

## The Methods of Evangelism

Growing up in a Baptist church somewhat like this, I would often see or read about methods for evangelism. They were usually techniques as to how to do door-to-door evangelism, or how to bring the plan of salvation, and how to draw the net. There was some strength in those programs, but also some weaknesses. The major weaknesses of those programs were their failure to recognise that the method of evangelism is not just the plan of salvation, but several things. We see at least five things in Scripture, each of which has a certain amount of power, when used by the Holy Spirit. I want us to examine these five, with the aim of examining ourselves to see if these things are true in our lives.

### I. The Power of the Message

The most obvious and indispensable means of evangelism is the message of the gospel. We have read Romans 10:17 – faith comes by hearing, and hearing of the word of God. No one can come to faith if you do not actually share that message of salvation.

The reason is this: God has appointed that He will call people to Himself through the sound of the gospel message. He does not call them through soup kitchens. He does not call them through being born into Christian families. He doesn't call them through the moral lives of other Christians. He calls them when the message of the gospel itself is shared.

You might not realise just what it is you hold in your hand. The gospel has innate power.

*Jeremiah 23:29* <sup>29</sup> "Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

*Isaiah 55:10-11* "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Not only does the Word have innate power, it is effective when it is heard by God's sheep.

*John 10:26-28* But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. <sup>27</sup> "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup> "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

When we give out the Word of the gospel, we are not simply giving out abstract ideas. We are blowing a whistle at a pitch which those chosen of God can hear. It is as if the Word is a message on a frequency that those chosen by God are tuned in to hear. The sheep-to-be hear the call in the Word. When you share the message, the dead hear His voice.

There was a rabbi by the name of Charles Freshman, who was the rabbi of a synagogue in Canada. Many years before his arrival in Canada, a Scottish missionary had persuaded him to purchase a Bible, which he had never read. He kept it locked in a drawer in his study. As the years went by in Canada, he was always amazed to see the variety of people attending churches, and felt grieved that they followed what he thought was idolatry. His confusion deepened until one day he decided to open his drawer, and read the New Testament. He read a few pages, and then threw it across the room, saying, "This cannot be." But a few minutes later, he picked it up again, and read more. Again, he threw it from him, with the same attitude. But the excitement of what he was reading gripped him and he grabbed it again and read, devouring what he read, until he threw the book away with such violence, that the pages scattered around the room. A few minutes later, he was gathering up the pages and trying to put them together, and then he locked it up again, vowing not to read it

again. But a few weeks later, he was reading it again, along with the prophecies of the Old Testament. Over a period of months, Rabbi Charles Freshman came to faith in Jesus Christ, as did his wife and children.

## II. The Power of Reason

*1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;*

First Peter is an epistle about having Christian hope in the midst of suffering. Peter says to his suffering readers: Put God in first place in your hearts. Set Him apart as sacred, as above all. From there, he says, be prepared to reason.

Notice a few things.

You are to be ready. That means you must have prepared beforehand. You must have the gun loaded before you have to fire. You must have the argument and the answer under your belt, ready to be used. You are always to be ready. This means you may have to give reasons for your Christian faith on Monday morning at work, or Saturday afternoon at the mall, or Friday evening with friends. This is not something you switch off or on. You have the reasons for your faith, and the reasons why a lack of faith is foolish in your heart and mind, so that if someone, anyone, at any time should call you on it, you have a response.

To give a defence - the original word is *apologia*, from where we get apologetics. And according to Peter, it is not a defence using weapons; it is not a defence using loud shouting or gesticulating. It is a defence that gives reasons. 'Apologetics' is giving the reasons for faith in Christ. Why do you believe the Bible is trustworthy? Why do you believe that God created the world out of nothing? Why do you believe that man fell into sin? Why do you believe that Jesus Christ really existed? Why do you believe that Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead? To know some of the reasons for these things is to be ready to give an answer.

Christians should not only know what we believe, we should know why we believe it. And the other side of the coin is to know what you don't believe, and why you don't believe it. Why don't you believe that atheism has the answer? Why don't you believe in Darwinism? Why don't you believe in Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age? Why don't you believe in health, wealth and prosperity? How can you believe that opposing points of view can both be right? How can you believe there are no absolutes, when you use those categories all the time?

Sometimes, I will hear people say things like, no one is won to the Lord through arguing. Or apologetics won't convince a sinner dead in his sin. And those statements are partially true. No one is argued into salvation, and apologetics alone will not save anyone. But the point is God does not use just one of any of these five things. He usually uses all of them.

In fact, the Bible gives us more than one example of reason being used on unbelievers.

