

CHAPTER ONE

**HOW OUR
UNDERSTANDING OF
THE WORD “EVANGELISM”
HAS BEEN CONFUSED
(PART ONE)**

The most deadly device of the enemy to hinder evangelism is simple: *to mess up our understanding of the word “evangelism.”*

The late **Dr Lewis Drummond**, past President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote: *“A proper theology of evangelism... will result in a profound zeal to win the lost.”*¹

In the preface we saw how gospel proclamation in the West through personal evangelism had all but ceased. I attribute much of this decline to the spread of an improper theology of evangelism which has been accommodated by many Christians. In this Chapter, I reveal how this has happened and its effects on evangelism.

Who has caused this confusion? You know the answer: *“While men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. And [the landowner] said to them, ‘An enemy has done this’”* (Matthew 13:25, 28).

H*ow the enemy mixes truth with error...*

The devil warps our thinking about evangelism, mixing truth with error so that we will not detect the error. According to

1 Dr Lewis A. Drummond. *The Word Of The Cross*. Broadman Press, 1992, p.337

Christian statesman **J. Oswald Sanders**, the devil deliberately includes just enough truth in his teaching to make it appear both credible and palatable. “*So much seems good and true that an injection of error is not obvious. To achieve this end, Satan will quote or misquote Scripture as best suits his purpose. He is ingenious. He employs orthodox language while giving the old words new and heterodox content. That is especially true in theological circles, where theological double talk confuses the issues and conceals the error.*”² So, the first strategy from heaven in the war for souls is to properly define evangelism, which is how I begin this Chapter. Then I unveil five devices of the enemy which he has used to try and corrupt this proper definition.

DEVICE # 1 **To mess up the definition of the word “Evangelism”...**

You would think Christians could easily define this word, but many cannot. Reverend Canon **Dr Michael Green**, one of the world’s leading evangelists and Senior Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, England, points out three great words used in the New Testament for proclaiming the Christian message.³ The first, *kerussein*, means “to proclaim.” The second, *euangelizomai*, means “to tell Good News.” The third, *marturein*, means “to bear witness.”

Where the word ‘evangelism’ came from...

The chart on the next page shows these and other New Testament words which relate to evangelism. We learn that to *evangelise* means to announce Good News. When Rome ruled the world, it fought military battles on the outskirts of its territories. When a battle was won, the Roman general would send a runner all the way from the battlefield to Caesar, the ruler of the Roman Empire.⁴ On arrival the runner would kneel at his feet, unroll a scroll, and announce

2 J. Oswald Sanders. *Satan Is No Myth*. Moody Press, 1975, p.75

3 Dr Michael Green. *Evangelism In The Early Church*. Highland Books, 1970, p.56

4 Dr David L. Larsen. *The Evangelism Mandate: Recovering The Centrality Of Gospel Preaching*. Crossway Books, 1992, p.20

the Good News.⁵ The reading of the message had a beginning, a middle, and an end - it was an event. Evangelism is therefore an event, not a process. According to New Testament scholar **C.F.D. Moule** of Cambridge University, its meaning in the New Testament is, “to offer or communicate Good News, whatever the result.”⁶

The message the military runner carried was called the “evangel,” the military runner an “evangeliser,” and the act of announcing the message “evangelism.” The good news Christians are commanded to carry to non-Christians is called *the gospel*.⁷ Any Christian who announces the gospel to non-Christians is evangelising, and the person who announces the gospel is an “evangeliser.” Any event or situation where the gospel is being proclaimed is called “evangelistic.”

Ephesians 4:11-12 tells us some people in the Church have what is commonly referred to as the “gift” of evangelism. They are evangelists. These people are to teach those in the Church who do not have the same “gift” how to proclaim the gospel to non-Christians.⁸ This is why Paul (an evangelist with the gift) can tell Timothy (a pastor without it⁹) to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). Paul was commanding Timothy to proclaim the gospel and to train others how to do the same.

5 The Marathon has been run in the Olympic Games since 1896. It was named after a Greek soldier’s run from the town of Marathon to Athens in 490 BC to bring the news of a Greek victory over the Persians. The Greek soldier was an evangeliser and his message of victory was the evangel.

6 Cited in: Dr David B. Barrett. *Evangelise! An Historical Survey Of The Concept*. Publication of the Foreign Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1987, p.11

7 In Chapter Four and Appendix One, the word “*gospel*” is further defined.

8 Any fully-functioning evangelist will not restrict his or her ministry to proclaiming the gospel and training others to do the same. Rightly, this will undoubtedly be their core business and take most of their time. However, like the great evangelist John Wesley, they will also be concerned to work with other leaders and pastors to help lay the foundation of Christian faith and practice for new believers. They will want to see their ministry as an evangelist organically connected to, and intertwined with, the ministry of local churches. As an evangelist, I have found myself also teaching, preaching, pastoring, moving in the prophetic, praying for Jesus to heal people and expecting the miraculous, and generally trying to help pastors and ministers disciple the people in their church. I will look to identify and nurture other budding evangelists. None of these behaviours, in and of themselves, is “evangelism” and they are secondary to my core business. Yet, they are expressions of my heart, part of what I do as an evangelist with ‘the gift.’

9 How do we know that Timothy did not have the gift of evangelism? In 2 Timothy 1:7-8, Paul encourages him not to be timid or ashamed of the gospel. He goes on to encourage Timothy to join with him in suffering for the gospel. People with the gift usually don’t need to be exhorted in these ways – they are the people in the Church who are most likely to be found naturally doing evangelism. Therefore, Paul’s exhortations to Timothy here bear the marks of someone with the gift exhorting someone without it. People without the gift usually struggle most with timidity and shame with respect to the gospel and, because of this, are often the most reluctant to suffer for it.

Discovering the truth about evangelism from biblical words			
Greek Word	Part of speech	Meaning	Example
Euaggelion (root word)	Noun. Used 77 times in the New Testament.	Good News or gospel.	Mark 16:15; Romans 1:16; Galatians 1:6-7; Ephesians 1:13.
Euaggelistes	Noun. Used 3 times in the New Testament.	Person who tells Good News.	Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5.
Euaggelizesthai	Verb. Used 53 times in the New Testament.	“To tell Good News.”	Luke 1:19; Luke 4:18; Acts 8:12.
Kerux (root word)	Noun. Used 3 times in the New Testament.	A herald.	1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11; 2 Peter 2:5.
Kerugma	Noun. Used 8 times in the New Testament.	The message or proclamation.	Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:32; Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 1 Corinthians 2:4.
Kerussein	Verb. Used 30 times in the New Testament.	“To proclaim.”	Matthew 3:1; Matthew 4:17; Matthew 4:23; Mark 5:20; Mark 16:15; Luke 9:2.
Lalein	Verb. Used 296 times in the New Testament.	“To speak or talk” (a message).	Acts 8:25.
Aggelos	Noun. Used 175 times in the New Testament.	An angel (or messenger).	Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27.
Martus (Root word)	Noun. Used 72 times in the New Testament.	Person who bears witness.	Mark 14:63; Luke 24:48; Witness in a historical and legal sense as in a law court (Acts 22:20). Sometimes, one who is a witness by blood (Martyr).
Marturion/ marturia	Noun. Used 99 times in the New Testament.	The substance of the witness or testimony.	Mark 6:11; John 1:7.
Marturein	Verb. Used 76 times in the New Testament.	To give witness. Connotes the declaration or confirmation of facts or events.	Matthew 23:31; John 1:8.

