

EVANGELISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

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The terms, *evangelize* and *evangelism* are unknown in the New Testament. They are terms that have been coined to describe activity that is described in the New Testament, but not neatly labeled therein. The English terms are derived from two Greek words that are found in the New Testament, εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*), “good news,” and εὐαγγελιστής (*euangelistes*), “a good news proclaimer.” Thus, these two coined terms refer to proclaiming the good news imparted by Christ and the Holy Spirit. In this paper we will present a study of evangelism as understood and practiced by the New Testament Church.

SECTION ONE: THE WHY OF EVANGELISM

The most obvious questions which to begin our study are, “**what is evangelism,**” and “**why should we evangelize?**” We begin by examining the second of these questions.

The most obvious answer to the question of why is two-fold:

1. Jesus commanded evangelism
2. Our compassion for the lost

Compassion for the lost is a strong motivator. Jesus said,

*"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."*¹

If the eternal destiny of our friends and loved ones, as well as all of humanity that surrounds us, is determined by whether or not these travel the only road to heaven, any caring person would do all that he could do to make certain that everyone traveled that road.

A stronger motivation for disciples of Jesus Christ is Our Lord's command, which succeeding generations have labeled, *The Great Commission*. In 1995, we presented a paper at the conclave, *How New Testament Churches Responded to the Great Commission*. We begin our study by quoting a portion of that paper.

*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*²

¹ John 14:6

² Matthew 28:18-20

To grasp what Our Lord commanded on this occasion, we first must undertake a brief word study of these verses.

The main verb of the phrase is μαθητεύω (*matheteuo*) "to disciple, to teach, to instruct." In the passage before us, the verb is second person plural, first aorist tense, imperative mood, active voice.³

- The imperative mood is used when the will of one person seeks to impact the will of another. Obedience or compliance is desired.
- The aorist tense in the imperative mood signifies summary action, transient or instantaneous...or something to be undertaken at once.⁴ It has the sense of either a command or an appeal to "do it!"
- **The primary command of the commission is, *disciple all the nations.***

The other three verbs in this passage, all participles, speak to the "how." We must understand the significance of the participles if we are to interpret properly Matthew's account of the Great Commission.

The two participles, βαπτίζοντες (*baptizontes*), "immersing," and διδάσκοντες (*didaskontes*), "teaching," are both nominative plural, present tense, active voice.

- The use of the present tense in participles indicates that the described action takes place simultaneously with the action described by the main verb.
- Therefore, "discipling" (the primary command) is defined in this passage as, "immersing people and teaching them to keep the commands of Christ."

In a departure from Classical Greek, Koine Greek writers and speakers sometimes used a participle as an imperative, although the use is rare. Because these two participles are tied to the main verb, which is in the imperative mood, they would be examples of the imperative use of participles.

Thus, Jesus clear command to His disciples is, **Disciple the nations, and do this by immersing them and then teaching them to keep every one of my commandments.**

The remaining participle in this passage is the opening word of verse 19. This participle, πορευθέντες (*poreuthentes*), is the nominative plural, masculine, aorist participle of πορεύομαι (*poreuomai*), meaning, "to go."

- The aorist tense in a participle indicates that the action described occurs prior to the action of the main verb.
- Thus, the "going" precedes the "discipling."

³ μαθητεύσατε (*matheteusate*)

⁴Dana, H.E., and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Toronto, The Macmillan Company, 1955) p. 300

It is important for us to understand what Matthew intended to convey by the use of this participle (*poreuthentes*). Participles have varied uses in Koine Greek. There are several ways that this participle can be understood. The three most obvious are:

1. **As a simple participle**, *poreuthentes* would be translated, "going," or, "as you go," meaning that as one moves about in the natural intercourse of life, he should be discipling those about him, by immersing them and then teaching them to observe the commandments of Christ. This understanding of the participle would imply that if every Christian did this in his own place of residence, then the nations eventually would be disciplined.
2. If this participle is translated **as a conditional participle**, it would be translated, "if you go," or "when you go." The idea being, "Should you go out among the nations for any reason, disciple them." This rendering of the participle says nothing about a deliberate going forth for the purpose of discipling.
3. The third possibility is that this participle, like the two other participles in this passage (*immersing* and *teaching*), is **imperative**. If the participle is so used here, it would be translated, *Go*. As an imperative, it would be either a command or an appeal to go to the nations of the world and make disciples of them. This is the manner in which most English versions have rendered this passage.

Thus, verse 19 can be interpreted in two ways:

- as a command to go out for the explicit purpose of discipling nations;
- as a command to be involved in discipling in the routine intercourse of life (If one stays at home, he should be discipling. If he travels on business or holiday, he should be discipling).

There are two means of determining whether the introductory participle of the commission is simple, conditional, or imperative.

1. immediate context;
2. how the eleven disciples responded to the commission.

In all honesty, the context provides little help. Some feel that since the main verb is an imperative, and the two present participles are used in an imperative sense (*immersing them and teaching them*), then the opening participle (expressing some sort of *going*) also must be an imperative. This assumption, of course, begs the question. The command could begin with discipling (the main verb), rather than going, i.e. ***Disciple all nations, as you go or when you go, immersing etc....***

An examination of the response of the apostles and the Church under their leadership is more enlightening. We will examine their response in the following sections.

SECTION TWO: THE MESSAGE PROCLAIMED BY THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Part One: Terms

The message of New Testament evangelism is more than the “good news of salvation.” Consistently, the New Testament Gospel is described by the terms,

- the *Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven*
- the *Gospel of the Kingdom of God*,
- the *Gospel of the Kingdom*

These terms are synonymous. Different Gospel writers use different terms for the same subject. Matthew, writing for a Jewish audience, uses four terms for the *Gospel of the Kingdom*.

- *The Kingdom of Heaven* - 32 times.
- *The Kingdom* – 7 times
- *The Kingdom of God* – 4 times
- *My Kingdom* – 1 time
- *The Kingdom of their Father* – 1 time

The rest of the New Testament writers never use the term, *Kingdom of Heaven*.

- Mark, Luke, and John use the expression, *The Kingdom of God* (48 times).
- Twice in his Gospel, Luke uses the expression, *The Kingdom*. Mark and John do not use this expression.
- In Acts, Luke uses the expression, *The Kingdom of God*, 6 times; *The Kingdom* occurs twice in Acts.
- New Testament writers also use other random terms a few times. For example, in Ephesians 5:5, Paul uses the term, *The Kingdom of Christ and God*.

It is important to be aware of these terms and how they are used.

- Some have tried to make a distinction between the **Kingdom of Heaven** and the **Kingdom of God**.
- Such a distinction cannot be made. When different writers described the same scene, they used synonymous terms, but not always identical terms.

Here is an example:

Matthew 4:12, 17 *Now when He heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee;... From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Mark 1:14-15 *And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the **kingdom of God is at hand**; repent and believe in the gospel."*

This example, and others like it, demonstrates that the terms, *Kingdom of Heaven* and *Kingdom of God*, and the others listed above, are synonymous.

