

12-1-1992

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### Recommended Citation

Gilbert, L. (1992). The Gift of Evangelism and Its Relationship to Evangelism. *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, 3(1), 9-17. Retrieved from <https://digitalarchives.apu.edu/jascg/vol3/iss1/3>

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## THE GIFT OF EVANGELISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO EVANGELISM

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Larry Gilbert

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*He is author of two books. Team Ministry, explains the relationships of spiritual gifts to the local church, the ministry, and to the individual believer. Team Evangelism (1991) presents a balance between confrontational evangelism and lifestyle evangelism.*

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The score is tied, the bases are loaded, and it is the bottom of the ninth inning. The past two batters have gone down swinging -- tension is at a peak -- pressure is on to make the most important decision of this championship series. The coach in the dugout must choose a pinch hitter to bat in this crucial situation. He must make the right choice. The coach encourages his clutch player to do his best. "You can do it; just be a man and do what we need you to do. We are counting on you to do your job. Go to it and get it done." Out of the shadows of the dugout comes the man the coach has sent to the plate --

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CHURCH GROWTH JOURNAL NASCG, VOL. III, 1992

the team's best starting pitcher, who only has a batting average of .097 -- the *weakest* hitter on the team.

The success of each team will ultimately rest on the coach putting the right player in the right position at the right time. That is where it always rests. Coaches must know their players and their skills; how they react to certain situations and what they can do under pressure. Success in business depends on proper use of personnel. The two most important elements of personnel usage are placing players in the position that suits them and getting each player to function as part of the team. Teamwork requires everyone doing their best at their position with their skills and cooperating with the others doing the same thing. This principle is called "workforce economics."

This principle applies in the church as well. The pastor is like the coach of a ball team; Christ is the owner; the members are the players. The owner expects the coach to manage the team by using the most qualified players in the proper positions and teaching them to work together as a team so they win the game. Winning the game in the church is reaching our communities for Christ and bringing new converts and church members to full maturity -- *reaching and teaching*.

There are strengths and deficiencies in every area of the ministry. These deficiencies are probably more evident in the area of evangelism than anywhere else. In this one area alone, our "coaches" have inflicted guilt, frustration, and discouragement by expecting all the players to perform like the team's best hitter.

Possibly the greatest contribution the Church Growth Movement has made to spiritual gifts is recognizing and properly defining the gift of evangelism. Understanding this gift is imperative to understanding the relationship of spiritual gifts to church growth.

To properly understand the relationship between spiritual gifts and evangelism, we must first understand the difference between the gift of evangelism and the command to evangelize.

### **The Command To Evangelize**

Two positions on evangelism dominate Christianity. Although a variety of Scriptures are used for their support, both positions consider their interpretation of the Great Commission as their foundation. (See Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:47-48, John 20:21-23, and Acts 1:8.)

**Position 1 - Confrontational Evangelism:** The interpretation of these combined Scriptures says that every Christian has the responsibility to witness to every unsaved person. Furthermore, witnessing goes beyond personal testimony, requiring a presentation of the Gospel and a request for a decision. This leads



to the belief that God's primary objective in saving sinners is to make them soul-winners.

Most people holding this position contend that the Great Commission was given to the individual, not to the church, and that we all have a personal responsibility to fulfill it. When speaking of the Great Commission, they most often quote the passage in Mark and emphasize "preach the Gospel to every creature." They believe that soul-winning is the most important work a person can do.

This position generally rejects the idea that God has given a gift that would enable certain Christians to become more effective or aggressive soul-winners than others, therefore removing the excuses of the "un-gifted" for not soul-winning. Most believe that "evangelism" in Ephesians 4 is a calling of God and an office of the church and therefore given to those called into full-time evangelistic ministries (for example, D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, John R. Rice, Billy Graham, etc.). Their belief, as they communicate it, is that God will enable any yielded person to overcome the obstacles that would hinder him or her from becoming the kind of soul-winner they themselves are.