Christians with or without the gift of evangelism who announce the gospel to non-Christians are *evangelising*. However, when a Christian who does not have the gift of evangelism teaches others in the Church how to proclaim or spread the gospel, they begin to *function* as evangelists.¹⁰ Only God can give the gift of evangelism

10 i.e. the distinguishing mark of a person with the gift is that they focus on training others how to evangelise.

but anyone can *function* as an evangelist when they begin to motivate and train others to evangelise.

Then there is the word *evangelisation*. According to **Dr Martin Robinson**, Director of Mission and Theology at the British Bible Society, “evangelisation” “...describes the task of evangelising a whole culture... [as seeing] media, education, politics, economics, law, family transformed by the message of the gospel.”¹¹ Here Robinson is describing the effects of the gospel - the transformation of a whole society. Others define *evangelisation* differently. For **Barrett**,¹² and the Lausanne Movement,¹³ the word refers not to an effect, but an activity. It means ensuring everyone in a geographical area or people group has heard and understood the gospel. This is how I and the majority of scholars use the term. The point to get here is that we’ll never see the effect of the gospel unless we engage in the activity of proclaiming it.

E *vangeli*sm is an event, not a process...

We need to understand the announcement of victory by the Roman soldier before Caesar was an *event*, with a beginning, middle and end. Evangelism too is an event. For many, viewing it this way will immediately seem alien. In Chapter Nine, I discuss why evangelism is not a *process* and how understanding it as such has had devastating effects on our mission to evangelise the world.¹⁴

The word *evangelism* is not just a word found only in the New Testament. It also occurs in the Greek version of the Old Testament.¹⁵ Isaiah, for example, is the herald who announces the Good News of God’s salvation to Israel (e.g. Isaiah 40:9; 52:7; 61:1-2). The table below shows the parallel between the king’s (small “k”) runner and the King’s (capital “K”) runner – a Christian. The table compares the king’s runner who announces his good news

11 Dr Martin Robinson. *To Win The West*. Monarch Publications, 1996, p.206

12 David Barrett. *Cosmos, Chaos, And The Gospel. A Chronology Of World Evangelisation From Creation To New Creation*. New Hope Publishers, 1987.

13 Edward R. Dayton and Samuel Wilson. *The Future Of World Evangelisation. The Lausanne Movement*. Marc Publishers, 1984.

14 Most Christians have come to believe evangelism is a process. The devil has used this misunderstanding of evangelism to stop millions of Christians from proclaiming the gospel.

15 The Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, known as the Septuagint (LXX), was carried out by 70 Alexandrian Jews in Egypt c. 250-15 BC

with the Christian who announces the gospel.

	Situation	To whom does he speak?	What does he say?
The king's runner	Speaks as someone who has witnessed a military victory.	A king or ruler.	He announces the military victory to the ruler.
The King's runner	Speaks as though they are someone who has witnessed a great event – the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We are to explain the salvation significance of this event to the person listening, i.e. proclaim the gospel.	Anyone who has not heard about the event.	He explains why the person listening must be saved, how Jesus can save them, what they must do to be saved, and the cost of becoming a disciple.

The way I have defined the word *evangelism* as announcing or proclaiming the gospel is accepted by Christian scholars worldwide.

Who are some of these scholars?...

Dr William Abrahams, Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University:

“Scripture, the history of the Church, and the religious experience of those called to do this work¹⁶ combine to make a weighty case for conceiving evangelism as the proclamation of the gospel.”¹⁷

After conducting an extensive review of the literature, **Dr David Barrett**, of the World Evangelisation Research Centre concludes:

“The entire range of theoreticians: biblical exegetes, Scripture scholars, biblical theologians, linguistic experts, lexicographers, Bible translators, professors of missions, professors of evangelism, mission specialists, missiologists... all of these unanimously affirm that evangelise meant in biblical times, meant throughout Christian history, and still means today, the strictly limited range of meanings that we have termed The Big Six - Preach [the gospel]! Bring [the gospel]! Tell [the gospel]! Proclaim [the gospel]! Announce [the gospel]!

¹⁶ This is not saying that the task of evangelism is restricted to a chosen few. This book will explain how some are called to be evangelists but all are commanded to evangelise.

¹⁷ Dr William Abraham. *The Logic Of Evangelism*. Erdmanns Publishing, 2002, p.48

Declare [the gospel]!”¹⁸

Barrett goes on to point out that Christians outside this “entire range of theoreticians” (i.e. people in the general Church population) have wide-ranging opinions as to the meaning of “evangelise.” If you asked 180 ordinary Christians to define evangelism, you would get 180 different answers!¹⁹ Conclusion? What the experts are agreed about, the average person in Church is terribly confused about.

You would think that if the best Christian scholars have concluded that evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel, all Christians would happily concur. Why don’t they? The devil has managed to hide the biblical definition of evangelism from the vast majority²⁰ of Christians. For others, he convinces them to reject the conclusions of the world’s best scholars and to make up their own definitions. Succumbing to the devil’s devices in this way has devastated our efforts to evangelise the West.

DEVISE # 2 To have us believe that personal opinion has as much authority as sound scholarship...

If we were to ask twenty genuine believers, “*What is evangelism?*” and we received twenty different answers, who would be right, and how would we know who is right? When I ask this question in conferences, I usually hear:

1. Everyone is right.
2. No one is right.
3. The one who is bearing fruit in their ministry is right.

Actually, none of those answers is right. So how do we find out the truth? Yes, we should ask Jesus and the Holy Spirit and consult

18 Dr David B. Barrett. *Evangelise! An Historical Survey Of The Concept*. Publication of the Foreign Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1987, p.79. Please note, I have added [the gospel] to this quote so as not to create further confusion. For example, with “Bring!,” some readers might have misunderstood what Barrett was saying, thinking that “Bring” meant bringing people to church or a Christian event constituted evangelism.

19 *ibid.* p.79

20 Using the word “millions” might seem like a wild exaggeration which could not be substantiated. Not so. I have been conducting research on what Christians believe about evangelism, testing their beliefs with a simple test. A wide variety of groups have been tested. The results? No matter what their denomination, socio economic background, theological persuasions, racial group, leadership status, age, level of formal theological training, ethnicity, or country, the results are noticeably consistent. From a sample size large enough to be taken seriously, we found that upward of 90% of Christians were thoroughly confused when it came to their understanding of evangelism.

our Bibles and pray. But if twenty genuine believers did so and still reached different conclusions, surely it would make sense to consult authorities on the subject.

Who would you choose to perform surgery on your heart?...

To illustrate the concept of “authority,” imagine that the world’s top cardiologist has performed various tests on your heart and concluded it is in terrible shape. You go to your neighbour and tell him the cardiologist’s findings. Shocked, your neighbour feels your pulse for a few seconds and announces your heart is in top condition. Now, who is the expert?²¹ Who would you trust to give you a heart transplant? You’d choose the one with twelve years training and twenty years experience, the one who has read 367 books on the subject. Clearly, when it comes to medical knowledge of the human heart, the cardiologist is the authority.

When it comes to biblical matters, those with authority are Christian scholars who have dedicated their lives to studying the Bible,²² because God has called them to it. Many Christians have based their definition of evangelism on nothing more than personal opinion. If we do this, we are like the neighbour giving advice on cardiac health who fails to cross-check with the heart specialist.

