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**Witnessing
and the
Early Church.**

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Witnessing and the Early Church.

Topics.

- The birth of Christianity.
- The early church synagogue and preaching.
- Open air preaching in the early church.
- The second century attraction to Christianity.
- Conversion for Jews and gentiles.
- The early church martyrdom and death.
- The early church and miracles.
- The early church and mass evangelism.
- The early church and roving evangelists.
- The early church and the amateur evangelist.
- The early church and household evangelism.
- The early church, philosophers, theologians and schools.
- Moralism, legalism and second century Christianity.

THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY

Rome was in peace during the time Jesus was on the earth and had built multitudes of roads making it easier to take the Gospel to the known world. Added to this there were about one million Jews in Egypt and hundreds of Jews had been scattered throughout the nations and so the Gospel was spread throughout all nations, languages and people. The Christian faith grew best and fastest on Jewish soil or at least soil that had been prepared by Judaism. The following are five major factors that helped in the spread of Christianity:

1. The spread of the believing Jews.
2. The Jews monotheism.
3. The Jews ethical standards.
4. The Jews synagogues.
5. The Jews Scriptures and those that believed concern for conversion.

These were all major factors in the advance of the Christian faith.

THE EARLY CHURCH, THE SYNAGOGUE AND PREACHING

Synagogues were the place of the Torah where the Law was spread and the commandments inculcated, they were intended to foster devotion, discipline and learning and were the seedbed for evangelism among the Jews. Wherever there were Jews, there were synagogues and all loyal Israelites were expected to attend the synagogues weekly. Though the

synagogues were primarily for the Jews they also attracted a number of thoughtful Gentiles seeking God so they became a ready-made congregation and a religious system that provided for Christian evangelists to propagate the Christian message and one of the most important factors in the early spread of the faith.

The synagogue service consisted of:

- A prayer and the reading of the Law and the prophets.
- An exposition and a blessing.

Giving the exposition was not restricted to the priestly class any member of the congregation could be called upon to read the Scriptures and anyone could be asked to give the exposition. The only element in the whole service that was restricted to the priestly office was the blessing when there was no priest present the blessing was dispensed with. This elasticity and flexibility in ministry in the synagogues accounts for the fact that Jesus was invited to read the prophets in his home, in the synagogue at Nazareth and explains why Paul was also often invited as a distinguished Pharisee visitor in certain synagogues to read and address the congregation during the course of his missionary journeys. Christian missionaries to Israel gratefully accepted opportunities in the three decades or so before the door into the synagogues was slammed shut in their faces. In the synagogues the evangelical address had three parts and each part was marked by an appeal to the attention of the listeners.

Their message showed:

1. How the history of God's people leads up to the coming of the Messiah.
2. How the ancient prophecies have been fulfilled in the Good News of Jesus.
3. How the forgiveness of sins is available through the risen Jesus.

They focused on prophecies concerning Israel's Messiah the Christ and Old Testament Scripture that speak of Christ and laid stress on Jesus death, burial and resurrection by not only honestly facing the difficulty of Jesus rejection by Israel and his death on the cross, but also by shining a brilliant light on the truth that it was all in fulfillment of their Scriptures. They highlighted the freedom Jesus offers which was never available under the Law of Moses, the need for response in faith to Jesus and often concluded the message with a solemn warning that God's mercy is not to be trifled with. The early evangelist aim was to convince his hearers that Israel's Messiah is Jesus. Their desire and goal were to bring their listeners to the newness of life which they themselves had found in Jesus. The preaching of the early evangelist was intensely relevant, to the circumstances, concerns and consciences of the hearers they made use of personal testimony and made an appeal and gave a warning to bring home the saving power of their message.

OPEN AIR PREACHING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

As well as preaching in the synagogues the disciples followed their Master in preaching in the open air, but this type of preaching was not the innovation of Judaism, it had long been carried out both in Palestine and elsewhere, in courtyards, open fields, riverbanks and market places. The ancient world was used to open air work, when a celebrated preacher came to a town or village, the Jews would raise a platform for him and would listen and learn from him. Some synagogues would sponsor preaching and teaching tours by gifted interpreters of the Torah. In the New Testament the disciples had open-air meetings in Jerusalem, Samaria, Lystra and Athens. These types of meetings were only effective in places where numbers of people naturally pass or gather and for this

reason the Temple area was a favourite site for open-air meetings. It was no disaster if the meeting attracted the unfavourable attention of the Jewish or Roman authorities since their presence gave open air meetings an added significance to the preaching and facilitated the subsequent break up into small groups for discussion and further instruction. This type of open-air evangelism continued throughout the first two centuries.