Within this first position are two extremes. One extreme says, "If you are not winning two or three souls a week, maybe you should question your own salvation." Or, "The evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit is not whether you are speaking in tongues but rather, how many souls you are winning to Christ." (Both statements "supported" with Scripture.)

The other extreme says, "The Scriptures do not say you have to get results; you only have to sow seeds." This leads to a simplified three-point tract that enables you to present the Gospel to a hundred homes on a Saturday afternoon without any need for follow-up.

Both extremes have messages entitled "Go" and use the passage in Acts saying "house to house," assuring us that this was the way they did it in the early church; therefore, it is the *only* successful way for us to evangelize today. Both are heavy users of tracts but insist that they should never be used as a "cop-out" to personal witnessing. Many times they leave the Christian feeling unspiritual or inferior because he is not a member of the visitation program. Both of these extremes often border on "Easy-Believism" (decision-getting without true conversion) and "Guilt-trip Evangelism" (motivation by guilt).

**Position 2 - Lifestyle Evangelism:** This position is quite the opposite of the first. Their reaction to the heavy emphasis on soul-winning gives the Great Commission a different twist. They stress the passage in Matthew and point out that the Commission really emphasizes teaching, which they do well. They would agree that the Great Commission conveys the idea that all should be witnesses - and a witness is "living your life that others might see Christ in you." You may

hear one say, "Our job is to sow seeds, but not verbal seeds, for actions speak louder than words."

This group will accuse the first group of being over-zealous and offering an overly simplified plan of salvation, while they themselves have a very complicated and theological explanation for God's redemption of man. An extreme for this position slides into the hyper-Calvinism philosophy.

The weakness of Lifestyle Evangelism is that it is a philosophy based on an over-reaction to Confrontational Evangelism. Therefore, the problem with Lifestyle Evangelism is not its philosophy or methodology, but the motivation for its conception. A person holding either of the two positions must evaluate his own motivation.

### **Evaluation of Both Positions**

It is noteworthy that both positions are built on their interpretation of the Great Commission. It is also important to acknowledge that both positions have good scriptural arguments, although neither side would agree with such a statement about the other.

The most important thing to notice about both positions is they fit the gifts, personalities, motivations, temperaments, character strengths and weaknesses of each group. We must recognize each position for what is -- a *method*, not a scriptural mandate. It is a method that basically fits the dominant gifts of each group. Both positions border on becoming *theo-methodologists* (making their methodology their theology).

It is not our place to condemn either position. Both are effective. But the attitude that says *everyone* should fit into their position is wrong. Some people, either by gift or personality, will never be outgoing or confrontational. Others, because of their gift or personality, will never be able to "give testimony only" by their actions. They must be outgoing and verbal.

### **Balance is the Answer**

A third position, that of "TEAM Evangelism," is also one that has a valid scriptural interpretation. It not only fits Scripture but also fits the personalities of all Christians, not just one group. This position recognizes individuals and acknowledges that some men are without complexes. Such men know no fear, can use any method under any situation, with anyone, and win them to Christ.

The third position recognizes that a method suitable to this personality would be over the head of the average Christian. It recognizes that few people have the above outstanding qualities. It also recognizes that most Christians are timid and an attempt at direct confrontational soul-winning is an overwhelming experience for them.



### The Position of TEAM Evangelism

1. God has given to some Christians (it appears to be approximately 10 percent) the gift of Evangelism which endows them to be effective and confrontational while leading people to Christ. This gift can manifest itself through mass evangelism (preaching to groups) or through personal confrontational witnessing one-on-one.

2. God at the same time gives every Christian the responsibility to be a *witness*.

It is important to recognize here that the largest difference in the function of these two groups is the methods, not the results of each. The witness has the responsibility to make the opportunities for himself. It is important to recognize that a fine line exists as to what may be called an opportunity. However, we must allow this decision to be made in the heart of the person being faced with the situation, for he alone will be responsible before God as to how he used or did not use the situation.