For brevity's sake, we are going to use the term, **The Gospel of the Kingdom**.

Part Two: The Message of Jesus

The Four Gospels frequently describe the message declared by Jesus as the Gospel of the Kingdom. Matthew 9:35 summarizes the ministry of Jesus,

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

When Jesus sent out the Twelve (Matthew 10:1ff; Mark 6:7ff; Luke 9:1ff) and later the Seventy (Luke 10:1ff), the content of their preaching was, *the Kingdom*.

The Twelve:

Luke 9:2 *And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.*
Matthew 10:7 *"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*

The Seventy:

Luke 10:8-11 *"Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' "But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'*

Part Three: The Post-Pentecost Message

The Gospel of the Kingdom was not just for the Jews to whom Jesus and his disciples spoke. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus declared that the Gospel of the Kingdom was to be proclaimed to all nations, during the Church age.

Matthew 24:14 *"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.*

Prior to His ascension, the resurrected Jesus spent forty days speaking of things concerning the Kingdom of God.

Acts 1:3 *To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*

In keeping with the declaration recorded in Matthew 24:14, when the Christians fled Jerusalem and took the Gospel to various cities, the message that they carried was the good news of the Kingdom and the identity of Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:12 *But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.*⁵

When Paul and his companions traveled throughout the Mediterranean world, the message that they carried was the Gospel of the Kingdom and the facts concerning Jesus Christ.

Acts 19:8 *And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.*

Acts 20:25 *"And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face."*

Acts 28:23 *When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.*

Acts 28:31 *preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.*

The goal toward which Paul directed believers was the Kingdom of God.

Acts 14:22 *strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."*

Both Jews (Acts 19:8; 28:23) and Gentiles (Acts 14:22; 20:25; 28:31) were in the audience described in these citations.

Part Four: What is the Gospel of the Kingdom?

In order to understand the Gospel that the New Testament Church proclaimed, we must ask, "What is the Gospel of the Kingdom?" In I Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul presented the core facts of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

*Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you,
which also you received,
in which also you stand,
by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless
you believed in vain.*

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,

⁵ Early in this passage, the message of those scattered from Jerusalem, including Philip, is described as, *preaching the Word* (Acts 8:4) and *proclaiming Christ* (Acts 8:5). Later (Acts 8:12) the fuller description is given of the content of the preaching. This example demonstrates that *proclaiming the word*, and *proclaiming Christ* involved both the good news concerning the Kingdom and the identity and work of Christ that made the Kingdom a reality.

*that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
and that He was buried,
and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...*⁶

These core facts are three:

1. Christ (the Messiah) died for our sins
2. Christ was buried
3. Christ was resurrected

All of the blessed facets of the Gospel message emanate from these core facts, which guarantee the reality of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

However, the Gospel of the Kingdom is more than these three facts. The result of these historical facts is the Good News proclaimed under the authority of the King.

The underlying sense of the Greek term rendered, *kingdom*⁷, is *to rule*.⁸ The Gospel of the Kingdom is both the good news of salvation and the proclamation of authority.

Luke 17:21 highlights this important truth.

nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (NAS)

- Some versions (KJV, NIV, etc.) render the closing phrase of Luke 17:21, *the kingdom of God is within you*.
- Other versions (NAS, RSV, etc.) render the phrase, *the kingdom of God is among you*, or, *in you midst*.

The Greek phrase⁹ can be rendered either way. There is not a clue in the context to guide us as to which is correct. In reality, both are correct. The essence of the declaration is, *God's kingdom exists wherever He is the ruler*. Wherever the King rules as king - that is His Kingdom. The Kingdom of God can be in an individual (*the Kingdom of God is within you*) or a group (*The Kingdom of God is among you*).

⁶ In I Corinthians 2:1-2, Paul wrote, *And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*. Paul clearly did not mean that he spoke only of Jesus and the cross, because he immediately followed this statement with varied aspects of the Kingdom, including the glories that await those who are Kingdom citizens. What he was declaring is that he did not come among them with the manipulating techniques of rhetoric, or philosophical wisdom, or awing them with miracles (I Corinthians 1:22ff).

⁷ Βασιλεία

⁸ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass. Hendrickson Publishers), 1896, reprinted 2000, pages 96-97

⁹ ἐντός ὑμῶν ἐστίν

The Good News of the Kingdom of God (and the synonymous terms mentioned above) is a message of lordship.

- The Good News of the Kingdom is that even though one is living on earth, he can have citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20-21)
- The Good News of the Kingdom is that salvation from the guilt of sin is concurrent with becoming a citizen of the Kingdom.
- The Good News of the Kingdom is that all who willingly accept the authority of the King are recipients of the indescribable blessings that characterize the Kingdom – to some degree now, but ultimately in heaven.
- The Good News of the Kingdom was and is good news (gospel) because of its declaration of God’s victory over Satan and all of the ramifications of that victory, including the resurrection and the glories that await citizens of the Kingdom.
- The Good News of the Kingdom informs us that we are united with those who today reside in Paradise with Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:1, 22-24)

In the model prayer, Our Lord presented four categories for which we should petition Our Father:

1. *Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*
2. *Give us this day our daily bread.*
3. *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*
4. *Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

The first of these (*Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*) expresses the hope of the Gospel of the Kingdom, i.e., that God’s rule might become reality in every quarter of the universe. The atoning work of Christ upon the cross, His victory over the grave, and His ascension to the right hand of the throne of God, make possible the ultimate fulfillment of this petition.

The Gospel of the Kingdom is more than, “pray the sinner’s prayer and go on your merry way.” The Gospel of the Kingdom includes how one gains his Kingdom citizenship papers, the responsibilities of citizenship, and the blessed life experienced by citizens of the Kingdom.

How does one gain citizenship in the Kingdom? Jesus mystically said that one must be born of water and Spirit in order to gain entrance into the Kingdom.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again (the Greek says, "born from above") he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."¹⁰

In the beautiful prologue to his Gospel, John stated this general truth,

¹⁰ John 3:3-5

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.¹¹

How does this spiritual birth take place; how does someone “receive Him”? Acts contains many examples of what people did when they responded positively to the Gospel of the Kingdom.¹² The pattern is clear.

A. They believed – this is mentioned clearly or is obvious in each instance. Saving belief has two elements:

- 1. Repentance** – the Greek term used is μετανοέω (*metanoeo*) which means to change your mind. In response to Peter’s sermon on Pentecost, when the crowd cried out, asking what they should do, Peter’s first word was, *change your mind* (μετανοέω) – meaning that they should change their mind about who Jesus is – the one who had been crucified, God had raised up and made Him both Lord and Christ. He is the King. Changing one’s mind and belief are synonymous terms, with respect to salvation. One believes that Christ is the King.¹³
- 2. Belief/trust in the atoning work of Christ.** Thus, when someone responds to the Gospel, the appropriate thing is to ask them, “Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and your Saviour?” If one of these is not true for the new convert, then neither is the other. To accept Jesus as Lord, without accepting Him as Saviour could result in attempting to be saved by meritorious works. If one accepts Jesus as Saviour, but not as Lord, then a “once saved, always saved,” life of licentiousness could follow.

