

Elbow-to-Elbow Evangelism

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The Mandate of Discipleship

The fulfillment of the Great Commission can be summarized in one major command: **make disciples** of all nations. Therefore, as we go, teach and baptize – our focus should be to make disciples.

We can't make disciples without going. But *without making disciples*, our going is in vain. In order to fulfill our assignment from Christ, we must **make**—not just go. In other words, the Great Commission is about making **disciples**—not about making **converts**.

Biblically speaking, discipleship is not a “follow-up” to evangelism—it is in fact the very soul and purpose of evangelism. And the means of its fulfillment is the **discipleship process**. The Bible is not just a divine **message**—it's also a divine **method**. The principle that Jesus understood is that the real success of your ministry is not in those **you** bring to Christ but in those that **they** bring to Christ.

We must remember that **sheep produce sheep**. It's not the shepherd's job to produce more sheep. (I trust the reality of that statement is self-evident and requires no explanation.) Our job is to protect and care for the sheep, allowing them to do what is natural to them (which is to produce new sheep). Moreover, **converts don't produce disciples**. Only disciples produce new disciples. Therefore, as we faithfully make converts into true disciples, those disciples will eventually produce new disciples.

When the focus of the Church is only on evangelism (making converts), the results will tend to be **single-generational**. When this happens, we begin to develop a church of spiritual **eunuchs** (non-reproducers). Therefore, **how** Jesus spread truth should be as important to us as the truth itself. The **divine promise** was meant to be fulfilled by a **divine process**. And only then will we truly know God's **divine provision**.

True evangelism is not merely about making decisions. We have developed a **convert-mentality** in churches today—yet God has a **discipleship-mentality**. It is critical to remember that evangelism and discipleship are not the same. In this regard, evangelism should be the **natural by-product** of discipleship, with discipleship remaining the primary goal of evangelism. Let's stay focused on what Christ commanded.

Cross-Culture Evangelism

In missions we often talk about **cross-cultural evangelism** (crossing cultural barriers to reach the lost). These are not necessarily *geographic* or *political* barriers, but they are barriers nonetheless. In many cases these barriers relate to a variety of sub-cultures within the realm of our calling.

A critical factor in cross-cultural evangelism is that the Gospel **message** must be made **culturally relevant**. And the **message** only becomes culturally relevant when the **messenger** has been thoroughly saturated in the culture of the recipients.

In other words, the **message** will never become relevant until the **messenger** becomes relevant. And the **messenger** only becomes relevant by truly understanding the culture. How does one do this? By becoming one of them.

Who was the greatest example of this kind of evangelism? Jesus Christ. That's what Christ did for us. He became one of us. In fact, He—*the Messenger*—actually **became** the **Message**.

In essence, the secret to effective evangelism is when the *messenger becomes the message*. Christ didn't **bring** a message ... He **was** the Message. Likewise, we're not to **bring** the message—we're to **become** the message.

Having a message—even a **relevant** one—is not enough. As a *messenger* of the Gospel, your **life must become your message**. Moreover, true evangelism will only take place when your **life becomes your message**. Until that happens, your evangelism will never be truly effective.

But here's our problem. When we're **not confident** that our life is a strong enough example to be a worthy message (model) to those around us, then by default we allow our **words**—and not our life—to become our message. But **words** will never change the world. Only **people** will. Passionate people. After all, the world has been hearing our words for years, and in most cases those words were never enough to make people want to change their lives.

Certainly our words are important, but here is how God sees it. When your **life** becomes the message, then your **words** become the **explanation** (or the clarification) of that message. However, you can't give the explanation (the words) without first giving the **message** (your life).

Gospel tracts will never be the message. An evangelism program will never be the message. These are merely **tools**. Only people can be that message. And that message involves the way we live our lives in a manner that others can see it and be impacted by it.

God didn't send a tract or a program to save the world—He sent a living **person** to be the message. Therefore, we should never allow a **tool** to become the **message** of our lives. Ask God to make you more than a *messenger who brings a message*. Trust God to help you **make your LIFE your message**.

Why Is This So Important?

We were never called by God "**to**" witness ... we are called to "**be**" a witness. Moreover, a **witness** is something you **ARE**—not something you **DO**. It's not the *words* we use that communicate the Gospel but what our **life communicates** to others about the Gospel.

As it relates to evangelism, **witness** is never used in the New Testament as a verb; it's always a **noun**. By the way, the word for witness in the New Testament (Greek) is the same word as **martyr**. What is a martyr? A martyr is someone whose life is a witness. Even in death.

The advantage of *being a witness* is that you don't have to **convince** people of truth ... you simply present the "truth of your life" as a clear **demonstration** of what God can do in someone's life. That's what people need to see.

In reality. God only asks one thing of us... ***Demonstrate Me to the world.*** That's the essence of the evangelism process, and we can only do that through *relationships* and *interaction*. In other words,

We do it. Therefore, our job is to be a ***demonstrator*** of the Gospel—not a ***persuader***. How effective would a salesperson be without first demonstrating the product? If we wouldn't buy a vacuum cleaner without first seeing how it works, why do we think people will ***accept Christ*** on the same basis ... especially when so much of what they have heard about Him has been negative and distorted?

Your job is all about **Product Demonstration**. Fortunately, the product you are called to demonstrate will sell itself, but you must be able to demonstrate it properly. And always remember: your words are not your witness ... your ***life*** is.

1 Peter 3:15 says ...*“Always be prepared to **give an answer** to everyone who **asks you to give the reason** for the **hope** that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”* Notice the Biblical process. ***They ask—You answer.*** Too often our concept of evangelism is: ***we*** ask—then ***we*** answer.

What is it that will cause people to ***ask*** you for a reason? According to Peter, it is the ***HOPE*** that they ***see in you***. If people are not seeing that hope in you, then your *words* are never going to be effective. If the world is not seeing hope in us—they won't ***ask***. And if they don't ***ask***, we can't give them a ***reason*** (answer). In which case, our words will always be empty.

Conclusion

Biblical evangelism is not about slick marketing and great entertainment. It is about our ***life*** ... and what our life conveys to those around us. Always remember that your ***words regarding*** Christ will never ***compensate*** for what your ***life*** does not say about Him.

Evangelism is not about you ***talking to people***. It's about you ***listening*** to them. Then allowing your life to ***proclaim*** the truth of what you believe. That's how the First Century Church changed their world for Christ. Words will adequately communicate ***concepts***—but only your life can communicate ***truth***.