Biblical Basis of Evangelism

Why should the church be concerned with evangelism? Should everyone be involved in evangelism? The answer is found in the Lord’s Great Commission: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20). The Great Commission is mentioned in all 4 gospels (cf. Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21).

From these passages, together with the blueprint for evangelism given in Acts 1:8 – “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” – we have the biblical basis for evangelism. Evangelism constitutes one of the church’s main purposes, which was what the Lord Jesus Himself clearly defined as the purpose of His coming: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Seeking the lost was the utmost desire and the very reason why our Lord came into the world!

Both the Living and the Written Word have given us the basis for evangelism. There is no reason why we should not be concerned about it. If we are truly Christ’s
followers, then we must be up and about obeying His command and following His example. Otherwise, we are actually guilty of the sin of disobedience to Christ who has commanded us to go and preach the Gospel. If we do not have compassion, love or zeal towards the lost, and if we do not pray for the salvation of our loved ones nor reach out to them with the Gospel, then we are indifferent to the condition of the lost! If the love of Christ does not constrain us (2 Corinthians 5:14) and motivate us to reach out to people, then we are insensitive to the love of Christ!

Biblical Guidelines for Evangelism

Since evangelism is commissioned by God, it follows that guidelines must be based on His inerrant and infallible Word. Looking at the Great Commission, we shall focus our consideration on the mandate for evangelism, the message of evangelism, and the manner of evangelism.

The Mandate for Evangelism

Unquestionably, the mandate comes with the command from the Lord who has “all power… in heaven and in earth”. Accomplishing this command would involve “going”, “proclaiming”, “baptizing” and “teaching” (Matthew 28:19). Indeed, biblical evangelism is more than just giving out Gospel tracts or inviting someone to church to hear the Gospel.

“Go ye therefore” behoves us to take the initiative to reach out to the lost. We cannot expect the lost to come to us; we must go to them. Biblical evangelism is reaching out, going out to the lost souls of this world. Many churches have fallen into the error of thinking that if sinners want to be saved, they need to come to church. They expect unbelievers to come, when in reality it is the church that should GO out to them. Yet others have given in to a pragmatic methodology of attracting and charming people to church by way of entertainment. This is one reason why we now have so-called “seeker-friendly” churches (like “user-friendly” gadgets). Realize that we are to GO!

“Teach all nations” tells us that evangelism is about preaching and proclaiming the Gospel with all its implications of the atonement of Christ, grace, repentance and faith. Evangelism is preaching the message of the cross of Christ, that He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day.

“Baptizing them” entails the calling of sinners from confession and repentance of their sin to profession of their faith in Christ. Jesus has commanded that those who believe and receive the Gospel must be baptized. This does not teach baptismal regeneration. The ones to be baptized are those who are already saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Teaching them to observe all things” emphasizes the importance of grounding believers in the fundamental truths of God’s Word. As new believers get baptized, they are incorporated into the assembly of believers – the church – from where they receive continuous further teachings, to be established in the doctrines, principles and practices of Christian living. This is one specific task in the Great Commission aimed at “perfecting” the believers.

The Message of Evangelism

Obviously, the message of evangelism is the Gospel – the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ. “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). It is sad to note that many today are preaching another gospel, including “social” or “prosperity” gospel,
liberation theology, economic equality, and many other humanistic philosophies and ideologies. In the Philippines, there is the prevalent gospel of good works, of penance, of indulgence and of idol worship!

Equally unacceptable is a “diluted” or “shallow” form of evangelism, which has been oversimplified. This approach goes like this: “God loves you and He has a wonderful plan for you. Just believe and you will be saved!” While this might sound reasonable, it does not in any way deal with sin and repentance, and therefore is woefully inadequate and insufficient. This “watered down” gospel is one that often leads to “easy-believism”. There is another trend that is called “quick-prayerism”, whereby the one presenting the Gospel would quickly ask the other person to repeat the sinner’s prayer and then declare that the person is saved! Yes, God in His sovereignty may have a person saved in this way, but this approach, more often than not, can be misleading. People must know why and what they believe, hence the need for a clear presentation of the Gospel.