B. They were immersed in water, signifying that the old man was dead and a new man had been born. This was something that was not delayed, but was done immediately when a person accepted the Gospel as truth. Lordship is the essential issue of this rite. Paul made this clear in his dissertation on immersion in Romans 6.

Some conversion accounts contain other elements, but these basic elements are clearly stated or implied in each account. In normal circumstances, the new citizen of the Kingdom becomes a member of a local expression of the Kingdom – a local church – where he is taught how to live as a citizen of the Kingdom¹⁴ - a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the pattern that Jesus

¹¹ John 1:12-13

¹² Acts 2:1-41 (Pentecost); 8:4-24 (Samaritans); 8:26-40 (Ethiopian); 9:1-18; 22:1-16 (Saul); 10:1-48 (Cornelius); 16:12-15 (Lydia); 16:25-34 (Jailer); 18:8 (Corinthians); 19:1-7 (John’s disciples)

¹³ Acts 2:36-38

¹⁴ Of interest is Paul’s language in the Philippian letter. Not only does he state in 3:12, *For our citizenship* [literally, the term is “commonwealth] *is in heaven*, but in 1:27 (*conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ*), the Greek term that Paul uses πολιτεύεσθε means, “fulfill your obligation as citizens.” Thus, a literal rendering of this verse is, *Only worthily of the Gospel of Christ, fulfill your obligation as citizens...* Paul had citizenship in the Kingdom in view, when he wrote this passage.

laid out in the Great Commission – immerse and teach converts to observe all that Jesus commanded.¹⁵

Sad to say, the Gospel proclaimed by many in the modern evangelical world obscures important aspects of the Gospel of the Kingdom. At the 2004 Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization in Thailand, commenting on the AIDS crisis, one speaker indicated that one reason for the crisis was the failure of African churches to fulfill the entire Great Commission. He stated,

“Our call to action [in the AIDS crisis] begins with a repentant spirit [on the part of evangelists]. Our past practice of evangelism was better at saving souls than creating Christian minds and Christian behaviour.”¹⁶

When one enters the Kingdom, it behooves those who disciple him to emphasize the relationship that he has with his new King, and then to instruct the convert in how to live as a citizen of the Kingdom. The Gospel of the Kingdom embraces all of these elements.

Part Five: Post-Pentecostal Proclamation declared the Kingdom as present reality

The Post-Pentecostal proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom had dimensions that were absent during the ministry of Jesus. Some of these we will highlight in the next section. Here we need to note one distinctive difference:

- Prior to the Lord’s ascension and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel of the Kingdom was, *The Kingdom is at hand*, or *nearby*. Jesus spoke of the coming of the Kingdom, which was imminent. It was for this reason that the Pharisees, in response to Jesus’ declaration that the Kingdom was just over the horizon, asked Him when the Kingdom was coming (Luke 17:21)
- From Pentecost onward, the Gospel of the Kingdom is not, *The Kingdom is near*, but *The Kingdom is here*.

This change in the message reflects the coronation passages that describe what happened when Jesus ascended, His present status, and the future of the Kingdom. The following is a summary of the progression of this topic as outlined in Scripture.

In this present age, God the Father has made Jesus King

*...and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*¹⁷

¹⁵ Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁶ Christianity Today.com, “The Spirit of Faithfulness,” Deborah Dortzbach. Posted 5/02/07

¹⁷ Luke 22:29-30

During the years of Jesus' earthly ministry, His Kingdom was not a reality, but it was just over the horizon.

1. When John the Baptist preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, his message was, "repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand."
2. When Jesus went about Judea preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, His message was the same, "The Kingdom of God is at hand."
3. The Kingdom of God was near, but not quite present, as yet.

After the resurrection of Jesus, His Kingly Rule was declared as present reality.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."¹⁸

*"Therefore having been **exalted to the right hand of God**, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. ... Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that **God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified.**"¹⁹*

*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, **and upholds all things by the word of His power**. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,²⁰*

In the Olivet discourse, the day before his arrest, Jesus looked to the future and declared,

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."²¹

After Pentecost, the apostles did not declare that the Kingdom of God is near – they proclaimed the Kingdom as present reality.

Six times in Acts, the apostles are described as preaching, teaching, or reasoning concerning the Kingdom and in none of these instances were the message, *The Kingdom of God is at Hand*. The Kingdom of God was presented as a present reality.

¹⁸ Matthew 28:18

¹⁹ Acts 2:33,36

²⁰ Hebrews 1:1-3

²¹ Matthew 24:14

As reigning King, there will come a day in which King Jesus will sit as judge of all mankind.

"And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead."²²

"For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,"²³

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

All the nations will be gathered before Him;

and He will separate them from one another,

as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to those on His right,

'Come, you who are blessed of My Father,

inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Then He will also say to those on His left,

"Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;"²⁴

There will come a time when Jesus will give the Kingdom to the Father, and will subject Himself to the Father.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

For He (God the Father) has put all things in subjection under His (Christ's) feet.

But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.

When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God (the Father) may be all in all."²⁵

²² Acts 10:42

²³ John 5:22

²⁴ Matthew 25:31-34, 41

²⁵ I Corinthians 15:22-28

The following scenario is an important part of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

- 1. God the Father so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son**
 - that is what it took for God the Father to redeem out of sinful humanity citizens for His Kingdom.
 - God the Father considered The Kingdom to be the Pearl of Great Price so He paid the greatest price in all of earth or heaven in order to obtain this Kingdom, which he then gave to His Son.
- 2. After his death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus received all authority**
 - He then ascended to sit on a throne at the right hand of God the Father.
 - From that heavenly throne, Jesus rules over His Kingdom, today.
- 3. There will come a day in which King Jesus will judge all people**
- 4. There will come a day in which the Son will give the reins of rule back to God the Father.**

SECTION THREE: THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PRESENCE IN EVANGELISM

The action of the Holy Spirit looms large in the New Testament record of evangelism. Chiefly, the activity of the Spirit is seen in empowering the message (contemporary Pentecostals and Charismatics describe this as, “anointing”) and working of miracles. First, we will consider the place of miracles in New Testament evangelism.

The Gospel of the Kingdom and Miracles

Part One: Miracles in the ministry of Jesus

Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist, did not perform miracles. His startling call to repentance and preparation of hearts for the Messiah won many converts, no doubt because he was a man filled with the Holy Spirit.²⁶

When Jesus began preaching, his message was the same as John’s but there was an essential difference - supernatural signs were an integral part of Jesus’ declaration of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Preaching, teaching, and miracles were the consistent package of Jesus’ ministry (Matthew 9:35, quoted above, accurately describes the nature of Jesus’ evangelistic activity).

Miracles were an important part of the Gospel of the Kingdom because they demonstrated the authority of God over every dimension of the human condition. Matthew described a scene, early in Jesus’ ministry, that set the tone for his future campaigns.