So who decides what ‘evangelism’ means?...

So who are the scholars, other than Abraham and Barrett, who have concluded evangelism is simply the proclamation of the gospel? They include the theologians who attended the Lausanne conferences on evangelism in 1974²³ and who formulated what is now known as **The Lausanne Covenant**. In it, they say: “*To evangelise is to spread the Good News [i.e. the gospel] that Jesus Christ died for*

21 Assuming your neighbour is not also a heart specialist!

22 True, there are some scholars who are little more than blind guides because they have never been born from above and are not in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, they cannot discern spiritual truth. The Church Fathers (e.g. Luther, Augustine, Calvin etc) are examples of scholars we can trust. It is true also that some scholars who are true believers disagree on some issues. But what is important for this discussion is that there is widespread agreement among scholars as to the biblical definition of evangelism.

23 The Lausanne Covenant is a declaration agreed upon by more than 2,300 delegates during the 1974 congress. The Congress was chaired by Billy Graham. Those who attended agreed to be more intentional about world evangelisation. Since then, the Covenant has challenged churches and Christian organisations to work together to make Jesus Christ known throughout the world. Fifteen years later in July 1989, the more than 3,000 participants in the second International Congress on World Evangelisation (Lausanne II) in Manila, Philippines, produced another important document, the Manila Manifesto. For more information on this just Google “Manila Manifesto 1989.”

our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord He now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ, as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to Him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation, we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow Him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with His new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into His Church, and responsible service in the world.”²⁴

From this definition we conclude:

- 1 Evangelism is spreading a specific and defined message about Jesus. The focus of the message is personal salvation.
- 2 The word “spreading” is highly significant. What does it mean? It means that if you directed a non-Christian to a web site or TV or radio station (or any other media) where someone else **clearly and succinctly in one sitting** articulated the whole gospel message, you could say you were engaged in “spreading” the gospel. Whether the non-Christian actually went to the web site (for example) and listened to the gospel is out of your control. What matters is that by directing them to hear the gospel message, you were spreading the gospel. If they watched the video of the gospel on the web site, we could say they had been evangelised. If they didn’t, they hadn’t. The same could be said of you if you gave a non-Christian a booklet containing the gospel message. By giving it, you have done some evangelism. But it’s not until they read it that they have been evangelised.
- 3 The gospel message has definite content: Jesus died for our sins, He was raised from the dead, He offers forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and He is not just the Saviour of the world

24 The Lausanne Covenant, from “*Let The Earth Hear His Voice*”. World Wide Publications, 1975, p.25

but also the reigning Lord.

- 4 Spreading this message happens in the context of our Christian presence in the world; that is, Christian conduct authenticates the message, but our Christian presence in and of itself is not evangelism.
- 5 When we deliver the gospel, we ought to do so with love and sensitivity, seeking to understand the non-Christian, and to make the message understandable.
- 6 When we evangelise we are to do so with a view to persuading people to come to Christ personally and to be reconciled to Him. However, if someone hears the gospel clearly and understands it but does not convert, he or she has still been evangelised.
- 7 When we evangelise, we are not to conceal the cost of becoming a Christian.
- 8 While the results of evangelism include obedience to Jesus, incorporation into His Church, and responsible service in the world, evangelism does not equal the winning of souls.

In the year 2000 another landmark conference was convened, and from this conference a book was written called **This We Believe**.²⁵ Respected Christians, including J.I. Packer, Joseph Lee Strobel, Don Carson, John Stott, Joni Eareckson Tada, Jack Hayford, Bill Hybels, R.C. Sproul, Billy Graham and Ravi Zacharias attended it. These leaders produced a statement titled *The Gospel of Jesus Christ: an Evangelical Celebration* which detailed the essentials of the gospel and evangelism in a series of affirmations. Affirmation 18 reads: *“We affirm that Jesus Christ commands His followers to proclaim the gospel to all living persons, evangelising everyone everywhere, discipling believers within the fellowship of the church. A full and faithful witness to Christ includes the witness of personal testimony, godly living, and acts of mercy and charity to our neighbour; without which the preaching of the gospel appears barren. We deny that the witness of personal testimony, godly living, and acts of mercy and charity to our neighbours constitutes*

25 A full list of the leaders and scholars who attended can be found in Appendix Five of this book. These 229 scholars and leaders signed a statement at the conclusion of the conference. They agreed evangelism should rightly be defined as the proclamation of the gospel.

evangelism apart from the proclamation of the gospel."²⁶

But I thought I was already doing evangelism?...

Some Christians have reasoned:

"Hey, I am already doing evangelism by living a good life, by feeding the hungry, by letting my light shine, by visiting those in prison, sharing my testimony, befriending non-Christians, going on a mission, participating in outreach, inviting someone to church, loving my family and all!"

We know that these things are crucial and entirely biblical, but if the people doing them *think* that in doing them they are evangelising, it is highly likely they will not go on to proclaim or spread the gospel.

Please also notice that Affirmation 18 narrows the definition of evangelism. Whereas **The 1974 Lausanne Covenant** included "spreading" the gospel in its definition of evangelism²⁷, Affirmation 18 restricts evangelism to "proclaiming" the gospel.

Many scholars are now adamant that a careful study of the Greek words from which we derive the word *evangelism* shows that the gospel must be verbalised.

For example, in the report of the World Evangelical Alliance Commission on Evangelism,²⁸ it was stressed that evangelism can mean nothing else than announcing a verbal message.

*"The verb from which we derive the word 'evangelism' is used in the New Testament to denote the spoken announcement of the gospel with a view to the divine regeneration of the hearers. The word evangelism should therefore be restricted in meaning to announcing the message of salvation."*²⁹

Dr John Stott, the late chaplain to the Queen and past President of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, concurs with

26 Ravi Zacharias et al. *This We Believe. The Good News Of Jesus Christ For The World*. Zondervan Publishing House, 2000, p.248

27 i.e. giving a gospel booklet away without saying anything was still 'evangelism'.

28 The WEA is a global ministry working with local churches around the world to join in common concern to live and proclaim the gospel of Jesus in their communities. WEA is a network of churches in 127 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a worldwide identity, voice and platform to more than 420 million evangelical Christians.

29 Report of the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Evangelism. Cited in: David Watson. *I Believe In Evangelism*. Hodder and Stroughton, 1976, p.26

the conclusion of the WEA Commission³⁰ on this point:

*“Evangelism is neither to convert people, nor to win them, nor to bring them to Christ, though this is indeed the first goal of evangelism. Evangelism is to preach the gospel.”*³¹

To preach is to speak, so, for **Dr John Stott**, evangelism is to personally speak the words of the gospel. Old Testament scholar

Dr Walter Brueggemann further strengthened the case for the verbal aspect of evangelism when he declared evangelism to be *“the message announced, a verbal, out-loud assertion of something decisive not known until the moment of utterance.”*³²

Dr William Abraham, Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology:

*“To be sure, we need to emphasise that by ‘proclamation of the gospel’ we mean the verbal proclamation.”*³³

Dr Tite Tienou, Dean and Professor of Theology of Missions at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, agrees: *“...the gospel must be spoken and heard.”*³⁴

So which is it – spreading or proclaiming?...