THE EARLY CHURCH, REASONING AND THE GOSPEL

Paul was a man filled with a brilliant knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures and because of this the intellectual content of Paul's speeches would have been very stimulating to the people of the early church. Paul won men to Christ in his daily encounter with pagans in the lecture hall and could not only hold his own in the course of his public debates, but also make new converts during them no doubt this was helped by his zeal and the quality of his enthusiasm which went with his intellectual brilliance. Though Paul and the early Christians knew that reasoning alone could not bring anyone into the Kingdom of God they were very aware that it could break down barriers which obstructed men's vision of the moral and absolute choice of accepting or rejecting Christ which faced them.

When Paul spoke in the synagogues he was:

- Accommodating and sympathetic to the sensitiveness of his hearers.
- Showed charity in his presentation and had a readiness to welcome what was good in their position.
- Identified and felt empathy with their difficulties and was wise and tactful in his approach.
- Showed respect for his hearers and for their intellectual powers and spiritual needs.
- Showed courage in recognizing the difficulties and openly proclaimed the unpalatable truth rather than compromise or make a difficult thing seem easy.
- Had an unhesitating confidence in the power of the Gospel message.

When Christianity was first proclaimed it was a private belief to be shared and a faith that embraced men of all races and backgrounds, barbarian as well as the civilized. During the time of the apostles uneducated people and old Christian woman who were unable in words to prove the benefit of the Christian message did so by their deeds and by exhibited the benefit arising from their persuasion of its truth. They did not rehearse speeches, but exhibited good works in the following ways:

- When their pride and ego was struck, they did not strike back.
- When cheated by a brother or sister they did not go to law, but sorted it out amongst themselves.
- They willingly gave to the poor and needy.
- They loved their neighbours as themselves

THE SECOND CENTURY ATTRACTION TO CHRISTIANITY

Christianity attracted people in the second century because of:

- The love brothers and sisters in Christ showed toward each other.
- The moral qualities and the good ethics Christians displayed.

- The warmth of their fellowship and the manifestation of their enthusiasm.
- The universal applicability of their message concerning reconciliation with God.
- The teaching of the unknown God who lay behind the idols of ancient polytheism.
- The message deals with the problem of human guilt and estrangement.
- The joy manifested in those who trusted in and knew the risen Christ.
- The teaching that people could have a personal union with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The added dimension belief in Christ added to living here and now (without waiting for whatever might befall after death).
- The assurance and confidence that Christians claimed and enjoyed.
- The willingness to lose home, comfort, friends and even life itself to propagate their cause and bring sinners to Christ.
- The fear of judgment to eternal death (i.e., total extinction).

All this made an enormous appeal to the man and woman in the street during the second century.

CONVERSION FOR JEWS AND GENTILES

Christian conversion was unique in that Christian missionaries and preachers called on Jews as well as Gentiles to put their faith in Israel's Messiah the Christ and Saviour of the world to unite together and form a new race in Christ. For the Gentile this would be a total conversion to a new faith and for faithful Jews it would be in a very important sense a conversion within the Jewish faith in which they had been nourished and of which Christ was the summit and supreme goal of their lives. This new message of Christianity proclaimed that both Jews and Gentiles would have to be water baptized into the Kingdom of the Messiah that the Jewish prophets had spoken of and who faithful Jews had for over four thousand years patiently waited for. For the Gentile being water baptized was much more preferable to being circumcised, but for the Jew it was a great stumbling block since it meant renouncing all claim to be God's elect simply on the grounds of birth and the practice of circumcision. The three teachings that incorporated a Jew and Gentile into the Kingdom of God and brought about entry into the body of Christ were: -

1. Repentance and faith.
2. Water baptism.
3. Allowing the Spirit of Jesus access into one's life.

Added to these three is the first century church belief that a person should not only be called a Christian, but also found to be one they understood the difference between confession and performance and were very aware of the difference between authentic Christians and nominal (so-called) Christians.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN TOLERANCE

During the era of the early church there were Jews who had been steeped in the laws of Moses, had great knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and adhered to Jewish religious customs and traditions their nation held fast too for around four thousand years and Gentiles from

pagan faiths who knew nothing of the Old Testament or the Jewish faith coming together. This meant that there were not only, a variety of doctrinal difference, but also various forms of church government and differing attitudes toward clean and unclean foods, the observance of sacred days and certain ceremonial rites. Because of these differences the unity of the early church was not one of a dull uniformity, but of mutual respect and trust toward those who belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ their differences were not allowed to interfere with the mutual well-being and spiritual health of the community. They understood that every brother and sister in Christ will have to give an account of the way they treat each other and for their own individual conscientious decisions they personally make regarding these matters.

The following statement of Paul is a good example of the proper display of Christian tolerance:

- As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him (Rom. 14:1-3).

Those in the early church did not allow secondary differences of practice to disturb their primary unity of fellowship. Even in Jesus original group of his own disciples he had forged a unity which comprised of people from opposite backgrounds and differing temperaments, but their allegiance to Jesus brought harmony to conflicting attitudes and even with all the problems at Corinth unity was achieved.