This position does not relieve Christians from reaching out to a lost world with the Gospel, but only acknowledges that God endows some people to do this through methods that may not fit all people.

### The Bottom Line

The bottom line comes in actual practice of the principles, not in their interpretation.

1. *Every Christian should evangelize in one manner or another.* You can be a soul-winner without being a "soul-winner". I remember a young woman in my home church several years ago. The pastor and evangelist were trying to motivate our members to "go out and win the lost." The young woman was in my Sunday school class, and she told me, "If they think I am going to go out and get people saved, they are crazy, because I just can not do it." Yet that very evening, she and her husband were responsible for having 26 visitors in the service. Several of them accepted Christ on the invitation. Was she a soul-winner or not? She did not think she was. However, she was doing the work of an evangelist, but not through direct confrontation which she thought was expected of her.

2. *God has endowed some Christians with the gift of evangelism.* This gift enables them, more so than teachers, to function effectively in the visitation program.

3. *God has not called everyone to be a part of the visitation program.* A person God has not called should not have to bear the burden of guilt nor be made to feel unspiritual or inadequate because he is not practicing that type of evangelism.

Guilt is not always a motivator, but quite often a tool of Satan for destruction. Most guilt only suppresses efficiency. A distinction must be made between the guilt associated with the Holy Spirit convicting one of sin, and the false guilt placed by man when one does not live up to his expectations. The Holy Spirit is associated with guilt resulting from conviction. If the principle being conveyed is not for that person or the teaching is not valid, the Holy Spirit will not convict. One must be careful not to attempt to do the Holy Spirit's work for Him.

More than a decade ago C. Peter Wagner's research indicated that approximately ten percent of Christians have the gift of evangelism.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, ninety percent of all members do not have the gift. This estimate is also based, today, on the evaluation of thousands of spiritual gift inventories given over past years by the author. However, others who have written on this subject estimate that as little as one to three percent (1-3 percent) have the gift of evangelism. The author's observation is, that of the total evaluated, four to five percent (4-5 percent) have evangelism as their dominant (number one) gift while five to six (5-6 percent) have it as a secondary or number two gift. Differences in opinion may be attributed to the fact that of those people who have the gift of evangelism, only a small percent actually use the gift in public view. However, when tested a much larger number are recognizable.

The real problem is that only five percent of those *with the gift of evangelism* are actually leading sinners to Christ. In other words, only one-half of one percent of the church population is actually involved in having any part in leading people to Christ. To put it another way, ninety-nine and one-half percent of the people in the church are not evangelizing.

The problem occurs when the blame is placed on the ninety-nine and one-half percent for not evangelizing. The blame should be put on the ninety-five percent of the gifted evangelists who are not fulfilling their mission and calling. They are primarily the ones God has called to do the job. Perhaps if this were done, the other ninety percent who have differing gifts would feel free to put those gifts to work. The result would be better "workforce economics" and greater effectiveness as a TEAM for evangelism and church growth.

4. *Balance needs to be taught when it comes to evangelism.* Teach that there is a difference in people and in methodology. Help each Christian find where he fits in so he can effectively help the lost person take another step towards making that decision for Christ. One may not be able to directly confront