What are we to conclude then? Should we restrict evangelism only to proclaiming the gospel verbally, or should we include spreading the gospel through tracts and booklets and other means? Given that there is not complete agreement between the scholars on this finer point, we conclude:

- Ideally the gospel should be proclaimed verbally and personally by one person to another person. To do so is to engage in personal evangelism. If the gospel is proclaimed personally by one person to a group of people, this is mass evangelism e.g. a Billy Graham crusade.
- Evangelism includes spreading the gospel.
- If you directed a non-Christian in some way to a web site or

30 WEA stands for World Evangelical Alliance.

31 Dr John R.W Stott. *Christian Mission In The Modern World*. Downers Grove: Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 1975, p.39

32 Dr Walter Brueggemann. *Biblical Perspective In Evangelism: Living In A Three-Storeyed Universe*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1993, p.14

33 Dr William J. Abraham. *The Logic Of Evangelism*. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002, pp.44-45

34 Ravi Zacharias et al. *This We Believe. The Good News Of Jesus Christ For The World*. Zondervan Publishing House, 2000, p.183

TV or radio station or some other agency where they heard *someone else* verbalise the gospel, it could be said of you that you were spreading the gospel, and therefore engaging in evangelism.

In the evangelism ministry I direct, we have what we call, “**The Six Step Master Plan of Evangelism,**”³⁵ which includes spreading and proclaiming the gospel.

Have a look at the plan on the next page.

To view an amazing strategy using simple business cards to direct non-Christian to a web site where they can hear the gospel, and be directed to your church, please write to me: julian@esisite.com.

Through this one simple strategy, absolutely everyone in any church can now engage in biblical evangelism. Wow!

The Six Step Master Plan of Evangelism

Level	Activity	Skill factor	Christian identity level	Engage non-Christian in conversation
1	Spreading gospel tracts. Distributing business cards which direct people to where they can hear the gospel.	Nil.	Private + Invisible. By this I mean you can distribute gospel tracts or www.biblein11.com cards where no one sees you doing it e.g. letter boxes, on ATM machines, around a library etc.	No.
2	Spreading gospel tracts. Distributing business cards which direct people to where they can hear the gospel.	Nil.	Private + Visible. By ‘visible’ I mean that someone might see you leaving a tract or www.biblein11.com card. e.g. when you leave a cafe after having a drink.	No.
3	Spreading gospel tracts. Distributing business cards which direct people to where they can hear the gospel.	Low.	1st time verbal identification as Christian. “Did you receive one of these?”	Yes.

35 A 19 study small group DVD series on evangelism (based on this book) with study guides and a leader’s guide is available from our head office in New Zealand. These studies are foundational if you want the culture of your church to become evangelistic. Please see our web site at www.esisite.com

4	Survey. Approaching strangers 1-2-1.	Low.	Public + Visible. Give out a gospel tract at the end of the survey. A sample survey can be see at Appendix Nine.	Yes.
5	Survey. Approaching strangers 1-2-1.	Moderate.	Public + Visible. Present the full gospel at end of survey.	Yes.
6	Approaching strangers 1-on-1	High.	Public + Visible. Verbalising the full gospel to a non-Christian, without the survey.	Yes.

How would this plan be helpful to a church? We reasoned that the majority of Christians would not be immediately ready to proclaim the gospel personally to non-Christians they do not know, let alone friends and family.

What they needed was a realistic and achievable plan to work towards this point. So the first four steps of the Evangelism Master Plan involve tract and business card distribution, and the last two steps proclamation. With this six step plan:

- 1 Step one involves the least risk, step six the most.
- 2 Virtually everyone³⁶ in a local church can begin immediately to evangelise successfully.
- 3 Everyone can start where they are at and no one needs to feel excluded or condemned for not participating or not “succeeding.”
- 4 Everyone can move up the six steps at their own pace which avoids putting people under pressure.
- 5 Steps four and five involve asking the people in your church to go on to the street or door to door and do a survey with non-Christians. This is a very successful way of getting them used to talking to strangers. But it is not only this. It is also a way for people in church to understand how non-Christians are thinking and to tune in to their world. At the end of the survey, there is nearly always a request from the non-Christian participating to hear the gospel.
- 6 Everyone can aim towards proclaiming the gospel, which is the ideal.

36 The exceptions are the very old, the very young, and people with extreme disabilities. Ultimately though, anyone who fits any of these categories can decide for themselves whether or not they are able to hand out a tract. I have seen people with extreme disabilities handing out tracts.

7 The true definition of evangelism is not compromised since the plan starts with spreading the gospel and ends with the ideal, proclaiming it.

DEVICE # 3 To have us believe that evangelism equals the winning of souls...

I have already touched on this, but let's explore it in detail now. This device has been so successful that it is common to hear the majority of Christians, including leaders, defining evangelism as the winning of souls rather than the proclamation or spread of the gospel.

I was ministering in a church, when part way through my stay, the senior pastor had to go away on an overnight trip to another city. When he returned to the church, he told the people enthusiastically how he had led someone to the Lord in the hotel where he was staying. On one level, we ought to rejoice in this. After all, Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). But on another level, the danger is that if a pastor talks *only* of his or her experiences of winning someone to the Lord, the people soon get the idea that evangelism equals the saving of souls rather than the proclamation or spread of the gospel, irrespective of the result.

How to motivate your people for evangelism...

God forbid that we should downplay any salvation miracle! But this same leader should be honest about other experiences, too. He or she might explain to the church, for example that: *“Even though I led such-and-such to the Lord on this occasion, if I had shared the gospel with him and he had not said “yes” to my invitation, the evangelism encounter would still have been a great success simply because I had shared the gospel with him lovingly and graciously and Jesus was glorified. I want you to always remember that evangelism does not equal the winning of souls. Evangelism is the proclamation or spread of the gospel for the glory of God.”*

Wise pastors and leaders should also speak of times when:

1. Their attempts to give the gospel to someone were rejected and the non-Christian politely said, *“No, thank you.”*
2. They were ridiculed as they attempted to give the gospel to someone, who told them in no uncertain terms to, *“Get lost!”*

3. They felt the evangelism experience was very ordinary and nothing special seemed to happen.
4. They found themselves having to answer some hard questions asked by the non-Christian and struggled to give a good answer.
5. They struggled to pluck up the courage to go and reach someone with the gospel.
6. They failed to give evangelism priority in their lives.
7. They felt defeated in their desire to reach people with the gospel.
8. They agonised over a lack of desire within their own heart to reach the lost with the gospel.
9. They progressed from a place of defeat in evangelism to success. This is most important and should be given in detail. People don't want to know so much that you are an "over-comer" in evangelism. *How* you overcame will be of much greater interest, and infinitely more inspiring.

Anyone who is regularly reaching lost people with the gospel has experienced situations like those listed above. So why only share success stories? If we persist in doing this, we are fuelling a completely false impression of reality – and strengthening the devil's plan to shut down evangelism. A leader who shows openness, honesty, brokenness and vulnerability in what they say about evangelism will encourage people infinitely more successfully than a pastor or a leader who shares only conversion stories.

Of course, if you don't do evangelism there will be no stories from the pulpit, successful or otherwise. For a leader not to report any stories about their evangelism experiences is the ultimate fast track to "dulling down" your people for evangelism. In my opinion, the single greatest factor contributing to the decline of evangelism in the West is the lack of leadership modelling. I talk more about the importance of how leaders need to model personal evangelism in Chapters Twelve and Thirteen, and how the devil has tried to stop them in Chapters Fourteen to Seventeen.

