

HOW DOES A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH EVANGELIZE?

“Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.”

Col. 4:5-6

We’re in the last part of our series on “Becoming like a New Testament Church”. We’ve looked at how the early Christians worshipped, fellowshiped, disciplined, and served. This afternoon, I’d like to show you how they evangelized.

First, let’s look at what evangelism means. It’s a big word. It comes from that Greek word “euaggelion” which is pronounced yuahngeleon. “euaggelion” means good news. Thus, evangelism means the preaching or the announcement of the good news. And the one who practices it is an evangelist. So, it wasn’t only Billy Graham who is an evangelist or Luis Palau or Greg Laurie. If you’re a Christian and you tell others the good news about Jesus, then you’re an evangelist.

Let us read together Col. 4:5-6.

This passage answers the question: How does a New Testament church evangelize? The answer is: Wisely. The church evangelizes wisely. So, this afternoon I’m going to share with you how each of us can evangelize wisely the way the early church did.

In this message, however, let me use the term witness instead of evangelist and witnessing instead of evangelism. I think those words are not too heavy to the ears. Now, let me show you three ways on how you can witness wisely:

I. Be Wise in Your Actions

The first thing we must learn to become a real good and effective witness for Christ is to present to others a life that is quite different from the rest. A different life that will, in fact, make a difference in other people’s lives. You see, as Christians, we are under a microscope. People are looking at us.

People judge our Christianity by the way we conduct ourselves. The problem is there are Christians who act like they are non-Christians. And there are non-Christians who act like they are Christians. Do you see the irony? When we are at home, at work, in school, or in any public place, do we act like a Christian? Or do we act like a Christian only in church? We must be Christians 24/7, not 7/11.

As you know, we've been doing an extreme makeover of our two-family house property in Jersey City. The first floor has been vacated and I've asked some people over there in Jersey City and some folks here in church to do some work over the past weekends. I've seen them do the work and it's a blessing. They painted the walls, they changed the flooring, they took out the old carpets and replaced with new ones, they scrubbed the windows, they fixed the doors, they repaired the leaks, they installed new toilet, new cabinets, and they ate at Jollibee's. **Gradually, the first floor that looked so drab, dirty and dilapidated at first was transformed into something bright, beautiful, and a sight to behold.** I'll forever be grateful to Kuya Alex, Kuya July, Marco, Jun, and Charlie. Your reward is waiting in heaven. So, you know who to call when you need some repairs, ok?

My point is, these folks made a difference in the apartment. The apartment has been transformed. People who know how it looked like before would easily see the transformation. And do you know who my dear brothers in Christ, my Jollibee-loving friends remind me of? They remind me of Jesus who makes a difference in people's lives.

You see, we're around people who need the Lord all the time. But they can't physically see Him, of course, to realize how real, how loving, and how powerful He is. God's plan for introducing Himself to them is that they see the difference Jesus makes...in you.

In **I Peter 2:12, Peter says, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they may accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and**

glorify God . . .” There are people who may even be hostile toward you and Jesus. But they when they see the difference that Jesus is doing in your life – in your “good deeds” – they end up glorifying God! Actions speak louder than words, an old saying goes.

Jesus makes this same point in the Sermon on the Mount when He says, *“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). There it is again – they can’t see Jesus, but they can see your good deeds that are there because of His life in you. And that living proof can turn them to Him especially in a world that is more skeptical than ever of religious pitches, religious systems, or religious charlatans.

Notice, God doesn’t say they’ll be impressed with your arguments or your persuasive words. It will be your persuasive life. The random acts of kindness . . . the words of encouragement . . . your temper under control . . . the cleaned up mouth . . . the way you treat and talk about your mate, or your children, or your parents . . . your unselfishness . . . or the way you put others ahead of yourself. St. Francis of Assissi once said, “Witness to people. If necessary, use words.”

Now, you can’t just show them the Jesus-difference. You do have to tell them **Who** is making the difference! They’re not going to guess that Jesus is the difference unless you tell them! The business of taking people to heaven with you is actually show and tell.