*Matthew 22:23-32 The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, <sup>24</sup> saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. <sup>25</sup> "Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. <sup>26</sup> "Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. <sup>27</sup> "Last of all the woman died also. <sup>28</sup> "Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her." <sup>29</sup> ¶ Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. <sup>30</sup> "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. <sup>31</sup> "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, <sup>32</sup> 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."*

The Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection, and use a silly test case to supposedly make the resurrection seem absurd. Jesus tells them two things to prove the resurrection. The first is something that He knew as God. He gave them revelation – in the resurrection, we are like the angels who do not marry. The second thing he does is take them to a Scripture from the Pentateuch (the only books they accepted). Jesus is using reason here. He is arguing from a simple verb tense. He is saying, if God *is*, not was, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then what does that mean about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? It means they are still alive. But He didn't say that in so many words. He expects them to use logic and reason to make the connections.

*Acts 17:17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.*

This was Paul's habit. When you read his sermons, or his epistles, he uses reason and logic nearly all the time.

Love alone won't save anyone. Example alone won't save anyone. Prayer alone won't save anyone. Even the message has to be delivered by a person, who presumably has some kind of example, or some kind of love. The truth is, giving reasons for your faith, or questioning the reasons for other's faith won't save anyone – by itself. But when part of the whole package, God will use it powerfully.

Frank Morison was a lawyer, who set out to prove that the historical Jesus had been ruined and clouded by this resurrection myth which had been attached to the gospel. So he sought to study what was thought to be the oldest Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, to prove that the resurrection was a silly myth, and the historical Jesus, was a beautiful, remarkable man to be honoured but not worshipped. But as Morrison applied his logical mind to the eyewitness accounts, he began to see that it was illogical to believe that the resurrection could have been staged, or hoaxed, or even added as a legend later. As he looked at the reasonable evidence, he was convinced that Jesus rose from the dead. But not just convinced, He was converted. He became a believer and worshipper of Jesus Christ. Now was it reason alone? No, he was reading the message of the Gospels. But reason was part of his conversion.

### **III. The Power of Example**

*1 Peter 3:1-2 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, <sup>2</sup> when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.*

Here we have a Scripture which instructs wives to have a particular kind of conduct towards unbelieving husbands. Peter says that if wives have submissive hearts, pure lives accompanied by respect, as well as a gentle and quiet spirit, their unbelieving husbands may be won to the Lord.

Notice, they may be won without a word. This is the power of a Christlike life.

Sometimes, the gospel message is like a landmine you lay in someone's mind. It's just lying there, though, potentially explosive. Sometimes, what God ordains is that your life is the thing that trips those landmines and explodes the power of the gospel.

I am sure that is what happened in Philippi.

*Acts 16:19-33 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. <sup>20</sup> And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; <sup>21</sup> "and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." <sup>22</sup> Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. <sup>24</sup> Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. <sup>25</sup> ¶ But at*

*midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. <sup>27</sup> And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. <sup>28</sup> But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." <sup>29</sup> Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.*

Certainly the earthquake was a decisive factor in the conversion of the Philippian jailer. But what do you think happened to him when he heard Paul and Silas singing hymns to God? The whole prison, usually noisy with the bawdy and rowdy shouts of uncouth prisoners, now quietly listening to Paul and Silas singing sweet praise to God; those two voices ringing out like light in the darkness. These are men who have been stripped, beaten and put in stocks. They're singing! That's the power of the gospel.

I'm certain the same was happening when Christ was on the cross. Both thieves on either side of him start mocking him. But one of them changes midway and eventually calls on the Lord for salvation. What changed him? Probably as he witnessed Christ's example on the cross. Christ was praying for his enemies on the cross.

You see, the most powerful example to unbelievers is not that you enjoy your children, for they enjoy theirs. It is not that you don't commit crime, for many of them don't either. It is not that you are sweet and polite, for many of them are too. What is really gripping to the unbelieving heart is how you suffer.

Your holy life is critical. Your standards of purity will interest them. Your habits of life will seem different to them. But perhaps only in the way strict Muslims or Jews or Amish seem. What takes their breath away is how you suffer. If you suffer with the same complaints, the same murmurs, the same demands, the same protests as they do, they have not seen Christ on the cross in you. But it is when you are suffering, and giving thanks, and singing hymns, and returning good for evil, and being kind to your enemies – that's when they will ask you for a reason for the hope that lies within you.

*Philippians 2:14-15 Do all things without complaining and disputing, <sup>15</sup> that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,*

George Müller told of a wealthy German whose wife was a devout believer. This man was a heavy drinker, spending late nights in the tavern. She would send the servants to bed, stay up till he returned, receive him kindly, and never scold him or complain. At times she would even have to undress him and put him to bed.