THE EARLY CHURCH MARTYRDOM AND DEATH

In the early church there were joyful Christian lives and joyful Christian deaths, both of these were major factors which attracted non-Christians to Christ. Paul himself desired to leave this mortal world as soon as possible so that he might meet the Lord whom he loved. The summons for the Christian was the thoroughly biblical belief that to depart from this world and to be with Christ is far better. The joy, which took a person cheerfully to their death for the sake of the ONE they could not see, made a profound impression on the ancient world. This was one of the reasons the Christian Gospel carried such strong conviction and many believed it when they saw men and who for the love of the One they had never seen rejoice with joy unspeakable even when faced by brutal deaths.

Even in the earliest days of the church, the spirit of non-retaliation for evil, taught by Jesus, had taken root. When Peter and John were imprisoned and threatened by an imposing meeting of the Sanhedrin for their Christian activities, they did not retaliate against them or complain, nor did they hold a committee meeting to decide what should be done next, but rather simply joined their friends and gave themselves to prayer and then continued preaching the risen Christ. Peter had peace of mind when he was faced with death the following day, as he was found sleeping peacefully between the guards (Acts 12:6) and Paul regarded the physical brutalities he suffered in the cause of the Gospel as the marks, which branded him as Jesus' bond slave.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND MIRACLES

The primary purpose of the miracles of Jesus was to prove that he was who he claimed to be. The following Old Testament Scriptures of the great prophet Isaiah testify to the truth that Jesus miracles proved he is who he claimed to be.

Thousands of years before Christ appeared Isaiah prophesied:

- The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).
- The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped (Isaiah 35:5).
- How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns" (Isaiah 52:7).

Then in the New Testament when John the Baptist questioned his faith and sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him if he was the one to come Jesus told them to tell John:

- What they had seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them (Luke 7:22).

These verses shine a brilliant spotlight on the truth that Jesus miracles were a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the good news preached to them. During the years of the early church medical knowledge, doctors, hospitals etc., were practically non-existent added to this Bibles were not readily available as they are today and the Christian faith had only just been birthed. In contrast to this, today in the Western world there are doctors and hospitals and medical knowledge is highly advanced in the mind of people. Added to this we have over two thousand years of Christian evidence and an abundance of Scriptural knowledge to authenticate Jesus' Messiahship so though the conditions would appear to be lacking in which we might expect miracles in the New Testament sense we cannot exclude the possibility of them since their maybe situations in which we may expect to see God miraculous hand at work even today, especially in the following situations:

- Where there is only a tiny church in a vast pagan stronghold.
- Where there is a shortage of medicine and medical help.
- Where there may not be translations of the Scriptures available.
- Where the people are illiterate and there are definite spiritual lessons to be reinforced.

During the New Testament era it is interesting to notice that Jesus said, "There is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist (Luke 7:28) (KJV) yet John never did one sign miracle and to notice that only the apostles and three others they appointed (Stephen, Phillip and Barnabas) actually performed any miracles. Even more stunning is to realize that the thousands they saved never did any miracles and that the miracles Jesus and the apostles did do left no doubt that they were miracles of God since many were not even dependent on the sick person's faith as many were simply acts of compassion and for many it did not even matter whether they were Christians or pagans.

Paul explains in the following verse why Jesus did miracles:

- Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested (approved of God in the KJV) to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22).

Attested and approved in this context carries the idea that something is affirmed, and declared by God to be true. This clearly shows that the primary, purpose of miracles was too authenticated and confirm the following two things:

1. That Jesus was sent by God.

2. That the twelve apostles were true apostles of Christ and of God.

We know this because Paul says:

- The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works (2 Cor. 12:12).

The verse clearly shows that the miracles the apostle's performed were to authenticate that they were true apostles sent by God and by Christ.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND WITNESSING

Witnessing for the early church was not about teaching the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, but about sharing the message of the cross and the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. It was about sharing their testimony of Jesus, showing who and what sort of person Jesus is and explaining why they followed him. John beautifully sums up the simplicity and purpose of Bible witnessing and teachings in the following verses:

- Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

John's entire focus was to highlight Jesus, his person and significance and to show that he is the long-awaited Messiah the absolute and true Son of God. John's focus was to lead the reader to a commitment to Christ, a commitment that opens the door to a new dimension of living a life shared with God. The Bible is designed to prove that Jesus is the person he and others claim him to be and give the reader information about Jesus to prove he is the Saviour of the world and the Son of God. Both the Scriptures and the miracles of the Lord combine to challenge the reader to decide for or against Jesus.

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THE EARLY CHURCH AND MASS EVANGELISM

Evangelism today is often associated with the greater public meetings in contrast to these types of meetings the early church seems to have made very little use of this method of witnessing the Gospel. The following maybe two reasons why the early Christians avoided mass evangelism for the most part:

1. Large-scale public associations were banned by imperial edict during the majority of early Christianity apart from the large meetings held in Jerusalem, but this was a city that was always regarded as a special case by Roman governors (sensitive as they were to intense nationalistic feeling). It was always politically unwise and potentially dangerous to organize a large public meeting because they attracted Roman soldiers and police action. For these reasons the emphasis naturally lay on home and personal evangelism.
2. It is certainly true that mass evangelism has the power to completely alter the direction of a person's life and take it into an entirely new direction and harnessing them firmly to the faith and to the knowledge of God. The evangelist of the mass meetings tends to overlook what they consider the lesser matters of living a Christian lifestyle to make it easier for the audience to secure the most vital matters of the Christian faith (making a decision to accept Christ).