Dr J.I. Packer, retired Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, passionately exhorts us *not* to define evangelism as the winning of souls: "*It would be natural to assume we are all unanimous as to what evangelism*

is. In fact, much of the confusion in present-day debates about evangelism arises from a lack of agreement on this point. The root of this confusion can be stated as our widespread and persistent habit of defining evangelism in terms not of a message delivered, but of an effect produced in our hearers. Evangelism is a work of communication in which Christians make themselves mouthpieces of God's message of mercy to sinners. Anyone who faithfully delivers that message in a small meeting, from a pulpit, or in a private conversation, is evangelising. The way to tell whether you are in fact evangelising is not to ask whether conversions are known to have resulted from your witness. It is to ask whether you are faithfully making known the gospel message."³⁷

Protestant Reformer, **Martin Luther** (1484-1546), one of the giants of Church history, also defined evangelism as simply the proclamation of the gospel: "[Evangelism is]...nothing other than preaching, the speaking forth of God's grace and mercy, which the Lord Jesus Christ has earned and acquired through His death."³⁸ Notice that **Luther** does not equate evangelism with the winning of souls, or any other effect produced in the hearers.

D*on't add or take away from the way the Bible defines evangelism...*

We must therefore reject the suggestions of some who lobby to redefine evangelism as something other than preaching or spreading the gospel. For example, the late **John Wimber**,³⁹ International Conference speaker, worship songwriter, best selling author and spiritual leader to the worldwide Vineyard Movement is one of my heroes in the faith. Yet he insisted that evangelism includes a "*power encounter with the Holy Spirit.*"⁴⁰ To accommodate this view would be to define evangelism not in terms of a message delivered but an effect produced in our hearers.

37 Dr J.I. Packer. *Evangelism And The Sovereignty Of God*. IVP, 1961, p.41

38 Cited in: Dr Darius Salter. *American Evangelism. Its Theology And Practice*. Baker Books, 1996, p.22

39 John Wimber and Kevin Springer. *Power Evangelism*. Harper and Row, 1986.

40 I believe that every time the gospel is proclaimed with love and grace, and the listener understands it, a "power encounter" with the Holy Spirit has occurred, irrespective of whether it is visible. The gospel has its own intrinsic power. But for Wimber, for a "power encounter" to have occurred, the work of the Spirit had to be immediately visible in some way.

Peter Wagner,⁴¹ President of the Global Harvest Ministries and Chancellor of the Wagner Leadership Institute, is another spiritual stalwart. Yet his call to define evangelism as “*church growth*” cannot be accepted for the same reason.

Both signs and wonders and church growth are highly desirable results of proclamation⁴² but they are not to be equated with evangelism.⁴³

One purpose of this book is to show how defining evangelism as “something other” subtly but surely undermines our mission to evangelise the world.

Dr William Abraham affirms the truth that to evangelise is to proclaim or spread the gospel, irrespective of the results. “*Whether or not people respond is not really the concern. The results are entirely in the hands of God. Hence there is no need for manipulation or anxious concern if no one responds. What matters is that the gospel is appropriately presented.*”⁴⁴

So how does equating evangelism with soul-winning stop Christians from proclaiming the gospel? It does so in five ways:

1 It sets Christians up for failure...

If a Christian shares the gospel and the person listening does not convert at once, the evangelism encounter is perceived as unsuccessful.

The truth is many people do not convert immediately upon hearing the gospel, but a Christian may reason, “*Hey, I am just not cut out for evangelism. I’ll leave it to the experts who see someone saved every time they speak.*” People can cope with only so much failure, and so they soon stop trying. One evangelist showed considerable vulnerability and honesty in his book on evangelism when he said, “*I need to tell you that I am not a great witness. I try, but I never seem to be as successful as others are. My only successes in winning people to Jesus Christ have come through long term friendships, a lot of*

41 Dr C. Peter Wagner. *Strategies For Church Growth*. Regal Books, 1987.

42 I beg you not to misunderstand me. The manifest power of the Holy Spirit is desperately needed in every sphere of the Church. We should expect and delight in powerful, visible manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit. As for Church growth? It is one of the great goals of evangelism! Jesus said “I came to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). However, Church growth is not to be equated with evangelism.

43 I deal with the topic of the place of signs and wonders in evangelism in Chapter Fifteen.

44 Dr William Abraham. *The Logic Of Evangelism*. Eerdmans Press, 2002, p.47

prayers, and lengthy conversations.”⁴⁵ He thinks evangelism equals the winning of souls and when he doesn’t see “results” he becomes discouraged.

If viewing evangelism as the winning of souls can discourage even a mature and seasoned Christian with the gift, imagine what such a view will do to discourage and devastate those without it?

A *pastor testifies...*

Another pastor of 25 years and experienced in evangelism, wrote a book on how churches can interact with their communities. About evangelism he wrote: *“In many secularised communities, traditional ways of reaching people have run their course and are no longer effective. Four years ago, I went door-to-door to twenty-five homes as part of a citywide evangelistic initiative. The strategy was simple: I was to smile, introduce myself, and ask if I could give them a free video of the Jesus film – one of the most watched films in history. I’ve had the pleasure of sharing Christ with lots of people and have seen many come to faith; so, armed with prayer and hopefulness, I started knocking. How did I do? I was zero out of twenty-five. I won’t try to spiritualise this through a homily on the importance of just being faithful. I felt like a big loser! Common sense tells me to quit long before I got to zero out of twenty five. But I was trying to give something away – something beneficial, something spiritual. And I was experienced. At the last five houses, I just prayed no one would be home. I hated the rejection. Ever felt that way? Maybe we need to explore new evangelistic strategies. Evangelism doesn’t have to be reduced to doing something you don’t like with people you don’t know.”*⁴⁶

Here’s another pastor who views evangelism as the winning of souls – which made him feel like a failure with evangelism. He went on to say, *“Imagine how much more motivating it would be for those in your church if people were saying, ‘Thanks for coming by. You’re*

45 Paul Borthwick. *Stop Witnessing And Start Loving*. Navpress. 2003, pp.144-45

46 The quotes from this author are pregnant with devices. He doesn’t realise that by just giving the video he is evangelising. Sadly, this is one way the devil disseminates his devices inside the Christian community. The book written by this author would do a lot to put people off doing evangelism e.g. he suggests we shouldn’t go to people we don’t know. How else will the world be evangelised? See Romans 10:14-15 for a biblical answer to this idea. Furthermore, in Mark 16:15 Jesus commanded us to go into “all” the world. We will never reach “all” people in this world unless we go to strangers as well as our friends and family.

really making a difference in our town. I don't go to church, but if I did, I'd go to one like yours.' Do you think they'd be encouraged? Externally focused churches are discovering approaches that give them great favour with their communities. Externally focused churches are trying to position themselves so that everyone in their communities knows someone who follows Jesus."

Truth and error are mixed here. The truth is:

- a. We ought to do everything within our power to create externally focused churches and to win the favour of the community.
- b. Developing favour with the community through service, and relating to it face to face, will make it easier to share the gospel.
- c. It would be desirable to have everyone in the community know someone who follows Jesus.

