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PAUL – AN EVANGELISTIC MODEL

We are well into the Decade of Evangelism and there is a general feeling that there is little movement forward. It is not the purpose of this article to directly address the issues involved but clearly, the time has come to reassess and restate our understanding of what Evangelism is. One reason is that the social side is being emphasised instead of the spiritual, yet there was a time when development and evangelism used to go together!¹ It is not out of place, therefore, to spend a little time reminding ourselves of the evangelistic message, method and manner of the Apostle Paul and in doing so to try and redress the balance. We must begin with Paul's message, for content always determines methodology and manner in Pauline practice.

The Message

Once admitted into the Society of believers at Damascus, Paul heard their personal testimony and could learn all their doctrines and practices. We read that straightaway in the synagogue he proclaimed about Jesus, '*...that He is the Son of God.*' Luke goes on to relate how at Antioch Paul said, '*Through this man is proclaimed remission of sins, and by him everyone that believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.*' (Acts 13: 26-29). To the anxious inquiry of the jailer he said, '*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.*' Pardon was offered, accepted and rejoiced in at once, not as a reward of amendment of life, but by simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 16: 30-34).

His farewell address to the elders of Ephesus indicates what his teaching had been there during three years. '*You know how I testified repentance toward God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ – take heed ... to feed the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*'. We note, too, that he was on his way to Jerusalem, '*expecting bonds, and afflictions, but he did not count life dear to himself ... if only he might accomplish the ministry he had received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*' (Acts 20: 21-28).

It is the same in all his Epistles as a random selection will prove. To the Corinthians he writes, '*Christ sent me to preach the Gospel, not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void. We preach Christ crucified, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*' (1 Cor 1: 12-24).

He prefaced his great argument for the Resurrection by again explicitly asserting the truth he was commissioned to preach, '*For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*' (1 Cor 15: 1-3). The Resurrection was evidence of the acceptance of the sacrifice, '*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins.*' (1 Cor 15: 17). He thus expressed the great theme of his whole didactic and evangelistic ministry '*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*' (2 Cor 5: 18-21). The great work of the Christian ministry is to lead sinners to God, who reconciles the world by '*not reckoning unto them their trespasses.*' This sets them free from condemnation, opens the way to God, inspires hope and prompts them to be reconciled to Him who is so ready to be reconciled to them. The atonement removes man's unrighteous alienation by first removing God's righteous displeasure. How rarely do we hear this necessary theme in contemporary evangelism and mission? Perhaps more rarely in Anglican churches than anywhere else!

The love of Christ has been often shown in human sympathy, compassion, even miracles, but we miss the heart of Paul's evangelistic message if we do not show Christ's love in dying to save us from death. This is the compelling motive in the message. His death was unlike all other. It was representative of mankind. He died for all and those who accept His mediation died with Him and so paid the penalty of law. (Gal. 2: 20 and Col. 3: 3). They now share in the resurrection, and their new life belongs to Him. His love inspires grateful obedience, sweetly compels glad service, constrains to a new life, not of self pleasing – a contemporary trait – but of pleasing Him who *'died for us and rose again.'* So to the Romans, *'Justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by His blood, that He might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that has faith in Jesus.'* (Romans 3: 24, 25).

To the Galatians, *'our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins . . . far be it from me to glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'* (Gal 1: 3, 4, 6, 14).

To the Ephesians, *'Christ in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.'* (Eph 1: 7. see also 2: 4-22, 4: 32, 5: 2).

To the Philippians, *'Being in the form of God, He became obedient even unto the death of the Cross: wherefore God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name ... for whom I suffered the loss of all things, that I may gain Christ; not having a righteousness of mine own, but that which is through faith in Christ.'* (Phil 2: 6-11, 3: 7-11).

To the Colossians, *'In whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins ... He made peace through the blood of His Cross, through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself.'* (Col 1: 12-22, 2: 13, 14, 3: 130).

To the Thessalonians, *'... for God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that we should live together with Him'* (1 Thess 1: 10, 5: 9).