²⁶ Luke 1:15

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics²⁷, paralytics; and He healed them.²⁸

The miracles associated with the Gospel of the Kingdom usually fell within the above described categories:

1. healing of obvious physical ailments
2. healing of mental illness
3. deliverance from demonization

There were instances in which Jesus performed miracles other than those within these categories:

- In a few instances, Jesus raised someone from the dead (Lazarus²⁹, the widow's son at Nain³⁰, etc.).
- On two occasions, the feeding of the 5000³¹ and the feeding of the 4000³², Jesus demonstrated Divine power by multiplying the quantity of food.³³

Even in Nazareth, where unbelief interfered with Jesus' performing a plethora of miracles, he still performed some miracles as accompaniments to His teaching.³⁴

When Jesus sent out the Twelve and later the Seventy, along with their commission to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, they were given authority³⁵ to expel demons, heal every kind of diseases, and to raise the dead.³⁶ One unnamed disciple caused consternation among the Twelve because he was performing miracles in Jesus' name, even though he was not one of their company.³⁷

Thus, it is apparent that in Jesus' ministry, the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom included miracles as much as preaching, although the preaching always was the primary element. Miracles were a dramatic means of declaring God's rule over everything.

In addition to demonstrating God's authority, miracles also fulfilled other purposes in the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

²⁷ The term (σεληνιαζομαι) rendered as *epileptics* [NAS], *having seizures* [NIV], *lunaticks* [KJV] refers to those whose mental health was effected by the moon. The ancients believed that phases of the moon caused an increase or a diminution of mental illness, especially seizures. Thus, one could render the term literally as, *moon-struck*.

²⁸ Matthew 4:23-24

²⁹ John 11:39ff;

³⁰ Luke 7:11ff

³¹ Matthew 14:19ff; Mark 6:41ff; Luke 9:12ff; John 6:10 ff; Matthew 16:9-10

³² Matthew 15:32ff; 16:9-10; Mark 8:1ff; 8:19-20

³³ Miracles such as turning water into wine, walking upon the water, and the Transfiguration, are not within the purview of this paper, since they were not displayed before the multitudes.

³⁴ Matthew 13:54ff

³⁵ Ἐξουσία

³⁶ Matthew 10:1, 8; Mark 6:7, 12-13; Luke 9:1,6; 10:1ff

³⁷ Mark 9:38ff; Luke 9:49ff

1. They demonstrated the absolute power of God.
2. They demonstrated the character of the King – he was touched by the suffering of fallen man.
3. They credentialed Jesus, and thus His message.
4. When the Twelve and the Seventy were commissioned to tour cities and villages, miracles credentialed their message.

Miracles always had a purpose; they were neither playthings nor objects of curiosity. On more than one occasion, the enemies of Jesus tested Him by asking Him for a sign.³⁸ In each of these instances, Jesus refused with comments that revealed that He knew their hearts. Jesus always responded to sincere questions, but refused to be manipulated by duplicity.³⁹ Usually, these hostile requests came shortly after Jesus had performed a notable miracle.

Part Two: Miracles in the Post-Pentecostal Church

Prior to Christ's ascension, the Gospel of the Kingdom was incomplete. After the ascension of Christ, the Gospel of the Kingdom could be preached in fullness. As already noted, the elements described by Paul in I Corinthians 15:1-4 were at the heart of the complete Gospel.

Miracles continued to be a frequent accompaniment to the proclamation, beginning with the miracle of languages manifested on Pentecost.⁴⁰ The proclamation always was center stage, with the miracles serving the same purpose as they did during the ministry of Christ – credentialing the messengers and the message, as well as demonstrating the authority of the one true God.

Jesus had promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would be given to them and they would receive power, enabling them to be His witnesses in every nation, beginning in Jerusalem.

*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*⁴¹

Because the apostles were the only ones to whom Jesus gave this promise, and because there is ambiguity in Acts 2 as to whether the gift of languages was given to the Twelve or to the 120,⁴² many argue that this promise was limited to the apostles. Indeed, according to the record in Acts, the manifestation of miraculous power was demonstrated only by the apostles, until the ordination of the seven deacons in Acts 6.

³⁸ Matthew 11:38ff; Mark 8:11ff; Luke 11:16ff; John 2:18; 6:30

³⁹ These passages immediately bring to mind the scene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, in which Herod challenges Jesus to *walk across my swimming pool*.

⁴⁰ Acts 2:1ff

⁴¹ Acts 1:8

⁴² The question turns on the answer as to whether the “all” in Acts 2:1 refers to the apostles or to the 120. Since the immediate antecedent is the Twelve (1:26) the strongest grammatical argument is that the term refers only to the apostles. The succeeding account of Peter's standing up with the Twelve also lends weight to this position. On the other hand, Peter's promise in Acts 2:38 might argue for the reference's being to the 120. Also, the Greek idiomatic expression, πάντες ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό (*all together, together*) could refer to the 120, since ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό is the expression used in 1:15 for the 120 and 2:44 for the entire church. The question cannot be resolved with certainty. The interpreter's theology probably will influence how he chooses to understand this verse.

Here is the record of post-Pentecostal miraculous activity in the early Church, prior to the commissioning of Paul.

Acts 2:43 *Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.*

Acts 3:6-9 *But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-- walk!" And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God;*

Acts 4:33 *And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.*

Acts 5:3-10 *But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.*

Acts 5:12-13 *At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.*

Acts 5:14-16 *And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.*

Acts 6:8 *And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.*

Acts 8:5-8 *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. So there was much rejoicing in that city.*

Acts 8:14-17 *Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been*

baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

Acts 9:33-34 *There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed." Immediately he got up.*

Acts 9:36-42 *Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us." So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.*

Acts 10:44-46 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.*

Up to this point in the Acts record, the only ones through whom the Holy Spirit manifested supernatural activity, other than the apostles, were Stephen and Philip, two men on whom the apostles had laid hands (Acts 6:6).

Of special interest is the episode in Acts 9:36-42. When Tabitha fell sick and died, none of the church leaders prayed for her healing or resurrection. They sent for an apostle. This pattern gives further credence to the view that only apostles and those on whom they laid hands had the authority to perform miracles.

A related question is the ability of those on whom the apostles laid hands to pass the gift on to others. Many argue that the Philip's evangelistic activity in Samaria demonstrated that those on whom the apostles laid hands could not lay hands on others and thus pass the gift to future generations.

Acts 8:12, 14-18 *But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike... Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money...*

The question has to be asked, "Why didn't Philip lay hands on his converts and bestow the Holy Spirit; why did two apostles have to travel from Jerusalem to Samaria to impart this gift?"

When the believers were scattered through the persecutions of Saul of Tarsus, they went everywhere preaching the word, but there is no record of any of them (other than Philip) having performed miracles.

Acts 8:1,4 ...*And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles... Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.*

Acts 11:19-21 *So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.*

Part Three: Miracles in the ministry of Paul

With the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul, a new miracle-working preacher, Paul, entered the narrative. The following is a catalogue of Paul's evangelistic activity, noting those episodes that include miracles and those that do not.