Increasingly, in much of modern evangelism, there is one vital element that is missing – the message of repentance. Biblical evangelism requires repentance. Repentance is not just something preached by John the Baptist. Repentance is preached by Jesus Christ. “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). It is also preached by the apostles. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Similarly, Paul addressed the men at Mar’s Hill thus: “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). As far as the Lord and the apostles are concerned, the message is always “repent and believe” the Gospel. In biblical evangelism, it is not only God’s mercy and love, but also God’s holiness, righteousness and judgment of sin that should be made clear, without fear or favour and without apology. Repentance from sin is a must before anyone may receive the offer of salvation so rich, full and free!

Admittedly, there is this subtle prevailing but wrong notion that evangelism is a mere human effort, something that we do for God. It is thus solely dependent on the natural talent and charisma of the presenter, and on his ability to argue and persuade. Nothing is further from the truth. Evangelism, being of the Lord, is the ministry of the Holy Spirit and is something which God does through us. This is clearly demonstrated by how the Lord worked through His people in the ministry of the Gospel during the Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41, 47), and in the early stage of the church (Acts 11:19-21; 16:14).

Without a doubt, it is not by human prowess that man gets saved. This is further attested to by the Apostle Paul in his epistles. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. …And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom,
The Manner of Evangelism

Generally, there are 2 ways in which the early Christians fulfilled the Great Commission. The first is personal or individual evangelism, sometimes called witnessing (telling others about Christ), or testifying (speaking of what you have personally experienced in your own life regarding salvation), or personal outreach (person-to-person dealing with other persons), known also as personal "soul-winning". Personal evangelism implies that every believer should know what he believes in, and must learn to share it with others and personally draw them out and lead them to Christ. This is by far the most effective means of evangelism whereby a person shares the Gospel with a friend or loved one.

The second is collective or group evangelism. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20: "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ…" As Christ's ambassadors, the church should be obedient to the Word of God proclaiming the "word of reconciliation", which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Undeniably, the work of evangelism must be the church's priority, whereby every member should be motivated, equipped and mobilized to reach out effectively to the community at large. As we read through the history of the early church in the New Testament, we realize that it was not only the apostles that did the work of evangelism, we see the ordinary believers sharing the Gospel as well, in line with the evangelistic pattern delineated in Acts 1:8. Following the stoning of Stephen, "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). And what did those ordinary believers do? "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

Following the example of those early Christians, we are also to pursue the work of evangelism. In addition to the regular evangelism sessions of the church, we may consider the following various ways:

- Evangelistic Bible study or Inquirer's Bible class.
- Evangelistic meeting or Gospel rally
- Media evangelism – print media (such as Gospel tracts, evangelistic literature like Bible Witness magazine); broadcast media (like..."
Bible Witness Web Radio; as well as Internet social media.

- Special ministry and outreach – ministries that reach out to specific groups of people like students, businessmen, and even ex-convicts (Prison Ministry) and ex-drug addicts and substance abusers (Care Ministry).

- Missions – evangelism extended overseas to cover even greater areas to preach the Gospel and eventually establish a church.

Truly, evangelism can be incorporated in every ministry of the church, be it our Children’s Ministry, Teens and Youth Fellowship, or any other fellowship group. May the Lord impress upon us all the importance of evangelism and stir us to reach out to our friends and loved ones with the Gospel.

**Conclusion**

As the Lord tarries, the work of evangelism must continue. As the Lord leads, we are to be engaged in avenues whereby we can share the Gospel with the lost, seeking to win souls for Christ. “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified” (2 Thessalonians 3:1). As Paul had prayed, we also must pray for an open door for the Gospel. Inasmuch as evangelism is the work of God, we are to pursue that work based upon the principles and guidelines of the supreme Word of God. God’s work must be done in God’s way, as revealed to us in God’s Word. Amen.