

Evangelism

Adapted from “Romans For You” by Tim Keller

What motivates Paul to spread the Gospel?

What means and methods does Paul use to spread the Gospel?

What strategies does Paul use to spread the Gospel?

Paul’s Motives—Methods—Strategies

Paul’s Motives:

For Paul, evangelism was not only a duty, but a passion. He described his work as “*to the Gentiles... proclaiming the gospel of God*” (v.16), and in that service he said, “*I glory—I am proud of it*” (v.17). Paul saw evangelism as a priestly ministry: “*The priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel... so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God...*” (v.16). In the Old Testament, the worshipper was to bring two basic sacrifices or offerings to God: sin and guilt offerings (for atonement for sin — asking forgiveness *from* Him); and burnt and thanksgiving offerings (for gratitude — giving service and honor *to* Him). The priest offered these sacrifices on behalf of individuals and the people. In the New Testament, Christians understand that Jesus has made the final and complete sin offering, but all people must still bring themselves and all they have as “offerings” of gratitude to God (Rom 12:1). Paul saw Gentile converts as his offerings to God! He saw evangelism as a way of giving God praise and thanks. In Rom.12:1 Paul said, “Give yourselves totally to God, in light of all Jesus has given to you.” Paul saw his evangelism as an offering to God in response to all Jesus has given him.

The point is, Paul’s goal in evangelism is not just some kind of “conversion experience,” but changed lives—people who are obedient and loyal to God. For Paul, people have not been “evangelized” until they have ceased to be their own masters and have become bond-servants of the Lord Jesus. This is what made Paul “glory in his work.” This is what motivated him.

Paul’s Means and Methods:

Paul said he won people to Christ “...by what I have said and done” (v.18). Literally, by “word and deed.” He did not get the gospel to people just by speaking, but by his life and actions. He listed some of those deeds — “*by the power of signs and miracles*” (v. 19). These are supernatural displays that were part of Paul’s gifts as an Apostle. But Paul also said his deeds included care and help for the poor. (vv.26-27). And Paul was willing to suffer hardship for the Gospel. He wrote to the Thessalonians, “*You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord in spite of severe suffering...*” (1Thess 1:5-6)

Paul not only told people the gospel, but he embodied the gospel in his relationships. Like Paul, we are to invite people to examine us, in our words and deeds, so they can see what a human life looks like that is re-arranged and remodeled by the gospel. We want them to see “Jesus in the flesh”. In that way, the Church in the world is truly the “Incarnate Body of Christ.” As he further told the Thessalonians, “*As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our own lives as well...*” (1 Thess 2:6-8).

So, Paul’s methods were preaching, suffering and serving. Ours are no different.

Paul's Strategies:

His main strategy was *pioneering and urban*. “From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ” (v.19). This seems like an overstatement. Literally he said, “*I have completed the preaching of Christ*”. This is made clearer when he says, “*now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions.*” (v.23)

What does Paul mean? There were hundreds of towns and villages and thousands of people he had not personally seen or talked to. But here is the key—Paul’s missionary strategy was urban, the cities. He bypassed the towns and villages. He went into every large and influential city and evangelized until a vital growing movement of churches was developed. Once he had done that, his work would spread to the whole region. Once Paul planted a vibrant church in the region’s biggest city, he was “done”. He left it to the leaders of that “city church” to spread out into the surrounding villages, then Paul would move on. He said, “*It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation*” (v.20). Paul wanted the “hardest ground”, the people who were the farthest from the faith—confirmed, pagan unbelievers.

Paul performed miracles. What about miracles? Miracles can happen today, but the number of miracles in Paul’s ministry was specific to his being an apostle. This is a controversial topic. John Stott helps us, commenting on Rom 15:18-19:

“This combination of words and works, the verbal and the visual, is a recognition that human beings often learn more through their eyes than through their ears. Words explain works but works dramatize words. The public ministry of Jesus is the best example of this, and after his ascension into heaven he continued ‘to do and to teach’ through his apostles (Acts 1:1). It would be wrong to conclude, however, that ‘works’ means only miracles. One of Jesus’ most powerful visual aids was to take a child into his arms, and in the early church it was their common life and their care for the needy... Paul’s only other use of these three words [‘power’, ‘signs’, and ‘wonders’] is in relation to his ministry in II Cor. 12:12, where he calls them ‘the things that mark an apostle’. This does not deny that God can perform miracles today... it is rather to acknowledge that their chief purpose was to authenticate the unique ministry of the apostles (Heb 2:4).”

Be aware that Paul had special gifts of evangelism and a motivation that we do not share today. For example, Paul felt that nothing else he did in his life was as important as evangelism. This reflects his specific calling to be a church-planting Apostle. His calling to be an urban missionary to the most “hardened” unbelievers is also specific to his particular set of gifts. But his example, shows us the tremendous importance of evangelism in general and of urban evangelism in particular.

Paul and the Poor:

Paul did not explain what caused the poverty in the Jerusalem church. In Acts we are told that there was a famine (Acts 11:27), but there may have been other reasons.

Paul does not motivate the Roman Christians by explaining the cause of the poverty. He simply said that the believers in Achaia and Macedonia had contributed to the poor (v.26) and they were pleased to do it, but then he adds, “*indeed they owe it to them*” (v.27). This means that helping the poor is not an option. It is a “duty” that pleases us—the Macedonians were *pleased* to do it (v.26). It is a duty that wells up out of our hearts and gives us joy and fulfillment as we do it. In other words, helping the

needy, while a requirement, is not simply a response to a requirement, but is the overflow of a heart full of the joy of salvation.

But Paul said that the Gentile Christians owe *help* to the poor Jewish Christians. Why? Because the gospel of grace came to the Gentiles through the Old Testament and the Jewish people. “*If the Gentiles have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings*” (v.27). Grace makes us “debtors” to those in need. Paul is *not* saying that Gentiles owe Jews because of race, but because of grace. In 2 Cor. 8:8-9, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to give to the Jerusalem poor, and he reminds them “...they owe the poor, because they owe Christ.” This sense of debt is not a burden but shows great gratitude toward Christ for grace. The Christian view of charity is that the saved, who have any amount of money, owe those without any money, because of the spiritual riches of the gospel. Our salvation is a gift, not a wage—and it is a gift God intends that we share with others. And when we give away our “gift”... God abundantly blesses us even more. Paul’s plan is to go to Spain to preach, and to stop in Rome on his way. But then he said, “*I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there*” (v.25). This ministry to the poor was so important to Paul that he had to interrupt his preaching plans and put off his plans to be blessed by the Roman Church.

Paul sees his obligation to the poor every bit as important as his obligation to the Gentiles, and every bit as important as his pioneering church-planting mission.