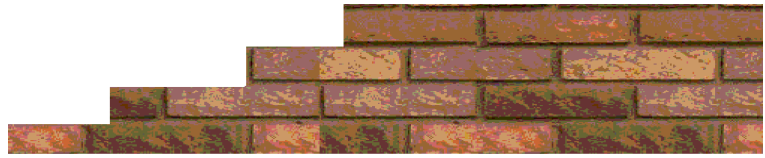


Rebuild



Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations, And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4)

Paradigm Makes a Difference (Part 4)

Evangelism: Presentation or Presence

Before addressing the subject of evangelism, it is important to know where I stand. I believe that if God did not send His Son, humanity would be lost. The Apostle Peter's conviction is mine: "There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). If this too is your conviction, it is obvious we both are committed to bringing people to Christ in the most effective way possible.

But how does one best introduce another to Christ? What does the Bible teach?

It may be shocking to some, but there is hardly an instance of anyone doing "one-on-one" evangelism in the Bible. "Saturation evangelism," where a group of people go into an area and conduct a "Gospel campaign" blitz does not appear at all. Why?

It is because New Testament evangelism represents a paradigm – a way of seeing and living – that is entirely different from the one current in 20th Century America.

This is a very significant point.

Our contemporary slant to the Gospel can so neutralize the message of Christ that it can actually cause one to wonder if we are preaching the Gospel at all. For those of us who believe that only the life and message of the God-Man Jesus Christ saves, there is no more important concern.

So What's the Difference?

The New Testament pattern of evangelism is to live the *evangel*, the Good News. This is not a "silent" witness. No one can truly live the Gospel and be silent. (How can one be silent when God has given Himself so generously?) The gift of Christ demands a life given in return, words and all.

But the Gospel is more than words. It is a message illustrated in lives devoted to God, and to one another.

When the Holy Spirit came on the believers in Jerusalem, their joint dedication to God, His word, and one another drew people into the Kingdom "day by day" (Acts 2:42-47). Paul commends the community in Thessalonika for the same thing, because of their faithful love for Christ despite severe persecution. "The word of the Lord has sounded forth from you ... so that we do not have need to say anything" (1 Thessalonians 1:8). Imagine! The Thessalonian Christian Community presented such a powerful witness that Paul's preaching was not even necessary! That is what needs to be said about our congregations.

But what do you think the contemporary American Christian would do if called to "witness" in Jerusalem or Thessalonika? We would probably polish up our verbal presentation of the Gospel and get out and preach. There is nothing wrong with this, of course. But if our

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words are not illustrated by a Community witness that backs up our preaching, then our words will fall to the ground as water vapor.

A message that is word heavy, and life light, can too easily be confused with anyone's words - whether a Jew, a New Ager, or a used car salesman. Words that are not framed by a living testimony have no power. No matter how well they are pitched, words without witness are just tiny water droplets sprayed into the air. One droplet looks like another.

But Jesus did not send the Holy Spirit so we could just speak words. Jesus said, "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ... you shall be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8). Note the wording. He does not say, "When the Spirit comes on you, you will 'do' witnessing," but rather, "be My witnesses." There is a vast difference.

So, how great is the difference? It is as great as the difference between talking about God's love and demonstrating it. Is that significant? It is. For many, it will mean the difference between heaven or hell.

<p>Evangelistic Paradigm In American Setting</p>	<p>Evangelistic Paradigm in the Early Church</p>	<p>Biblical Truth(s)</p>
<p>Accepting the Gospel – <i>Making a “decision” for Christ:</i> Coming “forward,” raising a hand, praying “a prayer,” signing a card...</p>	<p>Accepting the Gospel – <i>Admittance into a Christian Community</i> that called people to be devoted to Christ and one another.</p>	<p>Union with God, and His People: “what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).</p>
<p>Content of the Gospel – <i>Persuading people to “receive” Christ, adopting a concept about Christ’s Atonement:</i> Explaining <i>The Four Spiritual Laws</i>, presenting <i>Evangelism Explosion</i> “script,” convening an evangelistic crusade, Sunday sermons, etc.</p>	<p>Content of the Gospel – <i>Calling people to follow Christ, adopting a Christian life-style based on Christ’s Cross:</i> Inviting people into a relational environment that re-orient’s one’s life around loving God and others (affecting one’s values, decisions, resources and purpose).</p>	<p>Living the Gospel: “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ ...and they continually devoted themselves to the apostles’s teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:38a, 42).</p>
<p>Means of Communicating the Gospel: Words, ideas, presentations</p>	<p>Means of Communicating the Gospel: Lives reflecting the love of God.</p>	<p>Love as Means and End: “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).</p>
<p>Primary Goal of the Gospel – <i>To get people to heaven:</i> To “save souls,” save people from hell...</p>	<p>Primary Goal of the Gospel – <i>To prepare people for heaven, readying them to love and serve God forever:</i> That not only people’s souls would be saved, but that one’s mind, soul, spirit, and relationships be continually healed by the power of Christ as well [i.e., God’s People being the Gospel].</p>	<p>To be like Christ: “... called according to His purpose. ...to become conformed to the image of His Son...” (Romans 8:28c, 29b). “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart... This is the great and foremost commandment.” (Matthew 22:37,38)</p>
<p>Place of Church in Proclaiming the Gospel: Teaching center, headquarters</p>	<p>Place Church in Proclaiming the Gospel: The People are the Message.</p>	<p>Church & Gospel are One: “the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” (1 Tim. 3:15b)</p>

Rev. Jordan Bajis is the pastor of the community of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Fort Collins, Colorado. In the last 20 years he has sought to restore the Covenant foundations of the Church as a missionary, author, speaker, and evangelist.

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church
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 2136 Sheffield Drive
 Fort Collins, Colorado 80526

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