

8 Principles for Evangelism from Jesus and the Apostolic Church 1

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In order to assist us in staying the course in our evangelistic work, I want to turn our attentions to a foundational matter. If we lose sight of biblical principles for missional living, then we find ourselves standing at a crossroads not knowing what to do in the societies in which we find ourselves.

In this post, I want to share with you eight principles for evangelism that we find in the New Testament. When we take a look at the Bible, what do we see in the lives of Jesus and those members of the Apostolic Church?

They proclaimed an exclusive gospel.

Their message was not just another message (1 Cor 1:23). It was good news, but a specific 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).

They were intentional in sharing the gospel.

Evangelism did not just happen by coincidence. 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 racism ran high and Jews did not desire interaction with Samaritans. 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? The primary reason Jesus traveled through Samaria was to reach these people with the gospel.

They were Spirit-led.

From the very beginning (Acts 1:8), the Spirit was the one who enabled the Church to be effective witnesses throughout the world. 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). We also read of the Spirit leading 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. This knowledge allowed them to connect with their hearers. 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). He 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).

They were flexible to the context.

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). 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.

Since Nicodemus believed that his genealogical account was sufficient to earn God's favor, Jesus spoke of being "born again" (John 3:3). 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.

Their practice was to make disciples, not converts. 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.

May we learn and allow these principles to guide our methods so "that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored" (2 Thes 3:1, ESV).

Portions from this post were originally from my article published in the [Lausanne World Pulse, May 2007](#).

<http://www.jdpayne.org/2010/10/05/8-principles-for-evangelism-from-jesus-and-the-apostolic-church/>