To Timothy, *'there is one Mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.'*

To Titus, *'our Saviour Jesus Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works.'* (Titus 2: 11-14).

And there is more, much more! How could the Church of England get into the mess that it is in, with a message like this to proclaim? How could there be such confusion about our chief work and supreme message, with all this biblical material, unless we have jettisoned our own yardstick?² No one denies the relevance and importance of social relief and addressing the physical needs of our hearers, but we appear to have fallen into the trap of Christian socialism in locating sin within the external structures of oppression rather than in the relationship of fallen individuals with God³. Our nation (and perhaps National Church) perishes for want of the Pauline message.

The Method

In Acts 11: 26 we find Paul and Barnabas were evangelising Antioch for a whole year. What was their method? *'For a whole year at Antioch Paul and Barnabas taught much people.'* It is the same wherever we turn in the Acts preaching and teaching – making disciples. You make disciples by teaching them.

Acts 15: 35 again, they used the same method – teaching and preaching. Similarly, in Acts 18: 11 Paul laboured at Corinth for one year and six months, evangelising – How? *‘And he continued there a year and six months teaching the Word of God among them.’*

But someone will say, what about Acts 8? Here we have an example of personal evangelism from the sacred manual of Evangelism. Philip was evangelising the Ethiopian treasurer but his method was the same as Paul’s, Philip explained the Scriptures. Or look at 2 Timothy 4: 5. The great Apostle talks to the young Timothy and tells him to do the work of an Evangelist. How did he tell him to do it? By forcing decisions upon vulnerable people? By the use of mime, drama, entertainment, or excessive emotional singing? By some clever methodology? Paul told him the God-centred method (2 Tim. 2: 2). *‘And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.’* Paul believed in the objective God-sent word! He believed in the power of preaching and the use of Scripture to do its own work. Indeed, to be honest, Paul believed that God’s method is a ‘ridiculed’ method for, *‘after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.’* (1 Cor 1: 21).

This is a lesson many preachers and evangelists need to learn. The direct appeal must be to the mind and the understanding, and then, through the mind and understanding we appeal to the affections and the will. The Gospel is a message that contains information and, therefore, must be communicated by definable words. The Gospel itself contains information and therefore needs explanation and application by word and power – *‘For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance ...’* (1 Thess 1: 5).⁴

Yes, they went for every-member witness, they worked outwards from the centre, they concentrated on the ‘God fearing fringe’, they ran a lot of home meetings, they loved to discuss on neutral ground, they wrote and used literature, they engaged in missionary journeys’, they relied on personal talks⁵. But always their message and method were God-centred, God-honouring, and God-owned.

If we desire New Testament results in this Decade of Evangelism we shall have to use New Testament methods and use the Apostolic Gospel. The alternative will be spurious converts or no converts at all.

The Manner

The only word to describe it is a word absent (mainly) in 20th Century evangelism – PASSION. Do we preach and evangelise as though life and death depends on it? Do we have a passion for souls? A longing to see the lost saved? Do we weep? Do we plead? Do we exhort? Do we pray and intercede before, during and after speaking, as if we are assaulting the kingdom of Satan? FOR WE ARE! The New Testament evangelists did. So did Paul as this rather lengthy but illuminating passage reveals:

‘You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you His Gospel in spite of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed – God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship;

we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. (1 Thess 2: 1- 9)

That's real evangelism and, sadly, we have to honestly admit, quite rare in the days in which we are living. Until we are filled with God the Holy Spirit, until revival comes, until we seek God in a fresh way for our times we shall not preach or evangelise as we should – but of course this is no excuse.

'O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us, the noble works that Thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them.

O Lord arise, help us, and deliver us for thine honour.'

This article has been contributed by a clerical member of Church Society.

Endnotes:

- 1) Leading Article – Peter Dowsett, *Church Times*, London, 17 Jan 1992.
- 2) Article 6, *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*.
- 3) *The Kindness That Kills* – William Oddie, p 123, SPCK 1984.
- 4) *Today's Evangelism* – E C Reisinger, p 88, Craig Press 1982.
- 5) *Evangelism – Now and Then* – M Green, p 116, IVF 1979.