

SESSION 9



THE FIFTH COLUMN

Introduction

'Evangelism is a process . . .'

Many Christians wouldn't think twice about this statement. As previously discussed, the cunning of the Great Deceiver is to disguise error and falsehood so close to the believer's heart that they fail to see the deception. How often do we hear people in church talking about 'steps' in evangelism as though it is a gradual process, something that takes place over time? But consider our true definition of evangelism - the proclamation of the Gospel.

When you put these concepts together there is an obvious dichotomy. The proclamation of the Gospel is an *event*. You either do it, or you don't. It happens, or it doesn't. There is no *process*. The error here is very similar to the previously discussed belief that any activity that draws a person closer to God is evangelism. In most cases there are plenty of 'warm-up' factors that do indeed draw a non-believer closer to Salvation. Such things are vital 'ploughing' activities, but unless the Gospel is given, the event of evangelism has not taken place. Ploughing activities are not evangelism and must not be viewed or discussed as such for fear of detracting from the actual, true act of giving a person the Gospel.

When our eyes are opened to this little deception we can begin to recognise the damage that it causes. If Christians believe evangelism to be a process it is almost inevitable that many will engage only in the 'niceties' of the process. Again we come back to our good works, our 'outreach' to non-believers. Outreach it may be, but evangelism it isn't. And while we're feeling good about our soup kitchens, housing shelters and coffee mornings the Gospel is still, by and large, being left, untold.

Focus

In Scripture the spreading of the Gospel is often referred to in terms of sowing seeds. When a farmer goes out into the field to sow the seed he goes out with the intention, quite simply, to 'sow the seeds'. The farmer understands that when it comes to sowing seeds it is an event, not a process. He goes out to his field and he either sows the seed or doesn't sow the seed. Seed-sowing is *not* a process. OK, it is a job that takes place over time, but it is still an *event*, not a *process*.

Notice the way Paul talks in his first letter to the Corinthians:

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

1 Corinthians 3:6

Paul *planted* the seed. He shared the Gospel. In this verse we can also see a process. The process is that of someone coming to know the Lord as his Saviour and it was done by the hand of God. We know that Paul was a great evangelist. His mission was to preach the Gospel (Acts 9:20; Romans 15:19,20; 1 Corinthians 9:16-19; 1 Timothy 2:7; 4:6, 11-16). This brief verse in 1 Corinthians 3:6 celebrates the working together of two men committed to the proclamation of the Gospel, committed to drawing others to Christ. We learn a little of Apollos in Acts 18: 24–28. Apollos was a man ‘who spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately . . . (verse 25). The Scripture then goes on to report,

. . . he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Acts 18:27

So we can see here that Apollos’ role was that of teacher and encourager, one who could perhaps clarify and discuss issues that had been introduced by Paul. He was ‘watering the seed.’ Like Paul and Apollos, we are called to sow and called to water. Undoubtedly a big part of our job as the body of Christ is also to ‘plough’, to prepare the way so that the soil is ready to receive the seed. But let us remind ourselves of the important truth that, when it comes to ‘growing’ and ‘harvesting’ this is the work of the Lord. Drawing a person to Christ is a process but evangelism is an event. God desperately wants His followers to go out into the fields (world) because they are ripe for harvest:

Then he said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.”

Matthew 9:37-38

Jesus knows about the different ways in which people react and respond to the Gospel. This is described in Matthew 13:1–9. Can we read that ‘parable of the sower’ and picture ourselves as the sower? How liberating when we do so knowing that the germination and the ‘growing’ of those seeds is purely the business of God and the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit!

Discussion

1. Review the dangers of this wrong definition: Evangelism is a process not an event.
2. Read the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1–9 and reflect on some of your own experiences of people’s different responses to the Gospel.
3. Discuss things, other than the hearing of the Gospel, which can be part of the process of drawing someone to Christ. What are some of the ‘watering’ activities you could do?
4. Has this study challenged your own views of evangelism as an event or process?

Bible Parallel

Read Mark 4:26-29

This story told by Jesus illustrates what the kingdom of God is like. It begins with the seed because inherent in the seed is life. The farmer has to intentionally plant the seeds in the field and when the seeds are sown onto ready soil, they will germinate and sprout and bring forth life, independent of the farmer.

The Gospel is like a seed that must be sown. It demands an intentional act of sharing or communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ. Just like the farmer, we must speak forth the story of salvation and of repentance from sin and the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross to bring transformation, righteousness and new life. The seed of the Gospel *must* be planted so that it will germinate and grow and ripen for harvest.

Further discussion and personal contemplation

Sharing the Gospel does not have to be in a formal setting from the pulpit or done by way of a structured script. Any believer, anywhere, can plant the Gospel seed. Discuss the various situations and opportunities that lend themselves for sharing the Gospel. Share some of your personal evangelism experiences where you know you planted a seed for the Gospel.