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## Evangelism

**What do you think are the greatest hindrances to the growth of the Church?**

**There may be a dozen, but a major one is - *me and you!* For many of us have absorbed the notion that the task of turning a person to God rests with a disembodied voice on radio, or a moving image on TV or an anonymous booklet.**

*Not so!*

by James McBride

In fact, *one purpose for our calling* is to act as a channel by which others, too, may be called. Jesus Christ's parting words to the apostles were "You must be witnesses for me...to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). His hearers are dead. We are their successors! But the Church in general (Acts 8 1-4) perceived that they, too, had a similar commission. And they acted on it!

Usually, however, we look to "the broadcast" with its follow-up of a mountain of literature and a Home Office to field the questions. Broadcasts, publications and tapes, of course, are an essential part of outreach. I for one came into the Church through radio and literature. But I wonder how many were drawn to faith through the ministry of an "ordinary" Church member? A few, but not a lot!

Yet, brethren, the work of evangelism is not confined to a man who has been designated an "evangelist"! Certainly there are divinely gifted men and women whose function in the Body of Christ is dedicated to outreach. And I'm sure that if some of us were to develop our spectrum of gifts we would be able to function in this role. It takes an unremitting zeal for the work of God. It takes an intimate knowledge of the Word of God, and practical experience of its application. It takes faith in the knowledge that God will provide for their material needs. It takes special skills of evangelism. It takes a special gift.

### No "Ordinary" Members

But that in no way rules out any of us from the other multiple functions needed in God's Church! For *no* member of Christ's Body is, in fact, "ordinary"! All of us are gifted. All of us have a part to play.

The early Church mushroomed because *all the brethren* were fired up with the wonder of the precious knowledge given to them. Jesus was the Messiah. He had by the power of God conquered death. And He was alive - and dwelling in each believer. All sin had, in Him, been forgiven. They

were reconciled to God the Father through Him. Every new Christian understood he or she was now enlisted as a soldier in the army of the Lord of Hosts. And each went into battle against the enemy.

### God's Sovereign Word

That enemy is Satan. He has deceived the whole world and blinded the unbeliever's mind to the Gospel message (II Corinthians 4:4). But recall that "God ... has commanded all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Would He command an impossibility? No - He has sent His Word - the "sword of the Spirit" - into the world and wherever that Word goes by whatever means a little piece of the deceit and blindness is lifted. "[God's] Word", reported Isaiah, "will not return to Me void, but will accomplish that which I purpose" (ch 55:11). The light shed by that Word has waxed and waned through the centuries. But now through the efforts of the Churches of God, through innumerable Bible Societies, through missions - and yes through the Sunday preachers! - that Word has gone through vast numbers of the world's population.

Multitudes alive today - but far from all mankind - have been exposed to the Christian Bible. The name of Jesus Christ is known to perhaps three billion men and women. Sadly *His true Gospel* is not widely known. It has been distorted. It has been misused. Its very name has been transferred to a false gospel which isn't the Gospel.

And there, brethren, is where *each of us* comes in!

For through that Word preached to us we have come to faith, and been granted repentance through the goodness of God. In His mercy He has allowed us to choose life, and has given us His Spirit. In fact, He wants *all* mankind to have opportunity to repent (II Peter 3:9)! We of all people can express the true knowledge that turns folk to God. For how will they hear unless someone tells them (Romans 10:14)! *That someone is you.* Paul had just told the Roman

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Christians "...if you confess with your mouth ...that Jesus is Lord...you will be saved" (v.9).

### We Are Witnesses

This is not, of course, a call to all of us to be "preachers"! That requires a combination of spiritual gifts, and a calling recognized by the visible Church. But we *are* each called to verbally confess Christ, as well as to "confess" Him by our Christ-like attitude and conduct.

How we do this reflects our gifts. It embraces witness all the way from a wife who wins over her husband "without a word" by her chaste and loyal behavior (I Peter 3:1-2), through the quiet man on the factory floor to the called evangelist or preacher. But the witness of that same wife is not confined to her role as wife. As a mouthpiece for Jesus Christ she can be an effective witness to others wherever she goes. Her children, for a start. Her companions. Her work colleagues. Her neighbors. Nor are *men* let off the hook! In every contact there is a potential for witness. Indeed the love for God in us should overflow towards *all* those we contact!

How, then, do we go about the responsibility for personal evangelism? Does it just come naturally? Are there techniques we can learn? Let's look at some aspects of an activity which does not come easily to most of us!

### A Learned Skill

Do you recall your first clumsy attempts at carving a piece of wood? Or that first lesson in knitting? Or early artistic endeavors in art class? Even the potato printing went wrong! These are skills. We can all learn them to some degree, and a few overcome the initial discomfort - and embarrassment - to become passable, or even expert. Some even go on to make the skill their life's work.

Personal evangelism, too, is a skill. But not only *can* we learn it - we *must!* How?

Every able-bodied person has the skills available to draw. We have fingers to hold the pencil or chalk. We have eyes to see. And a brain to imagine, to discern, to direct. With practice we can produce a passable image of a flower or a face.

And all of us, too, have the underlying resources to carry out our God-given function of a witness to Christ. Of course, as with any skill it must be sharpened towards perfection. And just as you don't learn to draw merely by reading about it the skill of personal evangelism must be practiced! And early "results" - like home-made pottery - may not be too pretty!

