

“I Must Evangelize!”
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“I must evangelize!” Who said these words? Was it D. L. Moody, who lived by the truth, “I must evangelize daily”? In actuality, the words “I must evangelize” were spoken by Jesus in Luke 4:43. Here is the context of these words:

And when day came, He departed and went to a lonely place; and the multitudes were searching for Him, and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from going away from them. But He said to them, “I must evangelize the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.” And He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. (Luke 4:42-44, adapted from the NAS)

The words “I must evangelize” are found from the mouth of Jesus when the multitudes desired that he not leave them. The mission of Jesus, His “apostleship” (from the Greek word *apostellô*), His reason for being sent, was to evangelize. Now, the King James and the New American Standard Bibles both use the word “preach” in verses 43-44. Yet the Greek behind the word “preach” in verse 43 is from the verb *euangelizô*, and the Greek verb in verse 44 is *kêrussô*. The difference is analogous to the difference between a class in evangelism and a class in homiletics—more on this topic below.

Jesus’ emphasis on coming to evangelize was not unique to these verses. He made often made this type of statement. For example:

“And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘*It is* not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance’” (Luke 5:31-32).

“And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’” (Luke 19:10).

Notice that the focus of the mission of Jesus was clearly on lost souls. However, this emphasis on lost souls is sometimes waning in our churches today. In the wake of the discipleship movement, our churches are now moving toward an emphasis on spiritual disciplines. It may be that the priority of Jesus’ example, as well as His evangelistic mandate for the church, has been downgraded to compete with other spiritual disciplines, such as journaling, and silence and solicitude.

Before it’s too late, it is high time we recapture the evangelistic priority of Jesus in three ways: first, by properly understanding the New Testament use of “evangelize”; second, by properly understanding of the Great Commission; and third, by properly recognizing the role of the Evangelist for the New Testament church.

Just like Jesus, there are some very strong statements affirming evangelizing by the Apostle Paul. However, these statements are often muffled in current translations. Yet when “evangelize” is read in its context, it has great power! For example:

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to evangelize, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void” (1 Cor 1:17).

“For if I evangelize, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not evangelize. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me” (1 Cor 9:16-17).

“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel by which I evangelized you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word by which I evangelized you, unless you believed in vain” (1 Cor 15:1-2).

“Thus, for my part, I am eager to evangelize you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous *man* shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:15-17).

“But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should evangelize you contrary to how we evangelized you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is evangelizing contrary to what you received, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8-9).

These are 9 examples of the 21 uses of the Greek verb *euangelizô* by the apostle Paul, with an additional two in the Book of Hebrews, bringing the total to 23 Pauline uses. There are a total of 55 uses of the Greek *euangelizô* in the New Testament. Jerome transliterated this verb 43 of the 55 uses in his 435 A.D. Latin Vulgate, as the Latin *evangelizo*. John Wycliffe, in his 1382 English translation of the Bible from the Latin included 36 of the 43 uses of Jerome as “evangelize.” Then something tragic happened. After Wycliffe died in 1384, a revision of his Bible was issued, the so-called Wycliffe 2nd Edition of 1388. In that Bible only 3 uses of “evangelize” remained, 33 were changed to “preach”, a change that took 615 years to correct!

Yes, the word “evangelize,” and its corollary, evangelism, have not fared very well in English church history. Nor has “evangelize” fared well in English translations of the Bible. While the 1560 French Geneva New Testament used the verb “evangelize” 24 times, the 1560 English Geneva used it not-at-all. While the 1859 French John Darby New Testament used the verb “evangelize” 21 times, he used it only once in his 1884 English New Testament. In fact the only other English Bible to ever use the word “evangelize” since Wycliffe’s 1388 was the 1899 Douais-Rheims, using it only once. There seemed to be a lockbox on that word. However, “evangelize” has been unearthed in our present century. The 2003 Holman Christian Standard contains 6 uses of “evangelize” (Acts 8:25, 40; 14:7, 21; 16:10; Rom 15:20). Thank you, Lifeway, for your boldness in uncovering such a powerful word in the English Bible!

If only people could read the word “evangelize” in its context in the Bible, it would sure help them distinguish between what the pastor does on Sunday morning (preach) and what all Christians are to do throughout the week (evangelize). Perhaps then they could say with Jesus “I must evangelize!” or with Paul “Woe is me if I do not evangelize!”¹

The priority of evangelizing is also found in the Great Commission passages given to the New Testament Church. Due to space, let’s focus only on Matthew’s Great Commission. Beginning with John Darby’s 1884 English New Testament, every major English translation of the Bible has translated the main verb in Matthew 28:19 as “make disciples.” While this was an

¹For further charts and outlines on the verb evangelize, please consider my notes available free at www.evangelismunlimited.org.

improvement over the Latin Vulgate’s translation *docete* (or “teach”), my recommendation is that “win disciples” is a better translation of the meaning of the main Greek verb *matheteuô*.