Damascus	Acts 9:19-25	No miracles recorded
Jerusalem	Acts 9:26-29	No miracles recorded
Antioch	Acts 11:25-26	No miracles recorded
Cyprus	Acts 13:4-12	False prophet miraculously blinded
Pisidian Antioch	Acts 13:14-51	No miracles recorded
Iconium	Acts 13:51-14:6	Unspecified signs and wonders
Lystra	Acts 14:8-20	Healed a lame man
Derbe	Acts 14:20-21	No miracles recorded
Perga	Acts 14:25	No miracles recorded
Antioch	Acts 14:26-28	No miracles recorded
Jerusalem Council	Acts 15:3-29	No miracles, but reported the miracles done among Gentiles
Antioch	Acts 15:30-40	No miracles recorded
Tour of Churches	Acts 15:41–16:5	No miracles recorded
Philippi	Acts 16:12-40	Cast out a demon; freed from prison by an earthquake
Thessalonica	Acts 17:1-10	No miracles recorded ⁴³

⁴³ In I Thessalonians 1:5, Paul wrote, *for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.* The Greek in this passage indicates that the descriptive terms refer to the apostles, i.e., that the full conviction referred to the heart of the preachers, not the audience; the lack of an ἐν before the term for “full conviction,” throws the term and “Holy Spirit,” into a single conception, complimentary to the word for “power.” Thus, the phrase refers to the courage, intensity, of the preachers. The phrase refers to the effect of the Holy Spirit on the preachers. This is followed up with reference to the effect of the spirit on the audience (v 6).

Berea	Acts 17:10-14	No miracles recorded
Athens	Acts 17:16-34	No miracles recorded
Corinth	Acts 18:1-18	No miracles recorded ⁴⁴
Ephesus	Acts 18:19-21	No miracles recorded
Antioch	Acts 18:22	No miracles recorded
Tour of Churches	Acts 18:23	No miracles recorded
Ephesus	Acts 19:1-20:1	Bestowal of Holy Spirit on John's disciples; Extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul
Philippi and surrounding region	Acts 20:1-6	No miracles recorded
Troas	Acts 20:6-12	Restored Eutychus to life
Journey to Jerusalem	Acts 20:13-21:17	No miracles recorded
Jerusalem (including his imprisonment)	Acts 21:17-23.30	No miracles recorded
Imprisoned in Caesarea	Acts 23:31-26:32	No miracles recorded
Journey to Rome	Acts 27:1-28:15	Unscathed by poison snake bite on Malta; Healed father of Publius; Healed many residents of Malta
Imprisoned in Rome	Acts 28:16-31	No miracles recorded

Of note in the Acts record is the absence of miracles performed by any of Paul's companions.

- Neither Barnabas, nor Silas, nor Timothy, nor Titus, nor any other of Paul's traveling companions performed miracles.
- Apollos' ministry in Ephesus and Corinth consisted of powerful preaching, but no miracles.

Paul's epistles are consistent with this record. None of Paul's epistles mention miraculous activity by any of his traveling companions.

The only possibility of such a record is in two of Paul's exhortations to Timothy.

See James Moffatt, "The First & Second Epistles to the Thessalonians," *Expositor's Greek New Testament*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing) 1976, page 24

⁴⁴ In II Corinthians 12:12, Paul stated, *the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles*. Since Luke gives a detailed report of Paul's first visit to Corinth (Acts 18), and does not report miracles as occurring during that visit, and since Paul in I Corinthians 1:22-2:5 implies that the Holy Spirit empowered his speech, but that he did not produce "signs," we have to ask when the events referenced in II Corinthians 12:12 took place? Paul made three visits to Corinth, two of them were before II Corinthians was written. The second visit was one in which he had to make a hurried trip to the city to deal with problems in the church. On that visit, he had to assert his apostolic authority. Therefore, the events referenced in II Corinthians 12:12 probably took place on that second visit. For an explanation of Paul's visits to Corinth, see Addenda.

1 Timothy 4:14 *Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.*

NOTE: The term, *spiritual*, is not in the Greek text. The term was added by the NAS translators. The KJV and NIV are truer to the text in this instance.

2 Timothy 1:6 *For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*

What is the gift that was bestowed on Timothy by the laying on of hands by the elders and Paul?

Because the Greek term in both of these passages is *χάρισμα* (*charisma*), some would argue that the gift must of necessity be a “charismatic” gift – as the term, *charismatic*, is used in the contemporary Charismatic Movement. However, this term cannot be so restricted. In the New Testament the term is used for any gift freely given or bestowed. Here are a few examples of the term’s varied use in the New Testament:

- General favor from individuals or from God: II Corinthians 1:11
- God’s calling on an individual or nation: Romans 11:29
- The gift of salvation: Romans 5:15f; 6:23
- The ability to live according to God’s design for each individual: I Corinthians 7:7 (in this example, as single or married).
- Spiritual gifts in a special sense: Romans 12:6; I Corinthians 12:4, 9, 28, 30f; I Peter 4:10

Context must determine the meaning of the term. We look to the context of each of these Timothy passages in an effort to identify the gift that had been bestowed upon Timothy:

- I Timothy 4:14 is in the midst of a passage in which Paul is exhorting Timothy to refute false doctrine and be diligent in his teaching. Thus, we would conclude from this passage that the gift was that of a teacher.
- II Timothy 1:6 is in the context of Paul’s exhorting Timothy to be bold and to retain the standards of sound words which Timothy had received from Paul. Once again, the exhortation implies that the gift has to do with proclamation and teaching.

There is nothing here that justifies the conclusion that Timothy was a miracle-worker. The evidence points to the conclusion that his gift is was Holy Spirit anointed communication. He was supernaturally gifted at making disciples and teaching, as per the Great Commission.

The only New Testament passage that speaks of evangelistic miracles being performed by believers other than those already noted is Mark 16:15-20.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The *charismata* that Paul described in I Corinthians 12-14 do not come into view, here. The *charismata* described in these verses were manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the corporate meeting of the local church. The concern of this paper is the relevance of miracles in evangelism.

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved;

but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

These signs will accompany those who have believed:

in My name they will cast out demons,

they will speak with new tongues;

they will pick up serpents,

and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them;

they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

Available manuscripts of Mark end in one of four ways. The verses quoted above are found in the "long ending" of Mark (verses 9-20). None of the other endings include "signs." Although in earlier years I defended the long ending (I now realize that I did so because of bias – the long ending validated some of my favorite doctrines), honesty now compels me to reject these verses. The manuscript evidence, the testimony of the early church, and internal evidence are so convincing that I now agree with the general view that these verses were added to a manuscript of Mark sometime early in the Second Century. This is not a liberal/conservative issue. All theological liberals and almost all conservative scholars reject the long ending.

Rather than venture into a discussion of the various endings, the important point for this paper is that this sole testimony to miracles by other than apostles is spurious. We cannot base a doctrine nor a conclusion on what is found herein, unless it is attested to elsewhere in Scripture. However, we have to ask, "Why did someone append this summary to the end of Mark?" Could it be that the author was reporting what did happen as believers blanketed the Roman Empire with the Gospel? Indeed, that would seem to be the case.

