

Five Keys To Evangelism

Introduction. In the early church, many of the Jewish Christians did not accept the Gentiles socially, culturally, and religiously because of the 1,500 year heritage under the Mosaic law. Prejudice against the Gentiles, even hatred for them, was a well established fact before Christ came; therefore, the "Gentile problem" inevitably became one of the major problems of the early church.

This fact created great difficulties for Gentiles and Gentiles Christians. First, how were the Gentiles ever going to praise and give glory to God if the gospel was not preached to them and if they were not given the opportunity to obey? Second, if after the Gentiles have obeyed the gospel, they are then ostracized and treated as "second-class citizens" by their Jewish counterparts, how will they be able to praise God?

Paul discusses these problems in Romans 15. Meaningful lessons can be learned from this discussion. We are going to extract five key points which will help more people of all nations praise God, and will also better equip the church today to give God more of the glory that He deserves.

I. ***Unity Among Brethren***

- A. Christians must meet the challenge of unity if God is to be praised and people obey (Romans 15:5-6). Paul emphasizes that the strength and edification found in unity is not to be shattered by brethren pressing their own personal scruples and beliefs on others, as had been the case in the previous chapter.
- B. The "spirit of unity" and the "bond of peace" are much more important than anyone's pet hobby or tradition (Ephesians 4:1-3). Too many splits occur over personalities, ego conflicts, or plain pettiness. All of these should be subjected to the spirit of Christ and either resolved or overlooked so that the ultimate goal of unity and peace can be accomplished (Romans 15:2-3).
- C. If we cannot demonstrate oneness, unity, and peace inside the body of Christ, we certainly will not be able to bring the message to the world. The church either encourages or discourages evangelism by the example it sets (John 13:35).
- D. Paul knew that peace and unity in the body of Christ was necessary to both recruit and keep converts. He asked the saints at Rome to "strive together" (agonize) with him in their prayers so that the Jewish brethren would accept the Gentile gift (15:30). It is no wonder that Jesus prayed for the unity of believers so that the "world would believe" (John 17:21).

II. ***Acceptance Of All Men***

- A. All people have intrinsic worth and are loved by God (Romans 15:7-13). This view promotes both internal unity and external evangelism to all races and classes of people. Who are you to refuse those whom Christ has accepted on the same basis that He received you? God is no respecter of persons and you should not be either (Acts 10:34-35; 1 Timothy 5:21)! Paul poked fun at those who had a self-righteous attitude and thought they were better than others (Galatians 2:15; cf. Luke 18:9-14).
- B. Today, we make suspects of some of the best prospects. Secular historians have convincingly demonstrated that today's church is predominantly made up of a narrow band of white, middle-class Americans. The church ought to reflect and serve the community in which it resides rather than resist it. The sad part, however, about the prevailing overall structure of the church is that the narrow band that most still seem to be focusing on is not even the group that is the most receptive.
 - 1. Non-white ethnic groups, the poor, and the worldly have been abandoned by some in the Lord's church. But these people are sometimes the most likely to have honest, humble, and contrite hearts.
 - 2. Polls show that dissatisfaction exists with organized religion, and studies show that 50% of those who do not attend services see themselves as becoming active members of a church in the near future. What an opportunity for those of us who stand for the simple New Testament pattern.
- C. We must stop labeling, stereotyping, and prejudicing people on the assumption that they will never change. All of these groups are analogous today to the Gentiles in Romans 15 who were to be taught the gospel so that they would "glorify God for His mercy."

III. ***Priestly Duty And Blessed Privilege***

- A. Evangelism is a privilege and part of our priestly service (Romans 15:14-16). As a Christian priest we are to "bless" people by bringing them the glad tidings of the gospel (1 Peter 2:5, 9).
- B. The priests provided the means by which the faithful could offer their praise, gifts, and sacrifices to God and, in return, receive a blessing from God (Hebrews 13:15-16). Some of the happiest, most satisfying work you will ever do is converting someone to Christ.
- C. Evangelism should never be viewed as an option. It is absolutely necessary if we are to please our King and be a priest in more than name only.

IV. **A Missionary Spirit**

- A. We need to be willing to go where Christ has not already been named (Romans 15:20-21). Paul was not content merely to water where someone else had planted. He was willing to plow and to pray that the seed would germinate in receptive hearts.
- B. We must play the role of both John the Baptist and Christ. John plowed the soil of human hearts so Christ could come and plant seed effectively. By loving people and showing them we are sincerely interested in them as person first and not just as future church members, we soften their hearts and they become more receptive to our message.
- C. We need more of the spirit where instead of preachers always looking for a congregation, congregations look for a preacher who they can send to areas where there presently are no congregations of the Lord's people (Acts 11:19-20).
- D. Paul's effectiveness was at least partially attributed to his willingness to really work with people before moving on (Romans 15:17-19). We do not have miraculous powers now to validate our message, but we do have the power of a transformed, crucified life. Perhaps more than anything else, that give credibility to the message (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 2:20). Counterfeit Christians cannot show the world a genuine message.

V. **A Kingdom Mind-Set**

- A. Our goal is not to fill the building but the kingdom. Many churches become content and satisfied because the building is full. A minute percentage of the community is saved, yet Christians are "at ease in Zion" because the local congregation has reached a "convenient" size (Amos 6:1).
- B. Paul was never content to rest on past successes. He did not become smug and self-satisfied at the areas he had covered in his preaching. He wanted to go to Rome and Spain (Romans 15:22-24).
- C. We need to have the vision and the faith to fill up the kingdom and not be content just to fill up our present building of brick and mortar. Furthermore, we need to be willing to convert those we know, even when it may not benefit our congregation directly.
- D. Supporting foreign evangelism is wonderful, but it is not a substitute for personal evangelism. Christians think their responsibility is fulfilled in teaching because their congregation sends money to support a preacher in a faraway place. This is no excuse to neglect your back yard.
- E. One of our necessary tasks is to provide people with a faithful place to worship, but people moving into an area and swelling the size of a

local church is not a substitute for evangelism. There is a difference between growing and swelling. The former consists of genuine additions to the church by spreading the borders of the kingdom through converts whereas the latter is simply the shifting of sheep.

Conclusion. Imagine for a moment a brotherhood where all Christians were fulfilling their God-given responsibility and privilege to teach the lost. The explosive possibilities of such a condition existing among Christians are awesome.

Statistics tell us that it takes five Mormons to make one adult convert per year, and the Mormons are among the world's fastest growing religious groups. However, the average size congregation among churches of Christ is about 160 members and it takes about 80 members to make one convert a year. Churches of Christ, therefore, average about two conversions of baptized adults per year. Also, the drop out rate of those converted was around 50%. Surely the Lord expects more of us.

The Lord's church could be the fastest growing religion again if every Christian would take seriously their "priestly duty" to teach. Indeed, if these principles could be followed, all nations would praise God and glorify Him for His mercy.