

## *The Apostles' Doctrine Concerning Evangelism*

The apostles' doctrine (teaching) had an immediate impact on the infant church, as we see in Acts 2:42 that the new Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine..." It is obvious from the instant and continuing growth of the church that the apostles impressed upon those disciples the necessity of teaching others the Gospel, the ongoing need for evangelism.

The church today knows about the Great Commission, that we are to take the soul-saving message to all people everywhere. We know that this was done by the early church, and thus, we know that it **can** be done! Like in so many things, we **know** better than we **do**!

We all appreciate and benefit from words of encouragement and commendation, but there are times when we can also benefit from words that are not so encouraging but are needed for correction and rejuvenation.

### *Evangelism Today*

There was a time in the lifetime of many of us when the Lord's church was the fastest growing religious group in America. What a glorious time that was as the church was actively engaged in both group and individual evangelistic efforts, and we saw that the efforts were indeed successful! However, that was **then**, and this is **now**. I believe that no one would dispute the fact that the church is not as evangelistic as it was a few decades ago.

### *Why Is This True?*

I believe that there is one word that perhaps answers the question better than any other – **apathy**. Apathy involves a lack of passion, feeling, emotion or excitement.

Please notice with me now just a few of the many causes of apathy regarding lost souls. **(1) Desire for acceptance and popularity.** Satan takes advantage of our natural yearning to be accepted – popular. Even in the church this can become a problem when we neglect our evangelism for fear of offending others with the Gospel, thus endangering our acceptability. **(2) Tolerance and broadmindedness.** Misunderstood tolerance and broadmindedness **greatly deter evangelism**. In the eyes of many, we are guilty of self-righteousness when we try to share the message of salvation. The idea seems to be that "we have our faults" and "they have their faults," so we have no business trying to show to them that what they are practicing religiously is different from what the Bible teaches. This kind of thinking contributes to a willingness to let evangelization of the world go lacking. **(3) A growing spirit of universalism.** It is sad that even some in leadership roles in the church are no longer sure that the lost are really lost. Much of what has been black and white from the first century has now become gray. Some believe that all people will ultimately be saved, despite Christ's warning regarding "the broad way that leads to destruction" and the fact that "there are many who go in by it" (Matthew 7:13-14). To believe in universalism is to deny the Great Commission and any purpose for evangelism. **(4) Lack of commitment and conviction.** Several years ago, a Communist military officer told an American missionary that he would be quite willing to die if it would help advance the cause of Communism. He then told the missionary, "Christianity means **something** to you, but Communism means **everything** to us." For the most part, the Lord's church is not displaying a commitment equivalent to that of some of Christianity's greatest foes, resulting in an evangelistic effort that is not what it **could** and **should** be. **(5) Another cause of apathy in evangelism is a *greater emphasis on sound doctrine than on Christ*.** Brethren, please stay with me on this and don't misunderstand what I am saying. I am a strong believer in sound doctrine, but it is possible to have a **correct mind** and a **cold heart**. We can, as the church or as individual Christians, be absolutely right doctrinally but have practically no evangelistic outreach. It is quite possible for us to be **doctrinally sound** but **sound asleep** regarding evangelism. Let me say, however, that **genuinely sound doctrine includes a sincere love for the lost and an ardent desire for them to be saved.**

### *Conquering Apathy in Evangelism*

An old preacher once said, "If man has a soul, and he has, and if that soul can be won or lost for eternity, and it can, then the most important thing in the world is to bring a man to Jesus Christ." Surely, he was right in his assessment. Apathy toward evangelism **can** and **must** be overcome because it is our responsibility as God's children to take the message of salvation to the world. Souls can be won, but this is only done **intentionally**, not **accidentally**.

We can conquer apathy in evangelism if we can come to understand what Christianity is really all about. We must come to see that we are not our own but that we have truly been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We must move from **selfishness** to **selflessness** and **sympathy**, sympathy for those who are still lost in sin. It isn't hard at all to get lots of people to give a great deal of themselves in rescue efforts to find a lost child. Surely, with proper motivation, the church can be moved to try harder to rescue **the lost souls of the world**.

Several years ago, a good friend of mine began preaching for a small rural congregation. One Sunday, he asked the members to let him know of anyone with whom he might be able to have Bible studies. One of the men in the church was about 50 years old, very poor and could neither read nor write, but he was kind and humble. This man told the preacher to be at his house on Tuesday evening, and he would have someone there with whom to study.

Tuesday evening arrived, and as my friend drove up to the house, he saw a large number of cars and pickups. His first thought was that some family member must have died. Instead, at least 100 relatives and friends of the man and his wife had come at his invitation. They were packed into every room, as well as outside on the front porch. The preacher couldn't even talk to them all at one time; he had to move from room to room just to talk to them.

Because of the great number of folks who were willing to study with him, my friend had to divide them into small groups so that the studies could be conducted. Several of the couples were living together but were not married. As he taught them and they learned from the Bible, he began baptizing folks and then conducting their weddings rather simultaneously. Over a period of time, some 50 or so of these folks repented of their sins and obeyed the Gospel! All of this came about because one illiterate, backwoods Christian was just the opposite of being apathetic toward evangelism. He did what he could! This gentle disciple is alive today, and he still is unaware that he is a hero of the faith.

Our proper perception of the cross is critical to the seriousness of our evangelism. P.T. Forsyth once said, "You may always measure the value of Christ's cross by your interest in missions. The **missionless church** betrays that it is a **crossless church**, and it becomes a **faithless church**." Along this same line are these stirring words by Leighton Ford. "When the Christ of the **judgment seat** and the Christ of the **cross** become the Christ of the **heart**, we cannot help looking at others through new eyes – the eyes of Christ – and sharing with them the One who means so much to us."

E. Stanley Jones was a longtime denominational missionary to the Hindus of India. During one of his attempts to teach about Jesus, one very perceptive Hindu man spoke up and said, "Sir, if what you say about this Jesus is not true, it doesn't matter at all. But, if what you say about Jesus is true, **then nothing else matters at all**." Isn't that amazing! That Hindu man, knowing only Hinduism and nothing about Christianity, very quickly could see that, if true, the story of Jesus totally surpassed everything else in importance! In just a few moments, he was able to see something that many Christians have not seen throughout their lifetime!

The church has **many ministries** but only **one mission**. Think about Christ. He performed many good works. He showed compassion, fed the hungry, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, cured lepers and raised the dead. His **ministries** were many, but His **mission** was one! He proclaimed His mission in Luke 19:10, ***“The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”***

Christ’s church should also have many **ministries**, but only **one mission – to seek and save the lost!** We say that we believe that ***“the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation”*** (Romans 1:16). Let’s all resolve right now that we will, both individually and collectively, do our part in evangelism by sharing with others **the Gospel – God’s power to save the world**.

On June 5, 1910, American short story writer O. Henry lay on his death bed. As he slipped from life into death, his final words were, “Turn up the lights. I don’t want to go home in the dark.” Apathy in evangelism can be overcome by a realization of these three things: **(1) Who** we are, **(2) Whose** we are and **(3) Why** we are. As the Lord’s people, **let’s “turn up the lights.”**

**[Editor’s Note:** A more excellent article than this could hardly be found. This call to awake and light up the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ is much needed by every Christian and each congregation of the Lord’s church today. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

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