

What is Evangelism?

Again and again we are told we must witness, we must evangelize. True. But what does it mean to witness, to evangelize? Ajith Fernando points out there are six key verbs in Acts 17:2-4 used to describe the evangelism of Paul and Silas that help us construct a biblical theology of evangelism. First, when Paul goes to a synagogue he *dialegomai* with Jews. That is, he reads the Scriptures then gives expository teaching, Acts 17:2.

The second word is *dianoigo* meaning to open, open up, unlock. The subject taught is that “the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead,” Acts 17:3a. In Paul’s commission *dianoigo* is used of him being sent to metaphorically open spiritually blinded eyes: “to open their eyes, that, they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place amongst those who are sanctified by faith in me” Acts 26:18. Both the understanding and the scriptures require opening.

Thirdly, in addition to the exposition, the opening up of the Scriptures, Paul also *paratithemi*, ‘places before them, or establishes truthful evidence showing/proving that the Christ had to suffer’ Acts 17:3. Fourthly, another word *katangello*, emphasizes extent to which the announcement or proclamation is being made. Paul “proclaims” the gospel of Jesus Christ not only to the Thessalonians, but in every place he goes, Acts 17:3b, 1 Peter 2:9.

Two other words : *peitho* “persuaded” and *proskleroo* “joined” are used to describe the response to the gospel, Acts 17: 4. In Second Corinthians 5:11 Paul says, “We try to persuade (*peitho*) men.” ‘*peitho*’ is used seven times in Acts to describe Paul’s evangelism, Acts 17:4; 18:4; 19:8, 26; 26:28; 28:23, 24. The aim evangelism is not simply to discuss ideas so that we can know what each other believes. Rather, it is to *peitho*, to persuade or to convince a person to believe the gospel and to act on the basis of what they have heard. Evangelism aims at a response, a response so comprehensive that it can be called a conversion.

The evidence of conversion is implied in the word *proskleroo*, “joined”. The idea is that the new believers joined the company of the apostles. Their minds had been changed and they had made a decision about the truth. They took the next step: “They attached themselves to the missionaries, casting their lot with them, come what may.”

These six words show us that evangelism involves reading and explaining the scriptures, proclaiming the message of Christ, especially his death and resurrection. This dialogue may include discussion, and it aims at persuading people so that they will be converted to Christ and incorporated into the church. This is not a comprehensive definition of evangelism, but we can say that all biblical evangelism must have these six features. (**Ajith Fernando, Acts. NIVAC pp 460-462.**)