences and gain a hearing.

They were flexible to the context.

Closely related to their understanding of the value of culture was the fact that the methods and gospel presentations of Jesus and the Apostolic Church varied from situation to situation. Jesus did not speak to Zacchaeus as he did to Nicodemus. Paul did not present himself in the same manner to Agrippa as he did to Lydia (Acts 16). Jesus’ encounter with the Gerasene demoniac required a different approach than how he engaged the Samaritan woman. Though the gospel message did not change (Acts 20:21), the contexts required different methods of engagement and communication.

They began where people were in their spiritual journeys.

In many evangelistic encounters, Jesus and the Apostolic Church began with the people’s felt needs at the moment. Since Nicodemus believed that his genealogical account was sufficient to earn God’s favor, Jesus spoke of being “born again” (John 3:3). The Samaritan woman was not concerned with her heritage but rather getting water from a well; Jesus used the felt need as an opportunity to speak of “living water” (John 4:10). Philip did not begin sharing with the Ethiopian a discourse about Adam and Eve, but rather started preaching from the passage about which the man had questions (Acts 8:35).

They were sensitive to the fears, hurts, and concerns of others while speaking the truth in love.

Though Jesus could have spent much time speaking about the evils of adultery and fornication to the Samaritan woman, He acknowledged her wickedness and continued on in the conversation (John 4:17-18). Jesus could have scolded and severely



rebuked Zacchaeus for having wicked business practices (Luke 19:7). He decided, however, to stay at his house, bring salvation (Luke 19:9), and gain the reputation as a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Luke 7:34). Jesus and the Apostolic Church never denied wickedness. They always called people to repentance out of love (Mark 10:21), even when they spoke to the self-righteous.

They were post-conversion oriented.

Though evangelism is the first step of the Great Commission, the mandate to the Church includes making disciples (Matt 28:19). The New Testament was not written to provide its readers with every detail of the historic events. Sometimes it is easy to wonder what happened to those first century people who were evangelized but are not mentioned again in the Scriptures. Despite this silence, Jesus and the Apostolic Church were concerned with what occurred in the lives of people after they came to faith. A simple reading of the book of Acts and the Epistles reveals that the new believers were gathered together in new churches. Paul followed up with the new believers through visits, letters, and messengers. Church planting was (and still is) a major part of fulfilling the Great Commission. Following the conversion of the Gerasene demoniac, the man begged Jesus to allow him to get into the boat and accompany Him. Rather than agreeing to the man's plea, Jesus immediately calls the man to obedience and to bear fruit for the Kingdom by sending him back to his region to proclaim the works of God (Mark 5:19). The result? The man obeyed and "everyone marveled" (Mark 5:20). Also, Philip made certain that the Ethiopian was baptized (Acts 8:36-39).

Principles are timeless and translatable from culture to culture. As individuals concerned with global evangelization, may we consider how to apply these New Testament principles to our ministries for His glory.

J. D. Payne is a National Missionary with the North American Mission Board and Assistant Professor of Church Planting and Evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, USA. He is the founder of northamericanmissions.org, a web-based resource for the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches.

Copyright © 2008, J. D. Payne, All rights reserved

¹This article was originally published by Lausanne World Pulse and can be located at <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/700/05-2007>.