Table 1: A Historical Overview of the Translations of the Four NT Uses of *matheteuô*

Texts	Latin Vulgate	Wycliffe 2 nd ed (1388)	Geneva (1599)	KJV (1611/1769)	Young’s Literal (1862/1898)	Darby’s English (1884/1890)	ASV (1901)	RSV (1952)	NAS (1977)	NKJV (1982)	NIV (1984)
Matt 13:52	doctus	wise man in law	which is taught	<i>which is</i> instructed	having been discipled	discipled	who hath been made a disciple	who has been trained	who has become a disciple	instructed	who has been instructed
Matt 27:57	discipulus erat [Iesu]	was a disciple [of Jhesu]	had also himself bene [Iesus] disciple	was [Jesus’] disciple	was discipled [to Jesus]	was a disciple [to Jesus]	was [Jesus’] disciple	was a disciple [of Jesus]	had also become a disciple [of Jesus]	had also become a disciple [of Jesus]	had himself become a disciple [of Jesus]
Matt 28:19	docete	teche	teach	teach	disciple	make disciples	make disciples	make disciples	make disciples	make disciples	make disciples
Acts 14:[20]21	docuis-sent	taught	had taught	had taught	having discipled	having made [many] disciples	had made [many] disciples	had made [many] disciples	had made [many] disciples	made [many] disciples	won [a large number of] disciples

Notice how Table 1 illustrates a history of the translation of *matheteuô* in sample English Bibles. It seems that Jerome’s translation of *matheteuô* as the Latin word for “teach” accelerated the Church of Rome’s swift move away from the proclamation of the Gospel and toward the spiritual darkness of monasticism. Note that all the major translations followed Jerome’s precedent until Young’s Literal translation of 1862.

Fortunately for us, God made sure that the important verb *matheteuô* was also used in other contexts. Notice that the NIV translated this word as “won ... disciples” in Acts 14:21. The NIV’s use of the verb “win” rather than “make” in Acts 14:21 begs the question: does *matheteuô* speak primarily of the beginning of salvation (winning disciples) or of the continuation of salvation (making and/or mentoring disciples)? To answer this question, one needs only to look to Matthew 27:57, the closest use of *matheteuô* to Matthew’s Great Commission.

Matthew 27:57 reads, “And when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.” The words “had become a disciple” all come from the translation of the Greek *matheteuô*. Several points emanate from Matthew’s use of this verb related to Joseph of Arimathea. First, Joseph was a secret disciple (John 19:38), up until the burial of Jesus. By the way, being a secret disciple was not a positive trait according to John 12:42-43. Second, Joseph was mentioned only in the burial narratives of Jesus, making it either impossible or an argument from silence that he walked with Jesus for two or three years. Therefore, because of Matthew 27:57, the verb *matheteuô* cannot refer to a long-

term follow-up and/or discipleship process, as it is generally considered to mean. Rather, it refers to being won over to become a disciple of Jesus. Yes, the “teaching to obey” is a part of the proper evangelistic sequence (v. 20), but not based on the main verb in the sentence (v. 19).

Therefore it can be shown that a chronological reading of Matthew’s Great Commission actually follows historic Baptist practice:

1. Go ...
2. Win disciples ...
3. Baptize them. Who? Only those that are won as disciples ...
4. Teach them to obey. Who? Teach those that are won as disciples and are baptized.

Hence, the emphasis of Matthew’s Great Commission is on the beginning of salvation, that is, on conversion or the reception of the Gospel. This emphasis correlates to the reason that God sent Jesus as noted above, to seek and to save those that are lost.

The impact of a proper understanding of Christ’s Great Commission, as well as reading “evangelize” when it is used in the New Testament, is immense for the ministry of the local church. First of all, it validates and encourages the church to stay focused on evangelizing. And secondly, it affirms the role and ministry of the one church leader whose role is uniquely evangelizing—the Evangelist.

Christ gave the Evangelist to the church to keep its focus on reaching the lost with the Gospel of Christ. His focus is outside the church to the plentiful harvest. Naturally, the Pastor and Teacher (Eph 4:11) focus within the four walls of the church. Not the Evangelist, his attention is outside the church. His gaze is lifted to the wide road whereupon many are headed for hell. The Evangelist is given as a primary leader for the church to keep its ministry focused on the lost, the Gospel, and conversion.

When a church loses its focus upon evangelizing, when it substitutes anything else for the Great Commission, then it simultaneously ceases to use Evangelists. At this point, a Pastor may well bring in a Church Growth Specialist instead of an Evangelist. However, the Church Growth Specialist is often a Teacher and not a God-called Evangelist. The Specialist’s approach is often to change the structures of the church to better serve a target group that may come. The Church Growth Specialist focuses on reshaping those within the four walls of the church, often using the foundations of sociology or business practices. The Evangelist, however, is focused on a different thing, preaching the Gospel to reach lost souls, and encouraging the church to do likewise. His foundation is the Word of God. The Bible breathes forth both the message and the method for the Evangelist.

This biblical focus is why a New Testament church must needs use Evangelists. In Ephesians 4:11 the Evangelist is listed in order of importance prior to the Pastor and the Teacher. The Evangelist is prior to the Pastor and Teacher in at least two ways: (1) Chronologically, New Testament churches are first planted by Evangelists; and (2) Missionally, Christ gave the Evangelist priority because of his focus on fulfilling the Great Commission. While the ministry of the Pastor and Teacher are important and needful for the local church, the God-called Evangelist is more important to the life of a New Testament church. What does this

understanding of Ephesians 4:11 say about a church that does not value or use Evangelists? It would seem that such a church has ceased to be a New Testament church!

Let's recapture the evangelistic priority of Jesus demonstrated by the words, "I must evangelize!" Let's validate evangelizing in the text of Scripture. Let's obey the Great Commission to "win disciples" from all nations. And let's listen to and be Christ-sent and God-called Evangelists, focused on getting the Gospel out to lost souls. Let's never cease to "Do the work of an Evangelist!"