

# (New Wine in New Wineskins) 19. Evangelism and Making Disciples

by Zac Poonen

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*The purpose of evangelism is to build up the body of Christ, not just to save individual souls, and this requires a deep commitment to discipleship and obedience to Jesus' commandments.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:4-23, Mark 16:15, Luke 14:26-27, Luke 14:33, Acts 1:8, Ephesians 4:11-12, Revelation 3:16

**Topics:** "Discipleship", "Evangelism"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of understanding the full counsel of God in evangelism and discipleship, warning against the dangers of selective scripture interpretation. He highlights that true evangelism is not merely about winning souls but about building the body of Christ through discipleship, which includes repentance, baptism, and obedience to Jesus' commands. Poonen critiques modern evangelistic practices that fail to integrate new converts into local churches, leading to spiritual immaturity and division. He calls for a return to the biblical model of evangelism that prioritizes making disciples who love one another and obey Christ's teachings. Ultimately, he stresses that both evangelism and discipleship are essential for fulfilling the Great Commission.

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## Transcript

It is a common mistake among Christians to be taken up with one Scripture on a subject, to the exclusion of other Scriptures on the same subject.

Satan's first attempt (as we see in the temptation that came to Jesus in the wilderness) is to get us to act on the basis of our need ("You are hungry, so turn the stones to bread") or by ourselves apart from the will of God. Jesus rejected that temptation by saying that He would act only according to what God told Him (Matthew 4:4). This is what we must do too.

But when Satan sees that we, like Jesus, take our stand on the word of God ("It is written ...."), his next wife is to quote the word of God itself to us. He came to Jesus in the second temptation with the words "It is written .... (Matthew 4:6). If Jesus had not known the whole counsel of God, He would have been deceived by Satan's quotation of Scripture just as many believers are deceived today. But Jesus effectively rejected that temptation too, by saying, "It is also written .... (Matthew 4:7).

So it is essential that we know the whole purpose of God. The whole truth is found in "It is written .... and "It is also written ..... It is written, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). It is also written, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19 - NASB). In a careful consideration and obedience to both the above commissions, we can find the way to fulfil the will of God for us in this day and age.

## Evangelism

The first step obviously is to go into all the world, as Jesus has commanded in Mark 16:15. This command is not a command to the individual believer, but to the whole body of Christ. It is humanly impossible for any single individual for any local church all by itself, to preach to every human being in the world. Each of us can, at best, have but a small part in this task.

But that part, however small it be, we must fulfil. Here is where Acts 1:8 comes into the picture. Each believer must have the Holy Spirit coming upon him and enduing him with power, if he is to be an effective witness for Christ. Note that all are not called to be evangelists (for Christ has given only some as evangelists to His body, the church - Ephesians 4:11), but all are called to be witnesses.

An evangelist has a wider field of work than a witness. A witness has to proclaim Christ in the circle in which he moves and works - to relatives, neighbours, fellow workers in his office and to the others he comes across daily, to whom he may happen to be led to while travelling, etc. Here is where we can all be witnesses, whatever our earthly occupations may be.

But Christ has also given to the church evangelists, not however for 'winning souls' or for 'bringing people to Christ' as is commonly heard, but for 'building up the body of Christ' (as Ephesians 4:11, 12 makes plain). Here is where the biggest failure of much evangelism lies. Today's evangelism, unfortunately, is generally speaking not related to building up the body of Christ, but only to the saving of individual souls. These souls are then usually sent back to their dead, denominational 'churches' where they soon get lost all over again, or at best, become lukewarm, fit for being spat out of the mouth of the Lord (Revelation 3:16). Either way, they are not built into the body of Christ; and thus only Satan's purposes are accomplished, for the person has then become twofold a child of hell (Matthew 23:15) - first because he was lost to start with, and secondly because now he has been deluded by some evangelist into thinking that he is saved! The only thing that is built up through such evangelism is the evangelist's private empire; and the only reason for such evangelism usually is the seeking of the honour of men.

Jesus called evangelists 'fishers of men'. But evangelism that is done in cooperation with unconverted bishops and pastors is like fishing with a net full of holes. One cannot imagine Jesus or Peter inviting Annas or Caiaphas to sit on the platform and inaugurate their evangelistic meetings! Yet today's evangelists do just that - and not just that, they even praise these unconverted bishops. Such evangelists are compromisers of the first order.

Further, the fish that are caught in the net are allowed to go back into the sea (dead denominations), to be caught all over again at the next evangelistic crusade, only to be let back into the sea again. This process is repeated again and again by the many evangelists conducting interdenominational crusades these days, with each evangelist counting hands, decision cards, etc. This type of evangelism brings joy, not to the angels of heaven but only to the hosts of Satan! For, after all, how can angels rejoice over those who are made twofold the children of hell?

Signs and wonders may accompany the proclamation of the message that Jesus forgives sins and heals diseases. But the question that remains is how many have been built into the body of Christ as a result of such evangelism.

The apostles (in the first century) never engaged in this type of evangelism. With them, the converts were placed in local churches to be made into disciples and built up. Unfortunately, the 20th century has seen the emergence of the ministry of the healing-evangelist as the pre-eminent ministry in Christendom. This is but another indication of how far Christendom has drifted from the teaching of God's word.