That’s why Peter says, right before his statement about them seeing your good deeds, that you are *“...God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”* They need to see it...then you need to tell them. They’ll never guess Jesus died on the cross for them unless you do.

Which brings me to the second point.

II. Be Wise in Your Speech

This is where the rubber meets the road. Ok, you may be a good Christian, you may be presenting a Christian behavior to others, but do you present the plan of salvation to anyone? When was the last time you ever spoke to anyone about Jesus, that he loves them and that he died for them?

In Acts 1:8 (NLT), Jesus says, *“You will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* Now, which part of this statement of Jesus that we don’t understand? This statement of Jesus is not a suggestion, it is not a request, but it is a command. Jesus commands us to become ambassadors for him. In 2 Cor. 5:18b-20, it says, *“God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’”*

An ambassador is someone who speaks on someone’s behalf. Therefore, we Christians ought to speak on Christ’s behalf. Note that Paul says in verse 20 *“So we are Christ’s ambassadors.”* He didn’t say, *“Pastors are Christ’s ambassadors.”* He didn’t say *“Preachers are Christ’s ambassadors.”* He didn’t say, *“Teachers are Christ’s ambassadors.”* But he said *“We,”* meaning, all Christians, of all size and shape.

As ambassadors, what are we to say then to the world? We are to tell them what the apostle Paul implored to his readers: *“Come back to God!”* We are to tell them that to be reconciled to God is to accept Jesus in their lives as Lord and Savior.

As ambassadors, we need to be ready at all times. And we need to be witnessing to anyone.

I remember an incident years ago. A friend of mine and I were talking outside their house when a pair of Jehovah's Witnesses approached us. They said something and hadn't even finished their sentence when my friend, who I held in high regard because of his knowledge of the Bible, said rather sternly, "No, No...we're busy." With that, he hurriedly asked me to come inside the house as if he had seen a ghost. I was surprised to say the least. You see, if you believe in divine appointments, you will interpret such encounters as an opportunity God has given you to act as his ambassador.

Now, I'll give you a tip. If you don't want to get involved in a lengthy discussion with a Jehovah's Witness and I should know because I was formerly one of them, don't let the Jehovah's Witness inside the house. Right there at the door, ask the person, "What is your idea of salvation?" or "Can you please tell me briefly how a person gets saved according to the Bible?" More often than not, they will oblige. And they will oblige happily. Listen, or at least, pretend to listen. Then, when the person is finished, say, "May I share with you what I believe the Bible says how to get saved?" Almost always, the person will say "Yes" because you just gave the person the opportunity to talk first. Then, present the gospel in all its glory and splendor. Of course, you're not going to get a profession of faith right away, although I believe God can make it happen, but the important thing is you were able to plant a seed in that person's mind. And it is the Holy Spirit's job to do the follow-up and let that seed travel from the mind to the heart.

That's how I got converted. As a former Jehovah's Witness, I went from house to house and those Christians who were brave enough to speak with me planted the gospel seed in my mind until it sprouted and its roots reached deep down into my heart. You see, God loves the Jehovah's Witnesses, too. Jesus died for them, too. And so, it behooves us to share the gospel of reconciliation with them as well.

How do you speak then to the non-believer? The next verse of the passage we're looking at today says, *"Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone."* (Col. 4:6)

According to the original Greek word, to be gracious means to speak in a way that will afford joy, pleasure, and delight to your hearer. So, you should choose your words carefully such that it will make them want to listen to you more.

Bill Hybels, the founder and pastor of Willowcreek Church in Chicago wrote a book called "Just Walk Across the Room." In that book he tells the story in which he encountered a Christian in an airport who stopped him to witness to him. He didn't tell the guy that he was a Christian himself and tried to observe how this guy was going to witness to him. This over-eager Christian witness said, "Hey, you know, one night God woke me up because he wanted to tell me something. As I glanced at the clock, it showed 2:22. The next night, again I woke up because of the gentle nudge of God to my heart and when I glanced at the clock, it showed 3:33. But it gets better because the night after that again God woke me up and do you know what time it was?"