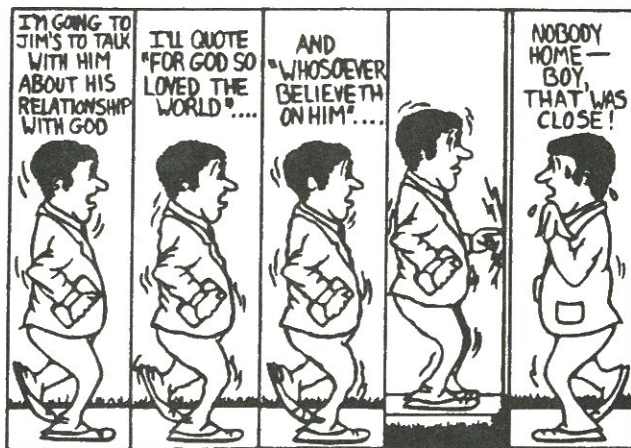
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<sup>1</sup> C. Peter Wagner. *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*. Glendale CA: Regal Books, 1979. p.177.  
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someone with the Gospel and obtain a decision from them, but that person can play a part in bringing a person one step closer to accepting Christ.

5. *Understand fear as an excuse.*



Everyone can laugh at this cartoon, but for most of us, it strikes close to home.

Fear is a hush-hush subject. It is something we all have, yet we do not want anyone else to know. And because others are afraid to mention it, we think they do not have any fear, thus making us believe we are the only ones who do. I took a speech class once. I was surprised at the boldness with which the instructor talked about fear while all the students acted as if they did not know what he was talking about. All the while they were shaking in their shoes, knowing he was going to call on one of them soon to stand in front of the class and make a speech.

I have a friend who worked for the telephone company. We were riding along in the car one day when he suddenly pointed and said, "See that pole -- pole number 628743? I will never forget that one. It is the one we worked on the first day I worked for the phone company ten years ago. I was scared to death."

I replied, "You mean they made you climb a telephone pole the first day you worked for them?"

"No," he said. "I was afraid they were going to ask me to climb one."

Preaching on fear will never get many amens. The fearless think the preacher is crazy or making excuses for the fearful, and the fearful are too afraid to shout "Amen."



In Revelation 21:8 the *fearful* are listed as the number one resident in Hell -- those who were afraid to profess faith in Christ for fear of ridicule. If this is so, how many had enough courage to just step over the line? They had enough courage to be saved, but no farther. Fear is not something that can be preached away. Preaching about fear only leads to frustration on the part of the fearful party. When fear is present, preaching about it must be balanced with understanding and practical application, or "how to" teaching. Knowledge brings self-confidence, and self-confidence will eradicate much of the fear of witnessing.

Therefore, TEAM Evangelism teaches that every Christian, both new and old, should take an active part in a personal evangelism training class. When the instructors are thoughtful, they can train without creating fear in students or putting them in embarrassing situations.

This training can do two things for the church. First, those who do not have the gift of evangelism will soon learn that they do not. Yet, the practical teaching will help them overcome much of their fear. This will make it easier for them to *witness* to others while they minister in another capacity, using the gift God has given them. Secondly, those that have the gift of evangelism will soon develop a stronger burden for winning the lost. No one can sit through practical teaching of the gift God has given him without soon getting a burden from God with the motivation to perform the task. Fear may still be present after the training but God will give the motivation needed to overcome it.

### Conclusion

"Your material on gifts is great. Why don't you leave the 'Sacred Cow' (meaning the gift of evangelism) alone like everyone else? Without that controversy, everyone would accept it!" More than once I have been asked a similar question.

This material is based on helping Christians discover their gifts and find fulfillment in life through the use of those gifts. Mixing new truths with old misconceptions will only confuse and frustrate people even more. One can never be effective and fulfilled if he is living under guilt for not doing what he thinks he should be doing. *It is not what you are that holds you back -- it is what you think you aren't.*

The reason for non-involvement goes far beyond lack of commitment. Possibly the church has been its own greatest hindrance to effective evangelism. This may be true because the church attempts to make everyone qualify. The leadership tells the team, "I know you are a good first baseman or shortstop, but that is of secondary importance because everyone on our team must first be a good recruiter." With that attitude continuing, current team members are either going to look for another team or join the ranks of the majority and become spectators.

We must never forget that every year, it is not the club with the best recruiter, the best pitcher or the best shortstop that takes home the pennant, but the one with the best TEAM.