His primary goal is to direct the people's hearts to Christ, but though the motive is a good one in practice the end result is not always a good since it often results in paganism decked out in Christian dress continuing to flourish in the midst of the body of Christ. This danger is always present in any form of Christianity, but it is accentuated in mass evangelism. The

chief agents in the expansion of Christianity in the early church appear not to have been those who made it a profession or made it a major part of their occupation, but men and women who carried on their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those they met in this natural fashion.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND ROVING EVANGELISTS

During the second century there were many roving evangelists of the Gospel eager to use their inspired zeal after the example of the apostles for the increase and building up of the Lord's word.

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL

Paul was urged to preach Christ in places where Christ had not been named, he was always pressing on to find new fields to convert people to Christ and after giving them the minimum of instruction and introducing them to other faithful brothers and sisters he would leave these new converted Christians to fend for themselves. Paul worked with his own hands to support himself and help the poor when the Christian communities and churches he visited were unable to supply his daily needs and the needs of those who travelled with him.

Most of their needs were met by faithful brothers and sisters taking them into their homes and giving them shelter and food while they ministered in their towns and cities, but even then Paul often paid them for the food they ate so he would not be a burden to them.

ROVING EVANGELISTS

The following are the main characteristics of the ministry of the roving evangelists:

- They made it the business of their life to wander from city to city, from town to town and village to village.
- They never stayed long in any one place.
- They would not accept anything from the pagans.
- They felt themselves directly called by God to their work.
- They were not elected by the churches like the permanent ministries in the local regions were.
- Their lives, their message and their Christian effectiveness were their credentials.
- They were very highly honoured as those who spoke the word of the Lord.
- Their only aim in life was to win fresh converts to the Lord.
- They were not being motivated by selfish considerations, as they were dedicated to poverty and accordingly supported by the gifts of the congregations they visited.
- Many people were willing to give them much more than required to provide for their necessities, but they were content with getting only their most pressing needs satisfied and therefore refused to accept more than they needed to supply the bare necessities of life.

Once pretenders and those who lacked integrity before God came to see that many communities gave such respect to the traveling teachers this type of ministry attracted abuses, because those who were corrupt could:

- Easily sponge on the community.
- Outstay their welcome.
- Wheedle food and money from the unsuspecting.

The following was a common saying during the era of the wandering evangelist amongst the local people:

- Let not the wandering apostle stay more than one day, Lord if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. No prophet who orders a meal in the spirit of the Lord shall eat of it; otherwise he is a false prophet and whosoever says in the spirit, give me money or something else, you shall not listen to him, but if he tells you to give on behalf of others in need, let no man judge him.

Today a number of rich men and woman who have been converted to the Christian faith give in abundance from the willingness of their hearts to help the messengers of the faith and brothers and sisters in Christ who were suffering need and poverty. In contrast to these kind acts of charity there are a certain few that proclaim the Gospel from selfish ambition and greed for worldly gain who live a lifestyle only the rich and wealthy can afford. Sadly, a great percentage of the secular world asserts that some evangelists preach the Christian faith merely for the sake of being honoured and made rich. During the generations of the early church such a suspicion could not have been entertained.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE AMATEUR EVANGELIST

As early as Acts chapter eight it was not so much the apostles, but amateur missionaries who spread the Gospel. They were men who were evicted from Jerusalem and Christian brothers and sisters who had been scattered throughout the nations because of persecution. The spread the Gospel went wherever they went. The little man or woman was the prime agent in evangelistic mission work, there was no one class of Christians who could be seen as the chief agents of Christian evangelism. The greater part of evangelism was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries, they were the evangelists just as much as the apostles were. Often the spread of the Gospel was not formal preaching, but the informal chattering to friends and chance acquaintances. People went everywhere naturally and enthusiastic and with conviction gossiping the Gospel, they were taken seriously, because they were often of the lower class and not paid to say that sort of thing.