Hybels said with annoyance, "Let me guess, 4:44?"

"Correct," the other guy said. And quickly, Hybels said goodbye.

Speak with words that will hold the interest of your hearer. And I thank God because there is an abundance of gospel tracts like the Four Spiritual Laws, the Romans Road, the Bridge, the Do You Know tract by Evangelism Explosion or EE, that can help us to share the gospel with grace. But there are some tracts out there that you wouldn't try to use because they condemn rather than commend. They scare people rather than show concern. Be wise even in the choice of tracts.

Speaking of tracts, let me tell you the story of a young man who came to faith because of a tract. He had overdosed on illegal drugs and fell into a coma.

When he was found, he was hospitalized. When he awoke, he was arrested for possession and distribution, and then thrown in jail. While in prison, he faced the shortcomings in his character and felt the tug of the Holy Spirit to seek after God. He took a risk and prayed:

“Lord, if you are real and you love me, on the day I get out, have a person on the street give me one of those tracts that tell me how to follow you and that person only needs to say “Jesus loves you.”

I hate tracts and the people who use them because they always condemn me. I don’t need a sermon, Lord, but I need to know you are real.”

On the day of his release, he was walking home after the bus ride when a stranger on the street gave him a tract, said “Jesus loves you,” and continued on his way. No sermon. This young man surrendered his life to Christ after reading the tract.

Now, verse 6 also says that your conversation must be attractive too. Other versions say “it must be seasoned with salt.” It means you have to add flavor to your speech or to your gospel presentation to make it more attractive. And what could be more flavorful than telling them your own story, the story of how you became a Christian? You tell them what your life looked like before you came to know Jesus. And tell them what it looks like, now that you have Jesus. Folks, people like to hear stories and more likely than not, they will listen. That’s why Jesus always spoke in parables.

Many of you attended Class 401 already. You should have learned how to write your story of how you came to know Jesus and to use that as a springboard to tell others about Jesus. We’ll teach Class 401 again in May and you can attend again if you want a refresher. And those who haven’t you can come to the class.

Be wise in your actions. Be wise in your speech. And lastly,

III. Be Wise in Your Approach.

Now, you may be a well-behaving Christian. You may know a tool or two on witnessing. However, if you're not using the right approach then it defeats the purpose.

Let me explain. Today, it seems as if "evangelism" has taken on a bad name among Christians and non-Christians alike. How can a word which means "to share the good news" become a synonym for being pushy, intolerant, insensitive or overbearing? The reality is, while many Christians understand the importance of sharing the content of the gospel, some of their methods do not effectively connect with the people with whom they share. We must realize that God cares just as much about our method as he does our message. You see, people come from different spiritual backgrounds and have different questions.

Therefore, there is no one way to share the gospel. Instead, we must analyze where individuals are on their spiritual journeys and respond with an approach that is just right for them.

It all begins with a thorough understanding of those with whom we share our faith. Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:19-23, *"Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings."*

I think that's a wise approach. Trying to find common ground with everyone. Not insisting on what you want but what they need. For example, you have a friend who lost a loved one. You come over to sympathize. Your friend, of course, is filled with grief and pain and even anger. She asks, "Where is God? Why did God let this happen to me?" And then you respond that God loves her and God is a good God, he is faithful, he is in control, he knows what he is doing, that there is a purpose in everything, that God will be glorified in the end. That God sent his son Jesus to die for her sins and so she must accept Jesus to have eternal life and not be afraid of death anymore.

Do you think your friend will listen to all of your theological explanations? She might even think "What is this person doing here?" You see, all your friend needs is your presence. Just being there. Your silence would be as loud as you proclaiming "God loves you and he cares for you. I'm here to show God's grace and compassion and comfort for you." And that would build a bridge that would hopefully bring her later to the point of wanting to know your God who offers peace and comfort.

The Bible says that understanding your audience comes from prayer, watchfulness, and listening. Let me backtrack in Col. 4. In verses 2-3, Paul says, *"Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should."*

The problem is sometimes we go out there with a gung-ho attitude, not bathing our witnessing efforts with prayer and not even listening to people we witness to. We shove the gospel down their throats and then wonder why we're not getting good enough results. No wonder that in a survey in the late 1990's, people ranked evangelical Christians as the worst listeners of any group, behind Democrats, Republicans, and salesmen!

