

Misconceptions of Modern Evangelism

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Topical Introduction: *Acts 10:36-38*

I. Definition

The word *evangelism* is derived from the Greek *euaggelion* (*yoo-ang-ghel' -ee-on*), from which we get our word "Gospel". Gospel, in its turn, means "Good News" or, by some interpretations "Glad Tidings".

Thus, *evangelism* is nothing more or less than *Gospel-ism*, or *Good News-ism* – the means of propagation for that which is contained in the Gospel. Accordingly, in this study, whenever I use the word *evangelism*, I will be referring to the means and ways of testifying of the Gospel – which is the message of redemption in and through Christ (Eph 1:12, 13).

II. The First Misconception – "Modern"

The very first misconception which we encounter, right from the beginning, is the use of the word "modern" in relation to evangelism. This denotes a change from that which is old-fashioned or out-of-date, and refers to a period that is distinct and apart from the past. However, Biblical Evangelism need not be upgraded or overhauled, for it is never out of date. There is no need for a different approach to the propagation of the Gospel other than that put forward in the Word, for:

A. Man's Condition Has Not Changed – *Isa. 64:6, 7*

Jer. 17:9: The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

B. The Message Has Not Changed – *Acts 17:30*

Mat. 3:2: And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

C. The God We Serve Has Not Changed – *Mal. 3:6*

Heb 1:12: And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

D. We Are Commanded NOT to Change – *Prov. 22:28*

II Thess. 2:15: Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

It might be good to note that we preach Christ's teachings, not Christian traditions. Christ's teachings are unchanging and eternal, and thus are traditional in the sense that they are historically ageless. However, it is because they are His teachings that we preach them, not because they are traditional.

III. The Second Misconception – "Means"

The second great misconception of modern evangelism is that the means and focus of evangelism must be updated and made more palatable for "modern" man – as if the 21st century human is depraved and dead in sins to a different degree than his counterparts in other times. Accordingly, the means of evangelism has been perverted. We now show movies and perform skits, set up hotlines and counseling centers, host basketball tournaments and hayrides, and give away ice cream and bicycles in an attempt to cajole people into hearing a watered-down, compromised Gospel. Despite this, true evangelism is still:

A. From The Word – *Lu. 16:27-30*

Ps. 119:130: *The understanding of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*

B. By Means of Preaching – Rom 10:14, 15

I Cor. 1:21: *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

IV. The Third Misconception – “Motivation”

The third great misconception of the modern evangelism movement has been in regard to the stimulus and motivation of evangelism. The focus of modern evangelism has been to gain a decision, to make a psycho-emotional appeal that triggers a positive, corresponding response, and to effect an intellectual resolution in line with what is desired. It finds the means of effecting these goals in corrupted psychology, mind control, and emotional prompting. True evangelism, however, finds its power and essence in:

A. God Himself – Jo. 15:5

Ps. 127:1: *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.*

Regarding John 15:5, we have tried to eliminate God so that we are no longer limited by the exclusiveness of “without me ye can do nothing”. However, having done that, and having dabbled with every method and motive under the sun, we find that our disobedient everything is still nothing, for He is everything that evangelism must be.

B. The Knowledge of Man’s Incapacity – Jer. 10:23

Isa. 6:5 – *Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*

C. The Fact That Salvation Is of the Lord – Eph. 2:8, 9

I Tim. 1:9: *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,*

Thus, the sustaining power of evangelism is the knowledge that we are fundamentally incapable of doing God’s Will in our own power, and yet that it pleased God to use us as His servants. Furthermore, beyond doing our duty as messengers, we must recognize that results are solely of God. In the summing up, we are but “unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do” (Lu. 17:10) – and that only through His power.

V. The Fourth Misconception – “Results”

The fourth misconception that the world holds regarding modern evangelism is in relation to its results. It is a sad fact that only a small fraction of the multitudes converted by modern methods ever darken the door of a church. Instead, it is perfectly acceptable that bars and strip clubs and other establishments of evil remain open in the wake of great “evangelistic outreaches”, while periodical services are held so that the lost conscience may remain assuaged by “rededication” to the Lord.

Despite this, true evangelism leads to:

A. Repentance of Sins – Ac. 16:29, 30

Ac. 2:37 – *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

B. Departure from Evil Ways – Ep. 4:28

Ac. 19:18, 19 – *And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.*

C. Submission to Baptism and a Commitment to Walk with Christ – Ac. 8:36-38

Acts 16:32, 33 - *And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.*

Acts 2:42 – *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

D. True Fellowship with Other Like-Minded Believers – Ac. 2:42-46

Ac. 4:32 - *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*

E. Establishment of, and Addition to, a New Testament Church to the Glory of God

Ac. 2:47 - *Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

Eph. 3:21 - *Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

Thus, the great fallacy of the modern evangelistic movement is that its converts are not attending Scriptural, New Testament churches. The sheep – if they are sheep – are not being fed as Ac. 20:28 indicates they should be, nor is glory being given to God, but to men. These errors have bankrupted the modern evangelistic movement and effectively separated it from its base, the local church, empowered by Christ to do His will (Mt. 28:18).

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the knowledge of all the above should impact our evangelism. It should not only make us conscious of the God-centeredness of every aspect of true evangelism (John 15:5), but it should also make us acutely aware of our unworthiness before Him, and our need to submit ourselves and our efforts unto Him on a continual basis. At the same time that it should burden us for the lost, it should make us draw closer to that precious faith for which our forefathers in the faith suffered – and for which faith they preferred all the terrors of Heb. 11:36-38 rather than give an inch in their beliefs. In every aspect of our Christian life – no less in our approach to evangelism - may we also be prepared to live as decidedly and uncompromisingly as they.