During the apostolic age, the most ordinary Christian found treasure and shared it with others according to the limits of their abilities. In the early days the Christian faith was spontaneously spread by informal evangelists and had its greatest appeal among the working classes, there was no distinction between the full-time ministers and laymen or even the sexes in the responsibility to spread the Gospel. To them it was self-evident that every Christian was called to be a witness for Christ by lip and by life simply by sharing what they knew and what they had experienced in contrast to Christianity today which has become highly professional and intellectualized in many regions. Even the apostles themselves were originally, laymen, devoid of formal theological or rhetorical training. Christianity was from its inception was a lay movement, but over time the ministry of the apostles inevitably became a profession.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND HOUSEHOLD EVANGELISM

Evangelism in the early days of the church was through Christian evangelists, teachers and personal testimony, the love and the quality of their fellowship, the character of the Christians lives, the courage the Christians displayed in their deaths and the joy and enthusiasm they had when they bore testimony to the Lord. The early church understood that Christian behaviour was a new law based upon the principal of universal love and were fully aware that New Testament teachings were not to be taught as a highly regulated ethical and legal system, but as guidelines for the life of love. For more than one hundred and fifty years the early Christians had no church buildings and knew nothing of evangelistic preaching in a building or a great arena. They did not evangelize by following certain homiletically patterns within the four walls of a church neither did their witnessing demand an instant response. To the early Christians witnessing was speaking the Gospel and letting the words make their own impact on the listeners understanding. They believed it was not them, but the sweetness and power of the words of the Saviour that brings a person to repentance and because of this mindset their witnessing was mostly personal and spontaneous. One of the most important methods of spreading the Gospel during the era of the early church was by the use of faithful brother and sisters' homes. Homes had positive advantages for spreading the Christian faith.

The small numbers in the homes made a real interchange of views and informed discussion among the brothers and sisters possible. There was no artificial isolation of a preacher from his hearers in the house meetings. Added to this in the homes there was no temptation for either the speaker or the heckler to play to the gallery as there was in a public place or open-air meeting. The sheer informality and relaxed atmosphere of the home and the hospitality which was enjoyed in the smaller home church meetings all helped to make this form of evangelism particularly successful. The unique quality of Christian fellowship during the early church was that they were communities in in which aristocrats and slaves, Roman citizens and the people of the street, the rich and the poor, the noble and lowly all mixed on equal terms and without distinction. They possessed a quality of caring and love which was unique this was one of the attractions to Christian fellowship. The following Scriptures show that household evangelism was a significant feature in the New Testament:

- Disciples attended the temple together and breaking bread in their homes (Acts 2:46).
- Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:42).
- Cornelius was directed by a holy angel to send for Peter to come to his house to hear what he had to say (Acts 10:22).
- Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John where many were gathered together and were praying (Acts 12:12).
- Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to the jailer and to all who were in his house and he and his family were baptized (Acts 16:32-40).
- In the household of Steven were the first converts in Achaia (1 Corinthians 16:15).

Added to these the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem where the very early Christian community were fellowshiping and praying (Acts 1:13) (Acts 2:1-4). During the early church the homes of faithful brothers and sisters were used as an evangelistic centre and a place of teaching, fellowship, prayer and a place for sharing communion with each other. The home was the perfect place for ministry and evangelism because of its hospitality and informal and relaxed atmosphere. It is hardly surprising that homes of faithful brothers and sisters became a crucial factor in the spread of the Christian faith since homes formed the fundamental unit of society both in Israelite and

Roman culture. The house was fundamental to the spread of the Christian faith. Christians who lived in regions free of persecution also bore witness to their faith by decorating of their homes with Christian symbols. House Meetings were used for the apostles and the disciples used houses for various gatherings, prayer meetings, Christian fellowship, Holy Communion services, impromptu evangelistic gatherings planned meetings in order to hear the Christian Gospel and following up enquires for organized instruction. Paul made use of his hired house in Rome and when he was no longer able to go out to preach the Gospel, he invited leading Jews to come to his residence for a full day of talk and discussion.

THE EARLY CHURCH, PRESBYTERY AND ELDERS

The presbytery and elders were engaged in the work of evangelism, but their main task was the oversight of the Christian community in their local area and to build up those in it so that every member grew in the fruits of the spirit, grew in knowledge and discovered and exercised his or her own particular ministry (i.e., teaching, evangelizing, helping, and encouraging, giving hospitality, counselling and such like things). The presbyter or elders were God's gift to the church it was their task to build up those who belonged to the community of Christ, their function was internal rather than external, they were church orientated rather than world orientated.

During the early church the elders were not bound to one church, but would oversee a number of home churches in the surrounding area where they lived. They would respond to any problems a home church group maybe struggling with, see that the poor were being cared for and solve any Scriptural difficulties there may be amongst the group.

THE EARLY CHURCH, PHILOSOPHERS, THEOLOGIANS AND SCHOOLS

Both in Rabbinic Judaism and in early Christianity there was no clear-cut distinction between the work of the evangelist and the teacher. This is because evangelism was often through teaching the Christian faith. Certain Christian influential theologians and philosophers went to various countries and engaged in public discussions with able pagans, eventually because of the disruption they often experience in public outdoor meetings they settled in schools and became the heads of them.

Origan's school at Alexandria was originally intended as an evangelistic agency as well as a school to instil and impart basic Christian teaching and elementary instruction in the faith. The schools were not exclusively devoted to the cultivation of Christian learning, but rather they were intentionally set up as evangelistic agencies, by godly intellectuals and everyone was welcome because the theologians and philosophers' objective was to bring people of all sorts and intellectual abilities to the truth about God.