Now, we must realize that each unbeliever lies somewhere on a continuum from hardened opposition to genuine seeking. We can compare this to a golf course, with the tee box being farthest from Christ and the hole being conversion.

You see, in golf getting the ball into the hole is a process. It can take several or many shots with a variety of clubs, depending on where your ball lies. Likewise, evangelism is also a process that involves selecting particular methods according to where others are in their journey toward Christ.

Let me give you 4 practical approaches to evangelism:

1. **Driver: reaching those who are resistant through active service** – this is the show-not-tell approach. An example is Servant Evangelism. How many of you have heard of it? In this approach, you go out on the street and distribute or give away free items or products like bottled water, bubble gums, chocolates to people. Or you offer free car wash or give quarters to people in a Laundromat. There are no strings attached, just a card telling them about your church. So, in this approach you try to demonstrate the love of Christ and bring the gospel to life.

I remember when I was still pastoring a church in Brooklyn and we went to the street one sunny day to give out bottled water. As I was preparing our coolers, a man and a woman were walking down the street and I overheard the woman said, “I don’t think I can live here in New York. It’s so tough living here. Most people are selfish, they don’t care about others.” Just then, one of the members in our group handed each of them a bottled water. They were surprised, to say the least. This time I heard the man say, “Hey, it’s not so bad here in NY after all. This just blows away your notion right there.” And the woman said, “You’re right. I was wrong. New York is a nice place after all.” Whether they became Christians after that, only God knows.

2. **Long Irons:** Reaching those who are uninterested through active friendship –

in this approach, you develop authentic friendship before giving a gospel presentation. We enter into others' lives by listening, questioning, and sincerely caring.

Many years back, I was in Russia serving as a missionary with YWAM. Our group emphasized friendship evangelism. I developed a friendship with a 15-year-old guy who was our interpreter. Throughout our friendship, I must have talked to him about Jesus every now and then but didn't actually ask for a commitment. One day, I saw him in the lobby of the youth hostel where we were staying. He looked worried, anxiety was written all over his face. I sat beside him and asked what was happening. He said that he already wanted to give his life to Christ but he was worried about his parents who were devout atheists. After comforting him and telling him about the promises of Jesus and the peace that he gives, he gave his heart to the Lord. My friendship with him enabled him to open up his heart.

3. **Short Irons:** Reaching those asking questions through active wondering – in this approach, you encourage your hearer to ask questions, you listen and you respond. You also ask questions yourself, trying to genuinely know more about their own beliefs. This is the apologetics-style of evangelism.
4. **Putter:** Reaching those who are genuinely seeking through active sharing – this is the ultimate approach. There will be an opportunity wherein we must boldly take the initiative to share so that others understand the gospel and its implication in their lives. This is otherwise known as the quick one-off approach. You usually use this when you encounter someone who you may never meet again like the stranger on the street, who you give a gospel tract to. Or like the person sitting next to you in the bus or on the train who you share the Four Spiritual Laws with.

It is said that it takes seven touches before a person becomes a Christian. As you use any of these approaches just think that perhaps you may be the first or the second or the seventh person who God has placed in that unbeliever's life to bring him closer to Christ.

And so, don't be disappointed if the only opportunity you have is to just give a few encouraging words to someone instead of making a full-blown gospel presentation. But if you're supposed to be the seventh person and you did not do your part, then it is God who will surely be disappointed. Let us then play our parts well, asking God for wisdom.

Folks, as you become involved in this glorious undertaking called "evangelism" remember to be wise in your actions, in your speech, and in your approach. Those are the principles you need to become a wise witness.

If you're here this afternoon and you're wondering what this means for you because you don't even know who Jesus is or what Jesus did for you, let me tell you that Jesus wants you to commit your life to him. The Bible says that there is no name under heaven by which we can be saved except the name of Jesus.