There are errors here and each is a device of the enemy:

- a. Don't go to strangers with the gospel like I did. You'll fail too and you'll feel rejected.
- b. If you present the gospel, and the person listening doesn't convert, you have failed.
- c. We *must* gain the favour of non-Christians before we can share the gospel with them.
- d. If you don't like doing evangelism with people you don't know, that's okay.

Of course we'll win favour with non-Christians by doing good works for them. We'll be appealing to their flesh which has an insatiable appetite. They'll love us. Why? Because we are doing "nice" things for them, not confronting them with the fact they are lost sinners in need of a Saviour. But in only doing good works, we are avoiding the "bit" of Christianity which is most likely to offend and confront - the gospel message.⁴⁷ We are avoiding the "bit" in Christianity which is the priority of the Church - the evangelisation of the world. I discuss this priority in detail in Chapter Five. The ideal is to serve the community, give the gospel as we do so, *and* reach complete strangers with this amazing message, whether we feel like it or not.

47 In chapter five I argue that this 'bit' (i.e. gospel proclamation) is actually our priority.

So how should we summarise our response to this device? Evangelism is not to be equated with the winning of souls. It's an unbiblical idea which sets us up for failure and it inhibits our efforts to evangelise the world.

2 Defining evangelism as the winning of souls encourages Christians into becoming high pressure sales people and bullies...

When evangelism equals soul winning, Christians must see a soul won in order to say they have succeeded. But this can quickly move us from “persuading men,”⁴⁸ which is biblical, towards bullying and coercing them into a decision, which is not. The thought of going to neighbours, friends and strangers, knowing that we must win their souls in order to say we have succeeded in evangelism, is abhorrent to most of us.

The pressure to manipulate becomes immense. Feeling this pressure, and not wanting to succumb to it, many of us don't even attempt evangelism. The pressure also knocks out Christians who have already mobilised. When they return home after coercing non-Christians in evangelism, they soon feel ashamed of their behaviour and convicted by the Holy Spirit of their error. Embarrassed, they give up proclaiming the gospel.

3 Defining evangelism as the winning of souls causes Christians to water down the message of the gospel...

If those proclaiming can't “win a soul” by proclaiming the full gospel, and they don't want to bully non-Christians into a decision, the only other way to get a decision is to “dumb down” the gospel message, stripping it of its costs and demands.

Urging us not to water down the gospel, **Dr John Stott** writes: *“If we do [proclaim the full gospel] we shall undoubtedly suffer for it, for the authentic gospel has never been popular. It humbles the sinner too much. And when we are called to suffer for the gospel we are tempted to trim it, to eliminate those elements which give offence and cause opposition, to mute the notes which jar on sensitive,*

48 In 2 Corinthians 5:11 the Bible urges us to persuade non-Christians to convert to Christ. “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.”

modern ears. But we must resist the temptation. For, above all, we are called to guard the gospel, keeping it pure whatever the cost and preserving it against every corruption. Guard it faithfully. Spread it actively. Suffer for it bravely. This is our threefold duty.”⁴⁹

Of course, if we can make Christianity easy to accept, more people will likely convert, and the greater will be our apparent success if we define evangelism as the winning of souls. Picture the following encounter.

Christian: *“Hey, do you want to be forgiven and go to heaven when you die?”*

Non-Christian: *“Sure, why not. Who wouldn’t?”*

Christian: *“Just say this prayer after me. Dear Lord Jesus, thank you that you forgive us and for inviting us to go to heaven. Amen.”*

Non-Christian: *“Dear Lord Jesus, thank you that you forgive us and for inviting us to go to heaven. Amen.”*

Christian: *“Praise God, you’re a Christian!”*

Those who lower the bar like this soon feel pressure from two directions. On the one hand, they feel driven to “win souls” by the pastor or leader and from Christian literature. But on the other, they feel convicted by the Holy Spirit for watering down the gospel message and not telling the whole truth. The combined pressures become too much, and they give up proclaiming the gospel.

4 Defining evangelism as the winning of souls can lead to disappointing results...

Imagine seeing ten people “saved” through being bullied or deceived into a decision, and the next day you call these people to invite them to church or a Bible study or even a meal, and not one says “yes.” This leads to discouragement which, in turn, causes Christians to drop out of evangelism.

When non-Christians are coerced into making decisions before they are genuinely ready, or when they respond to a watered-down gospel message, they have not been converted.

Even worse, those who have responded to a watered-down

presentation are inoculated against the real gospel. When someone attempts to reach them later in life with the truth, they respond, “*Oh, I have already heard all that stuff about Jesus. It doesn’t work. I’ve tried it. No thanks.*”

5 Defining evangelism as the winning of souls can cause some leaders to abandon evangelism...

Many pastors and leaders worldwide now believe that evangelism equals the winning of souls, and subtly and innocently communicate this to their members. They say things like: “*Church, evangelism is the main thing! We need to get out there and win our lost neighbours. Let’s bring them in! Church, get out there and win those souls!*”

There are, of course, elements of truth here. We do have to evangelise the world; we do want to bring souls into the Kingdom; and we do want lost people in our communities to be saved. We do want to fill our churches with new believers.

But such announcements do not make it clear that evangelism is the spread or proclamation of the gospel, irrespective of the result.

Such statements unwittingly connect evangelism with the winning of souls. Pastors and leaders would do well to avoid reinforcing the misconception that evangelism is soul winning. How exactly does equating evangelism with the winning of souls cause pastors and leaders to abandon the proclamation of the gospel? It causes them to evaluate evangelistic programmes and tools solely on the basis of their immediate results. They will say things like:

“If the gospel is the power of God for salvation, every time the gospel is shared there should be evidence of fruit, surely?”

Hence, any evangelism programme or tool which does not lead to an immediate harvest is deemed by these pastors and leaders to “not be of God.” Such thinking shows a grave misunderstanding of Jesus’ teaching on evangelism.

For example, the Lord taught the disciples in Mark 4:26-29 to expect a time delay between planting the seed and reaping a

harvest.⁵⁰ In this parable, He specifically taught them that something incredibly powerful happens every time the gospel is preached, but that this might not always be immediately visible to the preacher, i.e. the evangeliser plants the seed, and all God's mighty, unstoppable power, flowing down from the throne of heaven, is directed to growing it. My own experience and the experience of other evangelists affirm this reality. Some leaders have discarded gospel tools and programmes when they don't see immediate results from them. Leaders who have defined evangelism as soul winning unknowingly hinder gospel proclamation in three other ways:

1. They have subtly sent a message to all their members that if anyone shares the gospel and does not see immediate results, he or she has failed.
2. They have suggested that their members evaluate gospel proclamation programmes and tools on the basis of their ability to yield immediate fruit. The reality is, no proclamation tool on earth will result in the listener being saved every time the gospel is delivered.
3. They will often tell other pastors and leaders that they received little fruit from proclaiming the gospel. In turn, a bad report spreads through the Christian community that "*proclaiming the gospel doesn't work.*"

But it doesn't stop here. When we define evangelism as the winning of souls, and don't see souls won immediately into our churches, we are often quick to make something other than evangelising the world the main thing.⁵¹

For example, we turn to things like:

- Superb marketing, excellence, and professionalism.
- Inviting non-Christians to church.
- Transforming communities through good works.
- Building relationships with non-Christians
- Prayer and fasting.

50 A full discussion of Jesus' teaching on this subject follows in Chapter Eleven..

51 How we can know that proclaiming and spreading the gospel ought to be the supreme priority of the Christian church ? Please see Chapter Five.

