

# **BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #11: HOW THE APOSTLES PRACTICED EVANGELISM**

**By John Temples**

A few weeks ago I sent out an Insight article on how Jesus did evangelism. Here is the counterpart to that: how the inspired apostles did it. Lots of information and encouragement in these two articles to help us better reach others with the gospel.

## **1. They started in the large population centers.**

- a. In doing this, they followed the Lord's marching orders to preach the gospel first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).
- b. Of course, they evangelized in smaller towns also; but their focus was on the large centers.
- c. As churches were established in the cities, the gospel would naturally filter out to the countryside, as city folks took it there or as country folks visited the city.

## **2. They first sought out people who already believed in God and Scripture.**

- a. In the early years of the church, that meant going to the Jews.
- b. They followed the invariable rule "to the Jew first and then to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).
- c. "They came to Antioch...and went into the synagogue" (Acts 13:14).
- d. "...we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made" (Acts 16:13).

## **3. They began their preaching by complimenting their hearers and noting points of agreement.**

- a. Establishing goodwill is crucial in any evangelistic encounter.
- b. Acts 13:16,17--Paul identified with the Jews and recited their history.

- c. Acts 17:22--"Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious.'"
- d. Acts 24:10--Paul commended the Roman governor Felix.

#### **4. They adapted their methods and approaches to suit the audience.**

- a. Their basic message never changed, only the presentation.
- b. When they addressed Jews, they based their message on Old Testament Scriptures and Jewish history. Examples: Peter's sermon on Pentecost, Acts 2:14-36; Paul's address in the synagogue at Antioch, Acts 13:14-41.
- c. When they spoke to pagans or Gentiles, their themes were the One True God and His goodness to all mankind, the testimony of nature and creation, the futility of idolatry, and the certainty of judgment by God's appointed Judge, Jesus Christ. Example: Paul's sermon to the Athenians, Acts 17:16-31; his address to the Lycaonians, Acts 14:8-17.
- d. In presenting the gospel message, the apostles used:
  - i. Biblical Messianic prophecies (Acts 2:16, 13:33)
  - ii. Logic and reasoning (Acts 19:8)
  - iii. Quotes from relevant sources, even if not inspired (Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12)
  - iv. Their own experiences (Acts 22:1-21)

#### **5. They did not waste time trying to convert obstinate or prejudiced people.**

- a. "...since you reject [God's word], we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).
- b. "And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there" (Acts 14:5-7).
- c. In this, they were following the instructions of Jesus:

- i. “Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6).
- ii. “And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (Matthew 10:14).
- iii. “When they persecute you in one city, flee to another” (Matthew 10:23).

**6. They made sure their message, and people’s response to it, were centered and anchored on Jesus--His divine nature and His resurrection.**

- a. “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32).
- b. “God raised Him from the dead” (Acts 13:30).
- c. Acts 17:2,3 says, “Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’”
- d. Of course, the plan of salvation, the concept of the church, and acceptable worship must be taught; but consider that the church was not even mentioned on Pentecost!

**7. They relied on persuasive reasoning from the Scriptures instead of gimmicks to convert people.**

- a. “Agrippa said, ‘You almost persuade me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).
- b. “Then Paul, as his custom was, went into them, and for three sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2).
- c. How do people become Christians? They are *persuaded*. Not forced...tricked...manipulated...cajoled...bribed...badgered...intimidated ...but persuaded.

- d. When the apostles came to a town, they did not rent a large arena and put on an elaborate city-wide campaign; rather, they sought out and concentrated on individuals they had things in common with.

## **8. They did not write anyone off--they preached to all they met.**

- a. Romans 1:14,15--"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."
- b. They spoke to Jewish priests, Roman politicians, jailors, sailors, sorcerers, beggars, centurions, and even members of Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22).

Paul wrote an excellent summary of the apostles' evangelistic purposes, methods, and mindsets in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12: "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness — God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."

Their deep sense of duty and self-sacrifice in proclaiming the gospel is also seen in 2 Corinthians 4:5-15--"For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the

Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed — always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God."

May we have the same love for the Lord and for those who are lost. --John  
Temples