THE SCHOOL OF TYRANNUS

From time Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire and began to use the techniques of Roman paganism (temples, priests, pagan holidays etc.) to institutionalize Christianity most people have completely ignored one of the methods that Paul used for church planting. Today recent movements have begun to try and recapture the ancient way of doing church, believing the Constaninian transition was not an improvement, but that it was ultimately destructive to church life and practice. Many involved in church restoration today see Paul's methods as extremely simple and essentially free of structure; just

encourage people to meet in homes, release gifts and live life in community. Each of these elements has been very helpful, but some have neglected a necessary piece of Paul's strategy. The following are the two different methods of planting a church that exist today:

1. The traditional method of establishing a weekly worship service in a church building.
2. To ignore buildings and have weekly meetings in homes.

But in both these formats there is a third element that is missing which Paul used with tremendous success. The clearest glimpse of this missing element that Paul used when he wanted to plant churches in a city is found in Acts 19. Luke records that after Paul abandoned his original method of working through the local Synagogue, he rented space in the public School of Tyrannus and held daily discussions there for about a two-year period. This is most likely what he was doing in Synagogues before this time and we know this was what he did during his house arrest in Rome (Acts 28). Paul used his space in the public School of Tyrannus as a daily discipleship centre which had constant activity flowing through it and he complimented these public gatherings by having training and fellowship meetings in individual house churches (Acts 20:20).

THE PRIMARY FOCUS IN A CITY SHOULD NOT BE ON THE CHURCHES THEMSELVES, BUT ON DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING THROUGH DISCUSSION

To establish this third element of church planting and long-term faith means that the primary focus in a city would not be on the churches themselves but on discipleship training through discussion. Discussion-based training needs to replace sermonizing as a means to a long-lasting faith-building group discovery experience. In our modern society saturated with information readily available at the press of a key there needs to be a transition of each lesson from lecture format to discussion-based sharing, not only will people learn the word of the Lord this way but they are also fellowshiping with one another while doing it and as a result will grow together since they are learning not only the Scriptures, but about each other. A second great benefit that results from this type of meeting is that people's needs are often revealed while discussing the Scriptures so those within the meeting can then respond accordingly.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND WOMEN

The role played by Christian women is remarkable considering that in Jewish circles and in paganism alike it was very much a man's world and very easy for the men to sneer at women who gossiped Christianity at the laundry, the places they worked and at the markets, yet these same women who men in religious authority considered uneducated and unskilled were among some of the most successful evangelists.

The prominence of woman can be traced back to the ministry of Jesus:

- Jesus attracted many women into his movement.
- Women were dedicated and persevering in their allegiance to Jesus.
- Women disciples were present at the crucifixion.
- Women helped Joseph lay Jesus in the tomb.
- Women were first at the Tomb.
- Women were in the upper room on the day of Pentecost.

- A woman's house formed the headquarters of the Jerusalem church.
- Dorcas, Lydia, Priscilla, the four prophesying daughters of Philip the upper-class women of Berea and Thessalonica all helped in the spread of the Gospel.
- Eight of the twenty-six people mentioned in Paul's greetings in (Rom. 16) are woman.

Throughout the second century faithful women have continued to serve the Lord and spread the Gospel wherever they are and even today play a very large part in advancing the Christian faith.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM

After the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and as the Gospel message progresses the language and focus changes from the Kingdom to the King. There is less and less spoken about the Kingdom (though it never entirely drops out) and replaced with language such as, salvation, entering the Kingdom, receiving the Kingdom, being saved, inheriting eternal life, being resurrect to eternal glory and Jesus himself. Certainly, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom in his lifetime, but after his death and resurrection he and not the kingdom became the central focus of the early missionary's message. This is because the Gospel makes it clear that it is through Jesus the King of the Kingdom that people are brought into the Kingdom Added to this the Kingdom is inseparable from the King, whoever belongs to the King will automatically inherit the Kingdom.

This why the early Christians rightly centred their focus on Christ rather than the coming Kingdom to be established on earth, because they knew that Christ was the entry into the Kingdom, no one could enter the Kingdom without first accepting Christ. They understood that the path to salvation is not the Kingdom but the King. Jesus the King is the royal path into the Kingdom while the Kingdom is the inheritance of those who belong to the King. The early church saw Christ as the door to salvation and the Kingdom as the inheritance for those who were already saved in Christ. They knew that whoever belonged to Christ would automatically receive the Kingdom at the great resurrection when Christ returns, because it is the promised inheritance of all who are saved in Christ.