I call the practice of replacing the evangelisation of the world as the priority with something else “priority replacement.”

We must utterly reject any attempt to replace the priority with something else.

However, let’s not throw the baby out with the bath water.

The truth is, superb marketing is important. Churches *desperately* need to be excellent and professional in all their activities.

Low standards and lack of professionalism have dishonoured the Lord, discouraged the saints and repelled non-Christians. Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia, is just one example of a church which has led the way in showing the rest of us how to honour the Lord with excellence and professionalism.

We want to be attractive to non-Christians and to invite them to church. No one knows how to attract people to church better than Hillsong does. We must applaud their example in this area.⁵² We also need to be transforming our communities with good works and acts of kindness.⁵³

To use another southern hemisphere example, an exemplary leader in transforming communities through organising school makeovers is **Danny Guglielmucci**, Senior Pastor of the Edge Church International in Adelaide, South Australia. He and his church have been an inspiration, and I commend their creative and innovative initiatives to every church.

And of course we should emphasise the need to build relationships with non-Christians, and engage in prayer and fasting. The churches who are doing this successfully are too numerous to name.

However...

The error of “priority replacement” is simply that it allows something else to *replace* the main thing. The biblical balance for every church is to integrate at least the following nine elements:

1. Great marketing, excellence, and professionalism.
2. Inviting non-Christians to church.

52 This is not to say that a church in a poor country cannot be excellent and professional. Excellence and professionalism are not the same as wealth and opulence.

53 I highly recommend Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson’s book *The Externally Focused Church*. Group Publishing, 2004

3. Transforming communities through good works.
4. Building relationships with non-Christians.
5. Prayer and fasting.
6. Powerful, deep, exegetical, Biblical preaching of the Word.
7. Worship which glorifies Jesus.
8. Authentic, open, honest relationships between church members.
9. Mobilising people to evangelise the world.

Now here's the point - if we asked Jesus, as hypothetical as it sounds, to make a choice between having His Church boom in 1-8 above but weak in 9 **OR** having His Church weak in 1-8 but booming in 9, He would choose the latter *without question*. Why this is so is detailed in Chapter Five.

From the discussion so far in this Chapter, it might seem I am teaching that we ought not to expect fruit from our evangelism efforts. God forbid. We are always to proclaim or spread the gospel *with the intention* of winning souls, pleading for souls in prayer, interceding as we go, expecting to win souls, believing to win souls, and persuading non-Christians to convert where we feel the Spirit's leading.

However, by definition, evangelism is not to be equated with the winning of souls.

Furthermore, we *do* need to evaluate the effectiveness of the tools we use to proclaim the gospel. If there is no fruit over a sustained period, then our approach may be faulty and we ought to fine tune what we are doing.

It could be that the spiritual soil in the community we are sowing is hard and rocky and we need to "up" our efforts to plough it with social action, prayer, holiness, and the like. I talk more about this in Chapter Nine.

But here's the point - if the spiritual soil of the community in which our church is planted is hard and we see little initial fruit for our efforts in evangelism, we are never at liberty to quit.

We don't quit praying when we don't see an immediate answer, so why should we quit with evangelism?

I have heard some say, "*Didn't Jesus say the fields are white for*

harvest so shouldn't we expect to always see immediate fruit?" In reply I would make four points:

1. Yes indeed, the fields *are* ripe for harvest, but they are not all ripe all the time.
2. Jesus warned us to expect different soil conditions as we evangelise: there are rocks to remove, weeds to pluck, hard paths to plough, and birds of the air with which to contend (e.g. Matthew 13:1-23). To expect immediate fruit all the time is simply an unbiblical idea.
3. Actually, our **chief** motive for evangelising is not to win souls but to glorify God. This being so, we can rejoice **every time** the gospel is proclaimed because, in so doing, Jesus has been glorified, and that's what **really** matters. I discuss our motives for evangelising and how evangelising glorifies God more fully in Chapter Twenty One.
4. What also **really matters** to Jesus is that we pass the test of being faithful to His priority. Think on this: Jesus could save the world instantly without any of our efforts. So why doesn't He? He is testing us, to see what's in our hearts. For example, Deuteronomy 8:2 says: *"And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."*

In both the Old and New Testaments, the words translated "test" mean to prove by trial. Therefore, when God tests His children, the purpose is to prove that our faith is real. David Livingstone is one who passed gloriously "the test" of being faithful to Jesus' priority.

Famous missionary to Africa, David Livingstone – faithful with the priority to the end..

David Livingstone (1813-1873), after many years of faithfully sowing the gospel, saw no fruit. He wrote in his diary:

"We are like voices crying in the wilderness; we prepare the way for a glorious future. Future missionaries will be rewarded with conversions for every sermon. We are their pioneers and helpers. Let them not forget the watchmen of the night – us, who worked when all was gloom and no evidence of success in the way of

conversion cheered our paths. They will doubtless have more light than we; but we can serve our Master earnestly and proclaim the gospel as they will do."⁵⁴

Today, the location where Livingstone sowed the gospel boasts a city of 300,000 people.

In a recent crusade held by **Reinhard Bonnke**, tens of thousands of people were converted.

Did Reinhard Bonnke reap a harvest because he was superior to Livingstone and his band of pioneer missionaries? No.

Bonnke attributes his great success to the work of Livingstone and other missionaries who preceded his visits and who faithfully sowed the gospel. What lessons can we learn from this? There are two. First, pass God's test. Be faithful to evangelise. Second, relentlessly proclaim the gospel to everyone everywhere, irrespective of the results.

We are not at liberty to ever cry "ceasefire" in our efforts to evangelise the world when fruit for our efforts is sparse. Yet if fruit is sparse, we must also continually seek to improve and sharpen our strategies and tools, and "up" our "sowing" and "watering" behaviours. I discuss what I mean by these terms in Chapter Nine.

DEVISE # 4 To have us believe that every activity that brings a non-Christian person closer to the point of conversion is "evangelism"...

Satan has done a masterful job in manipulating the thinking of many Christians. The idea, when one thinks about it, that "*every activity which brings a non-Christian closer to the point of conversion is evangelism*" sounds so right but it is actually another device.

Many Christian behaviours have the potential to draw a non-Christian closer to the point of conversion: prayer, fasting, intercession, handing out food parcels, acts of mercy and charity, visiting those in prison, ministering to the sick, counselling, modelling generosity, living a Christian life of integrity and love,

54 Reinhard Bonnke. *Evangelism By Fire. Igniting Your Passion For The Lost*. Kingsway Publication, 1996, p.84

anointed worship, dance, drama and the arts, befriending a non-believer, special outreach services, giving a powerful testimony, being an awesome example at work and play, serving sacrificially, caring, being joyful, and so on. I call these behaviours VEOCLs (Vital Expressions of Christian Love).

They are also things we are commanded to do, and each is a critical aspect of our walk. We are being obedient when, for example, we visit someone in prison. However, are any of these behaviours by themselves “evangelism”? No.

Someone even said to me, “*Giving the gospel is only one of many ways of evangelising.*” Such an idea plays on human nature. Let me explain. If proclaiming the gospel is just one of many ways of evangelising, most people will quickly gravitate towards the nice, easy, soft, pleasant ways of doing it.