Here are a few basic principles to build skill:

- ***be persuaded*** of the value of the Gospel for everyone
- ***be prayerful*** in advance, each day and every day
- ***be prepared*** to answer questions and objections from the Scriptures, and thoroughly know our literature
- ***be practiced*** in answering by "trying it out" in non-threatening situations: with husband or wife, brethren,

before the mirror or even the dog

- ***be positive*** in your approach to people, but humble
- ***be persistent*** in presenting the claims of the Gospel but sensitive in knowing when to slow up or to quit
- ***be pleasant*** always, and flee "argument"

You can see that each of these principles applies before we ever get to broach the subject of an individual's relationship with God. But what of the actual "encounter"? Who should we speak with? When? What do we say to him or her?

### Good Practice

The greatest evangelist of all time, of course, is Jesus Christ. We would do well to study His varied encounters with all manner of mankind, for they are a key to good practice in personal evangelism. What was His "method"?

Although Jesus was the greatest ever outdoor preacher, yet we don't see Him on a street corner soap-box haranguing passers-by. He didn't accost anyone and ask "Are you saved, brother?" Neither did He hand out "gospel tracts" threatening hell-fire and damnation.

Let's look at a few ideas we can incorporate in our own ministry of evangelism. All were reflected in the ministry of Jesus.

A foundation principle is to "walk as we talk". It would be disastrous to urge God's claims on a person if we are not ourselves living in submission to Him, reflecting His joy in our lives and daily conquering our own "enemies". Let our lifestyle be an example of shining faith.

- Confine your presentation to "the milk of the Word". In Hebrews 6: 1-2 are stated the "elementary teaching about Christ" - and this would normally form our limits. It gives lots of scope! The key: *Always use milk!* Personal evangelism isn't an opportunity to vainly display Bible knowledge, or spout "hard sayings"!
- Make each encounter meaningful by first thinking about the person, and making him or her a target for believing prayer. You don't have to speak to everyone who crosses your path!
- Ask for insight and wisdom to determine their needs. Jesus always encountered people at the point of their greatest need: in their joy, or illness or distress or finances. Study His encounters with the woman at the well, the rich young ruler, Bartemaeus, Nicodemus etc.
- Adapt your approach to the individual's background: age, social status, occupation, present actions - "Give me a drink" etc. Be ready with an apt response to questions.
- Don't expect immediate "results". A thoughtful presentation of the Gospel is a seed which may sprout quickly, slowly - or not at all. Remember the parable of the Sower. Because he or she doesn't immediately fall to their knees in deep repentance doesn't mean your witness has been ineffective! Indeed a "sudden conversion" needs more careful attention!

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- Explain, in time, the “whole counsel of God” - within the definition of “milk”. Remember that in our day (unlike the Jews on the first Pentecost) very few understand what is *real* repentance. Today, most know the Christian claim that “Jesus saves” - but they don’t know the pattern of worship which identifies the true God (Leviticus 23), or what is real repentance.
- Use appropriate literature and tapes. When considering your approach be prepared with suitable publications or tapes. These are freely available for you from Lincoln, and you are welcome to have a few spare titles to hand.
- Aim to encourage the person to get in touch with the Home Office. When they are on the mailing list they will have access to a wider range of our publications and tapes.
- Never hesitate to admit “I don’t know”. But say you will find out - *and do so!* Follow up.
- Be ready to learn new, but Biblical, means of outreach.
- Witness with your *behavior*. Jesus “went about doing good”, and was consistently “moved with compassion”.

*Be enthusiastic for the Gospel!*

Personal evangelism, brethren, is a combination of skill, wisdom, common sense and spiritual insight. Each of us has a responsibility to “evangelize” our own range of contacts, to the limits of our knowledge and according to our gifts. Like Paul we ought to be able to say “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Let’s all prepare ourselves well for this essential and divinely-appointed responsibility.

*And let’s do it!*

### APPENDIX: What Is “Milk”?

The Scriptures refer to the basic facts of Christianity as “the milk of the Word”. The Hebrew Christians were told “For although you ought to be teachers of others because you have been Christians so long, you actually need someone to teach you over and over again the very elements of the truth that God has given us, and you have gotten into such a state that you are in constant need of milk instead of solid food. For everyone who uses milk alone is inexperienced in the message of right-doing; he is only an infant. But solid food belongs to full-grown men who on account of constant use have their faculties trained to distinguish good and evil” (ch 5: 12-14).

The writer continues: “So let us once for all quit the elementary teaching [the “milk”] about Christ and continue progressing toward maturity”. He then lists the basic “milk doctrines”. They are:

**Repentance**  
**Faith in Christ**  
**Baptism**  
**Laying on of hands**  
**Resurrection of the dead**  
**Final judgment**

The pattern should be clear! For these are the steps, in order, all of us pass through in our Christian life. We would do well to concentrate our approach to people around these vital teachings. Whatever our initial approach may be, our aim is to “get on track” for this orderly stepped approach.

Of course, each concept needs to be fleshed out and put into language that the person understands. It may even be *literally* “a different language”! Certainly we must be sensitive to each person’s individual language, background, culture, education, present circumstances etc.

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