The five ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers) are listed in their order of priority in 1 Corinthians 12:28. There we are told,

God has appointed in the church: First, apostles: Second, prophets: Third, teachers: then miracles, then gifts of healing (that is, evangelists, for all evangelists in the New Testament had the gift of healing); and (in the same category, again) helps (helpers of the weak), administrations (literally, 'the ones who steer the ships') (that is, shepherds or pastors)."

This makes it clear that in God's eyes, the ministries of the apostles, prophets and teachers are more important to the building up of the body of Christ than that of the evangelists. The evangelist can find his proper place in his ministry only as he takes his appointed place beneath the ministries of the apostle, prophet and teacher. Then and only then can his ministry serve to the building up of the body of Christ. Here is where twentieth century evangelism has gone astray from the word of God.

### Making Disciples

The purpose of evangelism (as commanded in Mark 16:15) can be understood only as seen in the light of the commission to make disciples in every nation of the world (Matthew 29:18). This is the whole plan of God for the unconverted.

The convert must be made into a disciple. Unfortunately today even the so-called convert is not often a true convert, for in many cases he has not repented properly. In the evangelistic meeting he was told only to believe, without even a word being mentioned about repentance. Most of today's converts are therefore like premature babies, pulled out by impatient midwives ('evangelists') in their lust for statistics, when the babies were not yet ready to be born. These premature babies then either die, or live as problem cases for the rest of their lives. The angels rejoice over sinners who repent, not over sinners who merely believe (Luke 15:7, 10).

But even where there has been a thorough repentance, and a person has been truly converted, he must then be led on to discipleship, to fulfil God's will for him.

Evangelism that does not lead on to discipleship is an incomplete job. Often, it is the evangelist's desire to build his own kingdom that prevents him from working together with those who can make his 'converts' into disciples.

We do not have to judge such preachers, for we are told not to judge. But they will certainly have to answer to the Lord for hindering their converts from becoming disciples.

Let us look at the commission in Mark 16:15 along with the one in Matthew 28:19, 20 and try and understand the whole purpose of God.

The first step of leading people to repentance and faith must culminate in water baptism (as Jesus made plain in Mark 16:16). Those evangelists who do not preach water baptism for fear of offending unconverted bishops etc., are not preaching the way Peter preached it on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38).

Further, in Matthew 28:19, the Lord commands us to make disciples. This involves leading these converts to be detached from an inordinate love for their relatives that hinders them from following the Lord (Luke 14:26), to be detached from material possessions (Luke 14:33) and leading them to take up the cross daily for the rest of their lives (Luke 14:27). These are the three minimum requirements for becoming a disciple.

Matthew 28:19 then repeats the necessity of water baptism. Although baptism is repeated in both commissions, it is rare indeed to find an evangelist today who has the courage to preach it. They fear men more than they fear God; preferring to be interdenominational and thus great in the eyes of men, rather than preach the whole counsel of God and be great in His eyes.

Matthew 28:20 goes on to say that this disciple must then be taught every single thing that Jesus commanded - and not only that, but be taught to obey and practise every single command of Jesus. One has to only look through Matthew chapters 5, 6 & 7 to see some of the things that Jesus commanded - which most believers do not even bother to obey.

So we see what a tremendous task it is to fulfil both commissions together.

The need now in our land is for those who have been gripped by the necessity of proclaiming the whole counsel of God, and who are wholeheartedly obedient themselves (as far as they have light) to all that Jesus commanded, and who passionately desire to build the body of Christ.

Jesus said that His disciples would be identified by one mark - their love for one another.

Mark that! It is not by large numbers that the disciples are identified, or by their wealth, but by their fervent mutual love. The evangelistic healing meeting that draw thousands to hear the message must lead on to the establishment of a local church in that locality, where the disciples love one another.

Yet the sad thing is that in the places where repeated evangelistic, healing crusades are held year after year, it is difficult to find even one church about which it can be said that the members therein do not fight with one another or backbite against one another, etc., leave alone love one another. One can understand if the new converts are still unable to live a victorious life. But what shall we say if strife and immaturity characterise even the elders of the churches in our land?

This is the clearest indication that the great commission of Matthew 28:19, 20 - discipleship and total obedience to the commandments of Jesus - has been totally ignored. The commission of Mark 16:15 (faith and water baptism) alone is obeyed, and that too in many cases only partially (water baptism being left out).

In Mark 16:15-20, the emphasis is on evangelism, the message being confirmed by signs and wonders done by the Lord. In Matthew 28:19, 20, the emphasis is on discipleship, the disciple's life being manifested by total obedience to Jesus' commandments. Multitudes of Christians are taken up with the former; very, very few with the latter. Yet the former without the latter is as incomplete and worthless as half a human body. But who has eyes to see this?

In Jesus' ministry, we read that great multitudes followed Him, because of His evangelistic, healing ministry. He immediately turned around and taught them about discipleship (Luke 14:25, 26). Would that today's evangelists would do the same, either themselves or along with apostles, prophets, teachers and shepherds who can complete the work they have begun.

When Jesus preached discipleship to the multitudes, it soon dwindled down to a handful of eleven disciples (Compare John 6:2 with 70). The remaining folk found the message too hard, and left (John 6:60, 66). But it was with those eleven disciples that God accomplished His purposes in the world and carried on the work that Jesus began.

Today we are to carry on the same ministry as His Body on earth. After the evangelist has gathered the multitude, we are to lead the converts to discipleship and obedience. Thus and thus alone will the body of Christ be built.

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