As we documented in a paper written for the 2002 Conclave, *Manifestations of the Spirit in the Corporate Meeting*, the earliest documents of the post-apostolic church do not mention miracles, tongues, etc., as a part of either church life or missionary activity. The first post-New Testament record of miraculous phenomena in Christian ministry is found in *Adversus Haeresus*, composed by Irenaeus around 185 AD. Various false doctrines were beginning to attract members of the church in Lyons. Irenaeus wrote this document to defend orthodox Christianity against these false teachers and their supposed magical powers. In Book 2, he contrasted the magicians that were rampant in his day, with those in the Church who by the power of God performed true miracles.

...For they can neither confer sight on the blind, nor hearing on the deaf, nor chase away all sorts of demons — [none, indeed,] except those that are sent into

others by themselves, if they can even do so much as this. Nor can they cure the weak, or the lame, or the paralytic, or those who are distressed in any other part of the body, as has often been done in regard to bodily infirmity. Nor can they furnish effective remedies for those external accidents which may occur. And so far are they from being able to raise the dead, as the Lord raised them, and the apostles did by means of prayer, and as has been frequently done in the brotherhood on account of some necessity — the entire Church in that particular locality entreating with much fasting and prayer, the spirit of the dead man has returned, and he has been bestowed in answer to the prayers of the saints...and inasmuch as those who are cured [by the miraculous ministry of the Church] very often do not possess the things which they require, they receive them from us⁴⁶

...Wherefore, also, those who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform [miracles], so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe [in Christ], and join themselves to the Church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remained among us for many years. And what shall I more say? It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the Church, [scattered] throughout the whole world, has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ... directing her prayers to the Lord, who made all things, in a pure, sincere, and straightforward spirit, and calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, she has been accustomed to work miracles for the advantage of mankind...the name of our Lord Jesus Christ even now confers benefits [upon men], and cures thoroughly and effectively all who anywhere believe on Him.⁴⁷

Without any ambiguity, Irenaeus stated that in 185 AD, miraculous activity occurred to the degree that the Church *has been accustomed to work miracles for the advantage of mankind*. In addition to raising the dead and casting out demons, *gifts of miracles, gifts of healings, and prophecy* are mentioned. Since Irenaeus made these statements in a polemic document, we would assume that he could substantiate them. He would have left himself open to ridicule if he could not present indisputable evidence that these claims were true.

In addition to the testimony of Scripture and the early Church, we must ask about our own experience. Are miracles occurring today as a part of evangelistic activity? It would seem to be

⁴⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 2, Chapter 31, excerpts from sections 2 & 3 (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1, The Master Christian Library, Albany, OR, AGES Software, 1997)

⁴⁷ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, Book 2 Chapter 32, excerpts from sections 4 & 5. (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1, The Master Christian Library, Albany, OR, AGES Software, 1997). Irenaeus also commented on the phenomena in Book 5, Chapter 6, section 1: *For this reason does the apostle declare, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect," terming those persons "perfect" who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit of God do speak in all languages, as he used Himself also to speak. In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare...*

so. Although many who have “healing ministries” are very suspect, the preponderance of reports of supernatural activity, especially on the mission field, forces us to conclude that miracles do occur today, although usually in response to prayer, rather than with the authority that was demonstrated by the apostles.

Reliance upon the Holy Spirit in Evangelism

Charles Grandison Finney often has been admired for his emphasis on holiness and aggressive revivalism. What often overlooked is Finney’s assertion that revival and the work of God do not rely on supernatural activity. In his *Lectures on Revivalism* (1835), Finney declared, “revival is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophical [i.e. scientific] result of the right use of the constituted means.” He argued that conversions were produced by human means and technique. Among other things, he chose to ignore Paul’s admonition concerning women’s silence in church, and most notably, he did away with immersion and substituted the Mourners’ Bench in its place. These things were done because Finney was a pragmatist – he did what he thought would produce the results that he sought. Bible patterns were not important – modern sales techniques produced more results. He also declared that holiness was a human possibility, based upon one’s decision to be holy – no Holy Spirit empowerment or involvement was necessary. The current practice of having people “pray the sinner’s prayer,” and other contemporary evangelistic practices find their roots in Finney. One author has stated, “He was an influential revisionist in the Reformed theological tradition, an enormously successful practitioner, almost the inventor, of the modern high-pressure revivalism...”⁴⁸

Even the most casual glance at the evangelical movement today sees evidence of Finney’s influence. Lighting of the room, the mood of the music, manipulative techniques of pulpiteers, and other established psychological and marketing principles do produce response from the audience.

The New Testament account stands in stark contrast to the view just expressed. Time and again, Scripture declares that responses to evangelism depended on God’s moving ahead of the evangelist and empowering the words of the evangelist. We will survey some of these texts.

There is not any particular order to the following, but a random presentation of a few of the texts that emphasize the evangelist’s dependence upon God, especially the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁸ Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Yale University Press) 1972, pages 460-461

- The restriction and the promise that Jesus gave to the Eleven, prior to His ascension, emphasized the importance of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in evangelism.

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.... but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."⁴⁹

Acts 2 records the fulfillment of that promise and the huge result of that Holy Spirit empowerment.

- Paul wrote to the Corinthians that God's servants might work diligently, but whether or not anything resulted from their labor was up to God.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.⁵⁰

- When Paul came to Corinth, he reasoned with the Jews and Greeks in the synagogue every Sabbath. Not much happened, even when he devoted himself completely to the Word. Then, the Lord spoke to Paul in a night vision,

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."⁵¹

Paul remained in Corinth for eighteen months, teaching and preaching, and one of the largest churches of the apostolic era came into existence – because God had many people in the city – His Sovereignty was displayed.

- Later, Paul declared that the reason that such results were obtained in Corinth was because his preaching was empowered by the Holy Spirit. He said that he had disavowed using the manipulative rhetorical techniques of the philosophers and orators.

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,⁵²

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of

⁴⁹ Acts 1:4-5, 8

⁵⁰ I Corinthians 3:6-7

⁵¹ Acts 18:9-10

⁵² I Corinthians 1:21-23

*power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*⁵³

- After being released from jail and a court appearance, Peter and John went to where the other apostles were staying and together they began to pray and glorify God. Luke records the result of their prayer meeting.

*"And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness... And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all..*⁵⁴

- Bold and effective proclamation was the result of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Paul asked the Ephesian church to pray for him, that he might have that boldness, recognizing that he might be intimidated unless God imparted that boldness.

*With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*⁵⁵

- Luke stated that the reason for the evangelistic success at Iconium in Pisidia (during Paul's first missionary journey) was because God had appointed certain one's to eternal life, and these were the one's who believed.

*When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed*⁵⁶.