For example, when we give out a food parcel, the recipient is highly likely to like us and praise what we are doing. We will be admired, respected, and thanked. We will feel good about ourselves. There is virtually no risk of rejection. With personal evangelism, on the other hand, there is risk, danger, and the possibility of rejection and humiliation. Our pride and reputation are at stake.

We might even be surreptitiously mocked by other Christians. With these choices at hand, what do you think most people would naturally choose? The devil knows all this, and so he invests heavily in propagating the idea that every Christian activity that brings a non-Christian closer to the point of conversion is evangelism.

T*Tracing the possible origin of this error...*

Where did we first get the idea that any activity which brings a non-Christian closer to the point of conversion is evangelism? I can only speculate. It was **Engel**⁵⁵ who first developed a scale to illustrate how non-Christians progress towards conversion. The upside of the Engel’s scale is that it showed perfectly how drawing a non-Christian to Christ is a process. He made it clear that God

55 Paul Hazelden. *The Modified Engel Scale. Working With God In Evangelism.* http://www.hazelden.org.uk/pt02/art_pt068_modified_engel_pt1.htm

worked through various influences to draw people closer to Christ. However, over time, like Chinese whispers, the original and biblically accurate version of Engel's message has been twisted by the devil.

Now, many Christians believe the wrong idea that any activity which draws a non-Christian a little closer to the point of conversion is evangelism. Engel never intended to convey this misunderstanding.

In summary, every behaviour which brings a non-Christian person closer to the point of conversion is a good thing, but only one activity is evangelism.

To have us believe that we are evangelising when we do good works...

Dr John Stott writes: "...[Many in the church want to] escape from the call to evangelise by plunging into good works of healing, education and social reform. These are right and necessary. Yet the final and universal commission of Christ, recorded at the end of the gospels, was neither to heal the sick (as it had been when He sent out the twelve and the seventy), nor to reform society, but to preach the gospel.

What then is the place of social action? And what is its relation to evangelism? Social action is not to be equated with evangelism, nor is it a constituent part of evangelism, nor is it primarily a means to evangelism. Like evangelism, social action must stand on its own feet and in its own right: both are the services of love, a part of the diakonia of Christ and of Christians, as He calls them to follow in His footsteps. Nevertheless, although they must not be identified with one another, they should not be isolated from one another either. The two walk together hand in hand, neither pretending to be the other, nor using the other as its cloak or prop. The Church then is committed to preaching the gospel to the world."⁵⁶

Dr Stott is not the only respected theologian who urges us to

stop equating good works with evangelism.

I have already noted “Affirmation 18” from the book **This We Believe**. Theologians there emphatically denied “...*that acts of mercy and charity to our neighbours constitute evangelism apart from the proclamation of the gospel.*”⁵⁷

It appears this device has been around for a long time. Back in 1966 it was **Dr Billy Graham** who said: “*There has been a change in understanding of the nature and mission of the Church, from “the Church has a mission” to “the Church is mission.” There has been a change of emphasis, from the spiritual nature of the Church task to one of secular reformation. This new evangelism leads many to reject the idea of conversion in its historical biblical meaning, and substitutes education and social reform for the work of the Holy Spirit in converting and changing men.*”⁵⁸

How does giving out a food parcel communicate the essential message of salvation?⁵⁹ Giving out a food parcel is a *work* of the gospel and it communicates one vital and indispensable aspect of the love and compassion of Jesus, but it doesn’t communicate the *words* of the gospel message.⁶⁰ Why not put a tract in with every food parcel?

The ideal biblical balance is to combine prayer, social reform, and evangelism.

To establish this balance is to advance rapidly towards victory in the battle for souls. And here’s the thing - if we say “*doing good works equals evangelism*” then all the non-Christian government and non-government agencies which feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and abound with good works (the Red Cross, Oxfam, the United Nations, etc) would be evangelising. But are they really? You know the answer.

57 Dr Ravi Zacharias et al. *This We Believe. The Good News Of Jesus Christ For The World*. Zondervan Publishing House, 2000, p.248

58 <http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/berlinaddress.htm>

59 In Chapter Four I define the content of the gospel.

60 In Chapter Three I differentiate between three vital aspects of the gospel: works, effects, and words. Giving out a food parcel is a *work* of the gospel, but it does not communicate the *words* of the gospel.

A *missionary speaks from first hand experience...*

Dr K.P. Yohannan, himself an Indian, is a noted missionary to Asia. In his famous book **“Revolution in World Missions”** he argues that our neglect of evangelism in missions’ work has devastated the Church in poor nations. He wrote the following after working directly with the poor in India, exhorting us to get back to evangelism. This is not a guy who has been to India on a two week mission and come home. He has been a missionary for many decades. We dare not make light of his advice.

“The lesson from the mission field is that meeting physical needs alone does not get people to follow God. Whether hungry or full, rich or poor, human beings remain in rebellion against God without the power of the gospel.

Unless we return to the biblical balance – to the gospel of Jesus Christ as He proclaimed it – we’ll never be able to put the accent where it rightly belongs in the outreach mission of the Church.

Jesus was compassionate to human beings as total persons. He did all He could to help them, but He never forgot the main purpose of His earthly mission: to reconcile men to God, to die for sinners and redeem their souls from hell. Jesus cared for the spiritual side of a person first and then the body.

I am not trying to minimise the social and material needs of the Asian nations, but it is important to emphasise that Asia’s basic problem is a spiritual one. When the Western media focus almost entirely on the problems of hunger, for example, showing all these pictures of starving children on TV, it is difficult for Americans not to get the false impression that hunger is the biggest problem. But what causes the hunger?

Asian Christians know these horrible conditions are only symptoms of the real problem – spiritual bondage to satanic philosophies.

Despite all these social programmes, the problems of hunger, population and poverty continue to grow.

The real culprit is not a person, lack of natural resources or a system of government. It is spiritual darkness. It thwarts every effort to make progress. It dooms our people to misery – both in

this world and the world to come.

The single most important social reform that can be brought to Asia is the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁶¹

By "the gospel," he means "the words of the gospel." He means evangelism.

Summary

- The chief device of the devil to stop evangelism is to change its definition.
- To evangelise is to proclaim or spread the gospel. This is the biblical definition.
- This definition was derived from the conclusions reached by leading theologians and church leaders who studied the word at two conferences:
 - 1) Lausanne, 1974 (To evangelise is to spread the gospel)
 - 2) This We Believe, 2000 (To evangelise is to proclaim the gospel).
- Although the winning of souls is a desired outcome of evangelism, evangelism is not to be defined as the winning of souls. Defining it as such will undermine our efforts to evangelise the world.
- Many Christians have wrongly equated evangelism with any behaviour which draws non-Christians closer to the point of conversion.
- Doing good works, in and of themselves, are not to be equated with evangelism.
- Jesus could save the world instantly without any of our efforts. So why doesn't He? He is testing us, to see what's in our hearts (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). Let's pass the test. Let's be faithful to His priority.
- Our chief motive for evangelising the world is not to win souls but to glorify God.
- **A**CTION POINT: Help others come to an awareness of the serious issues raised in this Chapter. Please can you

email everyone in your address book and encourage them to do the same. Send them a PDF file of this Chapter by writing to julian@esisite.com.

These are the first five devices to confuse our understanding of the word *evangelism*. Unfortunately there are five more in the next Chapter which are just as subtle, toxic, and deadly. Stay with me as we traverse the battle field in the war for souls...