One night in the tavern he said to his cronies, "I bet if we go to my house, my wife will be sitting up, waiting for me. She'll come to the door, give us a royal welcome, and even make supper for us, if I ask her." They were skeptical at first, but decided to go along and see. Sure enough, she came to the door, received them courteously, and willingly agreed to make supper for them without the slightest trace of resentment. After serving them, she went off to her room. As soon as she had left, one of the men began to condemn the husband. "What kind of a man are you to treat such a good woman so miserably?" The accuser got up without finishing his supper and left the house. Another did the same and another till they had all departed without eating the meal.

Within a half hour, the husband became deeply convicted of his wickedness, and especially of his heartless treatment of his wife. He went to his wife's room, asked her to pray for him, repented of

his sins, and surrendered to Christ. From that time on, he became a devoted disciple of the Lord Jesus. Won without a word! (MacDonald, William ; Farstad, Arthur: *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995, S. 1 Pe 3:2)

#### **IV. The Power of Love and Genuine Interest**

*Mark 6:33-34 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.*

When we read of our Lord Jesus, the one thing we keep reading about is His compassion for the crowds. He had compassion for them. He was genuinely moved by their needs. He felt loving pity for them. He wanted to help them. The crowds knew that. That's why tax-collectors and prostitutes avoided Pharisees, and were willing to come to Jesus. That's why people like Nicodemus and Zaccheus and others sought him out. People are magnetised by someone who shows a real interest in them. They are drawn to people who show genuine love and compassion.

The gospel is that God so loved the world. The gospel is that God demonstrated His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The gospel is that while we were dead in our trespasses and sins, God, for the great love wherewith He loved us, made us alive. Now what kind of a gospel would it be, if the messengers of this gospel of love show indifference, unkindness, impatience and nastiness?

And here's the kind of love that really speaks: the love for enemies. That's God's love – while we were yet sinners. It is when you love people who mock your beliefs. It is when you return kind words for harsh, when you suffer wrong and bear it, when you return genuine acts of kindness towards those who have mistreated you.

This is what has broken the hearts of so many unbelievers – gospel love. This is what sets New Testament Christianity apart- love your enemies, repay good for evil, turn the other cheek, feed your enemy when he is hungry.

It is not easy, but there is a promise for those who will bind their hearts to people that mistreat them.

*Psalm 126:5-6 Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy. <sup>6</sup> He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.*

Now will loving people alone bring them to faith? No. But it is unlikely that you will bring someone to faith unless you show them genuine love. The Spirit works mightily through genuine love.

#### **V. The Power of Prayer**

The final means by which evangelism takes place is through prayer.  
Paul says in Romans 10:1

*Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.*

Prayer is where we ask for a number of things. We ask for labourers to preach, as Jesus told us to. We pray for opportunities for the gospel to spread, as Paul asked for. We pray for boldness for ourselves and for all who will preach the gospel. We pray for protection from those hostile to the gospel. And we pray for the conversion of individuals.

Why pray if God is going to save? Because prayer is one of the instruments He uses. I do not

believe conversions take place apart from prayer. A church does not see souls brought into that church in significant numbers unless that church gets together and prays for such a thing. I do not know of many revivals that did not begin with some form of prayer from believers.

George Muller is such an example to us in this matter of prayer for souls. In November, 1844, I began to pray for the conversion of five individuals. I prayed every day without a single intermission, whether sick or in health, on the land or on the sea, and whatever the pressure of my engagements might be. Eighteen months elapsed before the first five was converted. I thanked God and prayed on for the others. Five years elapsed, and then the second was converted. I thanked God for the second, and prayed on for the other three. Day by day I continued to pray for them, and six years passed before the third was converted. I thanked God for the three and went on praying for the other two. These two remained unconverted.

"The man to whom God in the riches of his grace has given tens of thousands of answers to prayer in the self-same hour or day in which they were offered has been praying day by day for nearly 36 years for the conversion of these individuals, and yet they remain unconverted. But I hope in God, I pray on, and look yet for the answer. They are not converted yet, but they will be."

This was the faith that carried him through every straitened place. He met emergencies by asking and in due time God supplied whatever the need might be.

Those prayers? In 1897, those two men, sons of a friend of Mr. Muller's youth, were not converted, after he had entreated God in their behalf for 52 years daily. But after his death God brought them in the fold.

Will prayer alone save people? No. These five things work with each other. The message, reason, example, love and prayer are all means which God uses. He does not save through one, but by using several or all of them.