NOTE: though the central focus shifts from the Kingdom to the King it does not mean that the literal millennial Kingdom of God to come when Christ returns has been done away with. Just because the focus of something changes does not mean that something is done away with. The literal millennial Kingdom was always in the mind and teachings of the early Christians, but unfortunately has been spiritualized away by many in the Christian faith today. For further information see the title:

- Kingdom of God (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Though the early missionaries and preachers where fully aware of the coming Kingdom their central message was the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They proclaimed Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ and the Saviour of the world. Through Jesus the ancient promises have been spiritually fulfilled and will be perfectly and physically manifested when Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords to gather to himself the faithful who belong to him and establish God's Kingdom of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth.

Jesus embodied in his person and achievement the Kingly rule of God, eternal salvation, the Abrahamic promises and eternal life. The early preachers proclaimed Jesus himself nothing more was needed for the early preachers of the Gospel. They had only one focus and one only, Jesus. The supreme concern of the early missionaries was Jesus. The message they broadcast so devotedly and diligently to all nations was:

- “Jesus is Lord of the New World and the New Covenant he is the life, the light, the truth and the way to God and eternal life. In Jesus is forgiveness of sin, grace, peace, contentment, purpose and eternal life. Their message proclaimed that everything the human spirit needs is found in Jesus.”

The early missionaries and preachers:

- Perpetuated the knowledge of Christ's walk upon earth.
- Proclaimed Jesus second coming and taught people to prepare for his return.
- Preached Jesus and the Kingdom as a present spiritual reality in the hearts and minds which were willing to receive the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament almost every story is about Jesus.

THE EARLY CHURCH AND CONVERSION

To the early church Christian conversion meant that a person has left one religious position (or none) for exclusive attachment to another or that a person who up till a certain period had been a merely nominal adherent to his or her faith, but had then awoken to its significance and importance with enthusiasm and insight and embraced it with all the heart and mind. Conversion of this sort was foreign to the ancient world for the following three reasons:

1. During the early church those who held to pagan religions did not regard belief as necessary for their faith so long as the traditional sacrifices were offered and the show went on all would be well. They were not required to believe in the deities they worshipped. Even though many people scoffed at the stories of their nations traditional gods they were still very careful to continue the sacrifices and ceremonial rites on which the safety of the state and the well-being of society were held to depend.
2. During the early church those who held to pagan religions did not regard ethics as a part of religion for them a change in behaviour was not necessary to their religion. Their religion made little difference to it followers' behaviour, certainly some faiths demanded ritual purity for a period of initiation or during the performance of a ceremony, but none insisted on a total break with the past or a renunciation of all that is wrong. The deity they worshipped did not influence their behaviour or demand that their lifestyle change. The philosopher was expected to preach, but not expected to practice what he preached his followers came to the philosopher for his advice and not for his example. The separation of belief from behaviour was one of the fundamental differences between the best of pagan philosophical religion and Christian conversion (this of course is one of the most common reasons why religions outside of the Christian faith are so popular).
3. During the era of the early church people were surprised with Christian conversion because Christians were not only expected to fully belong to Christ in heart, mind and body, but also to acknowledge no other Lord, emperor or pagan deity as a god. The exclusive claims Christianity made on its devotees and exclusiveness of worship seemed very strange to devotees of pagan religions. In one sense mystery religions were not open to those who were not initiated, in this sense they were exclusive, but mystery religions were not exclusive in principle, they did not demand a person's total allegiance, nor did they prevent them from belonging to any other mystery religion.

All early Christians believed:

- Jesus Christ was God's last word to man and upon dying and rising again was manifestly vindicated in his claims achievements and all that he spoke.
- True ethics and true religion were inseparable they believed it was impossible to confess allegiance to a Holy God and at the same time live a loose life. Whereas for all other religions in the ancient world there was no necessary tie between belief and behaviour, although for ceremonial and cultic reasons abstinence from certain behaviours might be required by some religions for a limited period of time during some form of ceremonial rite or holy days.
- The Spirit of Jesus had come into their midst and indwelt their very personalities in order to equip them for evangelism for making Jesus known to others.
- They received the Spirit not for their own selfish and secret enjoyment, but to enable them to bear witness of Christ.
- The word of God is the very sword which the Spirit uses meaning the word of God is the spiritual vehicle upon which the Spirit of God moves and acts (this is why the Bible is often referred to as the Spirit word of God).

Though the early Christians believed these facts their modes of expressing it depended to a large extent on their own intellectual and spiritual background and upon those who taught them. Christianity flourished and made great and rapid gains both from Jews and the Gentiles to create a third race in Christ made up of Jews and Gentiles. This third race is called:

- A new creation in Christ and a new creature in Christ.
- One nation in Christ and the body of Christ.
- The Kingdom of God and the church.

MORALISM, LEGALISM AND SECOND CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

During the second century Christianity tended to lapse in moralism and legalism. It was one thing to see Christian behaviour as a new law, being the principal of universal love, but it was quite another thing to see it as a revised edition of the old law. The church became obsessed with subjects like what was to be done about post-baptismal sin and the teachings from the New Testament were taught like a new Torah rather than guidelines for the life of love. As early as the first century there was a system of ecclesiastical law and Christianity became a highly regulated ethical and legal system with the sanction of ex-communication. This became the germ of what later grew into a most unhealthy view of Christian evangelism. With the growing emphasis on merit which this attitude bred, went an increasing tendency to regard eschatology as primarily a matter of reward and punishments. Amongst certain Christian sects the Gospel of grace that Paul so gloriously taught slowly became replaced with a religion of a new legalism in ethics and a Christology which robbed from the humanity of Jesus.