- A passage often cited in evangelistic circles is Romans 10:17. Although not generally understood as such, this verse is a declaration of our dependency on God.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Some understand this verse to assert that there is a supernatural, almost magical, power resident in the Bible. If we present the Bible to people, they will believe because of the power in the verses. Unfortunately, this is not what Romans 10:17 is all about. This verse does not refer to the Bible, per se (it does remotely), but to the fact that God has not remained silent.

This is in the section of Romans in which Paul laments the fact that most Jews have rejected Christ. He points out that they are without excuse because God has not been silent, but has communicated with them.

⁵³ I Corinthians 2:1-5

⁵⁴ Acts 4:20-31, 33

⁵⁵ Ephesians 6:18-20

⁵⁶ Acts 13:48

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?¹⁵ How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"⁵⁷

Paul asserts that God has sent preachers, but most did not heed the preachers. He concludes by declaring that one can only believe by hearing, and that there is something to hear, because God has spoken. The Greek term rendered, *word*, is ῥῆμα (*rhema*), which conveys the idea of something's being communicated or spoken. God has spoken – he has sent a message – and thus preachers can speak forth that ῥῆμα (which for us is found in Scripture) to which the hearers must respond, either positively or negatively. The lament of Paul in this passage is that most Jews didn't respond positively – the ῥῆμα did not produce faith, when it was preached. As a matter of fact, as far as the Jews were concerned, it had the opposite effect. Even so, God could not be accused of being silent – He had spoken.

In this passage, there is a recognition of dependency on God – if He had not spoken, and if he had not sent preachers to declare what He had spoken, then we would be left in the same place that the Greek philosophers found themselves, trying to figure out life and the questions of eternity. When it comes to eternity and spiritual truth, we are dependent on God, at every level.

Even having the communication from God, and proclaiming it, the results of that proclamation seem to be in His hands.

We could continue listing passage after passage, but it is clear from the New Testament record that the early church considered God's action, through the Holy Spirit, to be the determining factor as to whether or not evangelism produced results. Human techniques did not even come into view.

SECTION FOUR: THE WHO OF EVANGELISM

Who did the New Testament Church consider to be responsible for evangelizing? Was this activity restricted to those who were called, ordained, and especially empowered, or was the task of evangelism something for which all were responsible?

Based on the record in Acts, it appears that only the apostles evangelized until the ordination of the deacons in Acts 6. Stephen, the first non-apostle who is recorded as working miracles, also is the first non-apostle reported to have engaged in evangelistic activity. Stephen's evangelistic activity was not a part of his deacon duties – it was something that he did totally apart from that role. So, up to this point, it seems that evangelism was not undertaken by the church at large. Only the leadership in the church was engaged in such activity.

⁵⁷ Romans 10:14-15

This changed when Stephen was martyred. After Stephen's death, Saul became the head of a campaign to wipe out Christianity. His efforts were so intense that Christians began fleeing Jerusalem. Every place that they settled, perhaps even every place that they passed through, they preached the word.

But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.⁵⁸

This is the first record of evangelizing by general-population Christians. Clearly, they did not consider proclamation of the word to be something restricted to those who were called and ordained.

The second most important church in the apostolic era, Antioch, was planted, not by apostles or by evangelists, but by Christians who were on the run.

So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.⁵⁹

This clearly is a fulfillment of the, *as you go/ if you go*, understanding of the participle in Matthew 28:19. It is another instance in which the results were obtained because *the hand of the Lord was with them*.

Priscilla and Aquila, were tent-makers, who found themselves moving about for one reason or another. They seem always to have been looking for opportunities to present the Gospel. Of singular importance is their work with Apollos.

Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.⁶⁰

From this time onward, undistinguished and sometimes unnamed believers evangelized the Roman world. In all probability, the Church in Rome came into existence when unidentified believers took up residence in that city. The Roman Catholic assertion that Peter founded the Roman Church notwithstanding, there is no evidence that an apostle or a recognized missionary visited the city and brought the church into existence. When we first encounter in Scripture the Church in Rome, it already was in existence had seems to have had a rather significant membership.

⁵⁸ Acts 8:3-4

⁵⁹ Acts 11:19-21

⁶⁰ Acts 18:24-26

The *imperative* understanding of the Matthew 28:19 participle is seen in the evangelistic tours of Saul and Barnabas. These men were called to travel for the explicit purpose of evangelizing.

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.⁶¹

Several things are noteworthy in this passage:

- Saul had been given this commission when he was saved.⁶² However, a decade passed before the Holy Spirit launched Paul into the fulfillment of his call.
- Saul and Barnabas were set apart for the Holy Spirit – the Greek says, *separate Saul and Barnabas to me... into the work...*
- The Antioch Church did not send Saul and Barnabas. The Greek says, *they released them (ἀπολύω)*.
- The Holy Spirit sent them out (ἐκπέμπω)

If we consider this event as the norm, then churches cannot send missionaries. In keeping with the Romans 10 sense that God has sent preachers, only the Holy Spirit can call and send missionaries. All that the church can do is cooperate with the Spirit and with the church's blessing, release the missionaries to the work for which they have been called.

Another interesting aspect of this episode is the fact that the praying church leaders were the ones who received the word concerning the call- probably though a prophecy given during their season of extended prayer. Saul did not come to the elders and say, "I am called to be a missionary and I want you to bless me."

What about the role of evangelists? In 2005 we presented a paper at the conclave, *Translocal Ministries in the New Testament Church*. We quote a portion of that paper.

The New Testament contains less information on evangelists than it does on the other two Ephesians 4:11 trans-local ministries. The term, *evangelist*, occurs only three times in the New Testament, and the title is given to only one person,⁶³ Philip, one of the seven Jerusalem deacons.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Acts 13:1-4

⁶² Acts 9:15-16; 22:15, 21; 26:13-19

⁶³ Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have been called, *The Evangelists*, in many classic documents of the Church, but no such label is given to them in Scripture.

⁶⁴ Acts 6:1-6

*And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.*⁶⁵

Timothy, who was Paul's apostolic delegate, although not an evangelist is urged to *do the work of an evangelist*.⁶⁶

*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*⁶⁷

The only other place that the term occurs in the New Testament is in Ephesians 4:11.

One cannot miss the irony of the contemporary church's response to Ephesians 4:11. In spite of the fact that the New Testament has a lot to say about apostles, and a considerable amount to say about prophets and prophecy, many denominations question the ongoing apostolic and prophetic ministry in every age; yet, every denomination assumes that evangelists, about which the New Testament says little, will be present in every age.

The early church considered evangelists to be the successors of the apostles. Eusebius wrote, concerning evangelists,

“There were many others, also, noted in these times, who held the first rank in the apostolic succession. These, as the holy disciples of such men, also built up the churches where foundations had been previously laid in every place by the apostles. They augmented the means of promulgating the gospel more and more, and spread the seeds of salvation and of the heavenly kingdom throughout the world far and wide.... [they] fulfilled the Saviour's precept by distributing their substance to the needy...leaving their country, they performed the office of evangelists to those who had not yet heard the faith, whilst with a noble ambition to proclaim Christ, they also delivered to them the books of the holy gospels. After laying the foundation of the faith in foreign parts as the particular object of their mission, and after appointing others as shepherds of the flocks, and committing to these the care of those that had been recently introduced, they went again to other regions and nations, with the grace and co-operation of God. The Holy Spirit also, wrought many wonders as yet through them, so that as soon as the gospel was heard, men voluntarily in crowds and eagerly, embraced the true faith with their whole minds.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Acts 21:8

⁶⁶ From all of the duties and responsibilities given to Timothy, it is clear that he was not an evangelist, in that evangelism was not the focus of his life. Even so, as a trans-local minister, and as a member of Paul's team, evangelism was one of the things that Paul expected of Timothy.