The Gospel of grace became a Gospel of laws and rules to be maintained if a person was to be accepted by God. In this new teaching of legalism, the Lord Jesus Christ lost his humanity, his ability to be able to understand people's hearts and circumstances; he became a legalistic Saviour that was bound by a set of legal laws and rules. This is a gross abuse of the New Covenant of Grace. The very reason Jesus came was to be able to empathize with the human heart and the human condition so he would be the perfect High Priest able to judge a person according to the inward attitude, suffering hurt, and the motivation of their heart rather than the outward appearance. Unfortunately, the beauty of the Gospel message

was so distorted that it reduced the Christian faith to a set of rules to be kept if one was going to have any chance of being part of the body of Christ. Jesus lost his ability to show compassion and mercy and instead became a legalistic and dogmatic Saviour.

The following words of Paul show the enormous importance of trusting in God's grace in Christ. Paul in his letters wrote:

- I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law (or any form of religious self-effort), then Christ died for no purpose (Gal. 2:21).

This means, when a brother or sister in Christ begin to justify themselves through the law and self-effort, they nullify the grace of God and by their actions declare that Christ's death was of no value.

Equally as horrific as this Paul states:

- When we forsake grace, we separate ourselves from Christ because it was only by grace that God made us alive in Christ" (Gal. 5:4) (Eph. 2:5).

Paul to highlight even more the majestic glory of grace wrote with absolute boldness that:

- It is only by grace that any brother or sister has been saved (Eph. 2:8).

Paul in these verses is shining a brilliant floodlight on the truth that every brother and sister in Christ is saved, solely by faith and by grace and it is not their own doing, but the gift of God". This means that without grace no-one can be united to Christ and whoever is without Christ is separated from God and without God no-one can be saved to eternal life.

- Which means in regards to eternal salvation, Christ, God, Grace and Faith, are all on an equal par with each other since no-one can be saved to eternal life without any one of them.

The reason the author here is telling his Hebrew audience to stop their sin of trusting in the Levitical Law and its priesthood to be counted righteous before God and start trusting in the grace of God that is in Christ and in his righteousness to be saved to eternal life.

WHY THE WORLD HATES CHRISTIANS

Paul said that the world not only commits evil things, but has pleasure in those who do them. The world in this context refers to those who deliberately and consciously deny God's existence, are self-seeking and do not obey what is right and good, but rather choose to follow what is corrupt and wicked (Rom 2:8-9). There is a common phrase that states, "Like attracts like." Those who are corrupt attract others who are corrupt as their close friends and turn against those who do what is right and good. This is what Paul means when he says, "The world loves its own." The Flesh (pride and ego) is such that it hates those whose good standards show them up. This was especially true in case of the early church in the first and second centuries when the standards of pagan society were extremely low and those of the church were very high.

This is one of the reasons why the world is more attracted to a new age god or some form of spiritualism since these faiths do not have any moral code attached to them. The world generally shies away from the Christian God, because they know He is a Holy God and being such has moral values. The Holiness of God confronts those in the world with their ungodliness and lack of morals. This is another reason why it is so important to let those that are lost know that God's love comes to them unconditionally. Christ died for all the world, and will accept them as they are. Though

every brother and sister in Christ should do all they can to help another when they are able or have the means it is important to understand that is not their job in witnessing to change a person's character, nature or persona that is the job of the Holy Spirit working on God's word and upon their heart. Humans are generally motivated by self; they are not going to be motivated to change until they have something working on the inside that is greater than all the pleasures this world has to offer. The only thing that is greater than the pleasures of this world is the love of God, when a person sees that their sin separates them from God and then experience His unconditional love they are then motivated on the inside to live a life on the outside that brings honour to God and a good testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible proclaims that it is the love of God that calls a person and not judgment or condemnation it is God's unconditional love that comes to all who accept the Lord Jesus Christ. When his love is experienced in the human heart people are motivated from their own free will to live to please him and in some cases even to die for him. For any human to want to change it has to start from the inside this is why it is so important when witnessing to tell the world the following two things:

1. Christianity is not about living to a set of laws and rules it is not about achieving a certain moral standard or adhering to ceremonial rites Holy days and keeping religious customs and traditions.
2. Christianity is about living in a loving relationship with a God who will not only love them unconditionally as they accept and put their faith in His only begotten Son the Lord Jesus Christ, but will also lavish His Grace upon them as they faithfully follow the Lord.

The God all Christians worship is fully aware that the greatest motivator of the human heart is love.

Jesus said:

- For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).