⁶⁷ II Timothy 4:5

⁶⁸ Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 37, translated by Christian Frederick Cruse (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, reprinted 1994) page 123

Based on the above description, we conclude that in the early church there was a proliferation of evangelists, who first gave away their possessions then spent the rest of their lives traveling from city to city, nation to nation, proclaiming the Gospel and planting churches.

In most of our churches, the role of the local evangelist has fallen into the background. Churches may find the funds to enable an elder to quit his income producing job and give himself fully to the work of the church. Most of our churches have some sort of funding for missionaries. However, few local churches find the funds to enable a local evangelist to quit his income producing job and give himself fully to evangelism in the local community.

It also is significant that most of our churches are not experiencing the joy of seeing people saved and discipled. Most of our work is in discipling those who have been around for awhile – binding up wounds of those who have been hurt in dysfunctional churches and receiving those who have fallen away or have chosen to leave another church and join ours. We are in a season in which converts are few and far between. Could it be that we are not recognizing those whom God has called and gifted to evangelize?

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

From the material surveyed, we reach the following conclusions:

1. Christians evangelize because Christ commanded it and because of love for the lost.
2. Evangelism should be the concern of every believer.
3. Believers should use every situation in life as an opportunity to bring people into the Kingdom.
4. The results of evangelistic effort – properly conducted – will depend upon God, not on human techniques.
5. True evangelism proclaims the full-orbed Gospel of the Kingdom.
6. Jesus did not command his disciples to “get people saved,” but to make disciples. Getting people saved is just the first step toward making disciples.
7. Immersion and instruction should follow conversion.
8. Miracles may accompany proclamation, although it is not always so.
9. God calls some disciples to devote their lives to evangelism, some locally, some trans-locally, and some among the nations. He bestows upon these evangelists the appropriate spiritual gifts so that they are equipped to fulfill this calling.

Addenda

Paul presents us with an intriguing puzzle in II Corinthians 12:14; 13:1

2 Corinthians 12:14 ¶ *Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.*

2 Corinthians 13:1 ¶ *This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.*

This epistle, written just before Paul's departure from Macedonia for Corinth (Acts 20:2-3), describes the pending journey as his *third* visit to Corinth. Luke's record in Acts reports only one previous visit to Corinth (Acts 18), thus, according to Luke, the pending visit would have been Paul's second visit to Corinth.

Taking Paul's statement (II Corinthians 12:14; 13:1) at face value, we conclude that Luke passed over a visit to Corinth. This visit would have occurred between the one recorded in Acts 18 and the one recorded in Acts 20:2-3. When could Paul have visited Corinth for the second time? Where in Luke's record of Paul's activities within the bracketed period was there a time when Paul could have visited Corinth? The vast majority of those who have looked into this matter place that visit as having taken place during Paul's three-year sojourn at Ephesus (Acts 19), early in his second missionary journey. This conclusion is achieved by coalescing data contained in Acts and in Paul's epistles. The result of this effort is the emergence of the following scenario.

Acts 19:20 summarizes the effectiveness of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, but does not give any details concerning his time there, after the burning of the books magic. During the period summarized by this verse, several significant things took place.

1. Paul, in response to reports concerning serious trouble in the Corinthian Church, made a hurried brief visit to the city. While there, he experienced deep personal hurt, by the negative response he received from some who had attained prominence in the church. Among other things, his apostolic credentials were challenged and he had to defend his right to have input into the church. This probably was the trip in which *the signs of a true apostle* were displayed (II Corinthians 12:12)
2. After returning to Ephesus, Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians. That letter is lost, but we can surmise some of the contents by Paul's reference to it in the two canonical Corinthian Epistles. Some Corinthian believers who were *of Chloe* (probably Chloe's servants who were in Ephesus on business) reported to Paul a number of ongoing problems in Corinth, including the church's response to this first letter.
 - a. *I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;* (I Corinthians 5:9). The Corinthians took Paul's statement literally and considered it impossible to keep, so they ignored it. Paul explained in I Corinthians 5 that he did not mean that they should isolate themselves from society, but that they should not tolerate the presence of immoral people in the congregation.

- b. He informed them that he planned to visit them when he left Ephesus, and then to proceed from Corinth north to Macedonia, then back to Corinth and thence to Jerusalem, then to Rome (II Corinthians 1:15-16). The reports that he later received from Chloe's servants (I Corinthians 1:11ff;) caused him to change his plans. When he wrote I Corinthians, he informed the Corinthians of this change of plans (I Corinthians 16:5-7). As a result of his not coming to Corinth as he had originally stated, his enemies in the Corinthian Church accused him of being fickle and unreliable (II Corinthians 1:17)
- c. He also commanded them to take a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. It seems that they did not know how this was to be done (Chloe's people must have advised him that they were uncertain concerning the procedure). In I Corinthians 16:1-4 he explained how he wanted it to be done.

Beyond these things, which are clearly mentioned or inferred in the canonical letters to Corinth, we cannot know what the letter contained.

- 3. He sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia [some speculate that this team also visited Corinth, but there is no record of their doing so] (Acts 19:22).
- 4. He wrote the letter that we know as I Corinthians, dealing with issues presented to him by those of Chloe and matters in his first letter that they failed to obey.
- 5. After sending the I Corinthian epistle to Corinth, he sent Titus and an unnamed brother to Corinth to determine their response to that letter and to give them further instructions concerning the offering for Jerusalem (II Corinthians 12:17-18; 7:13-15; 8:6).

This scenario is the one that best fits all of the data in Acts and the Epistles. Concerning the unrecorded second visit, Alford writes,

“Such a journey most of course be inserted between Acts 18:18, when his first visit to Corinth ended and Acts 20:2, when the Second Epistle was sent from Macedonia. But these limits are further narrowed by the history itself. From Acts 18:18 to 19:9 when we find the apostle established at Ephesus, is evidently a continuous narrative. And, as plainly, no visit took place between the sending of the First and Second Epistles, as is decisively proved by II Corinthians 1:15-23. Now the first Epistle was sent from Ephesus, in the early part of the year in which he left that city [Ephesus], I Corinthians 16:8. So that our *terminus a quo* is the settling at Ephesus, Acts 19:10, and our *terminus pro quem* the spring preceding the departure from Ephesus, Acts 20:1. During this time a visit to Corinth took place.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹ As quoted in Frank J. Goodwin, *A Harmony of the Life of Paul* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House), 1983, page 209