

Preface

When I first wrote *Know and Tell the Gospel* some 18 years ago, I had a couple of basic goals in mind.

Firstly, I wanted to encourage individual Christians to get involved in sharing the gospel of Jesus with their friends. I wanted to encourage them that although the task is not always easy—in fact it is often very difficult—it is an immensely rewarding privilege that God has granted to all his people through the gospel.

Following on from this, I wanted to argue that the role of the pastor is both to be an evangelist, and to equip his people for the evangelistic task; that the local church is to be a training centre, where individual Christians are taught and trained and encouraged to be involved in the gospel enterprise.

These basic goals haven't changed. In fact, with the passing of the years I am convinced even more that it is the joyous privilege of all Christians to be involved in evangelism, and that our churches do not do nearly enough to encourage, teach and train their people for this task.

In this new edition, apart from numerous minor updates and corrections, I have added quite a lot of extra material in chapter 4, relating to 'who does the job'—that is, whether all

Christians are called to be involved in sharing the gospel, or only some. I have also extensively revised chapter 11 on how to train yourself and others, to take into account the many new resources that are now available for evangelism. Chapter 12 on ‘power for evangelism’ has also been fortified with some additional material on the place of prayer and the church.

My prayer is now what it was 18 years ago—that we will all realise afresh how kind God has been in bringing the gospel to us, and that in gratitude and love we will take the gospel to others.

John Chapman

AUGUST 1998

PART ONE

Knowing Why

What! Another one?

A weary pilgrimage

I remember going to a weekend conference some eighteen months after I was converted, and a girl there asked me if I was a Christian. I answered, “Yes”.

“Tell me” she said, “what I have to do to become a Christian.”

I didn’t have the faintest idea where to begin.

As I write this now, I remember well the mixed emotions which swamped me. First, joy—because more than anything else I wanted to see people converted. Second, shame—because I didn’t know what to say. Third, anger—(with myself) for allowing such a situation to arise. All these emotions muddled together produced the only possible answer: “I’ll take you to someone who can tell you”.

So I did that, and she was converted—but not by my words or witness.

That incident left an indelible imprint on my memory, and that day I vowed that such a situation would never happen again. In the future I would know exactly what to say.

So I set out to learn the gospel. Which I did.

Being now thoroughly equipped, I embarked on a flurry of evangelistic activity. The family received the full blast, and a small sermon was delivered at breakfast each day for months! I remember my exasperated father saying one morning, “You don’t ever eat your breakfast at church do you? Why must I always have church at breakfast?” It seems a reasonable statement as I look back on it some 30 years later, although at the time I thought it was a godless rejection of the gospel.

Such feverish activity didn’t last long, it was really too hard to sustain, and I noticed that a lot of Christians were not really very concerned about evangelism. It did not seem to worry them. I got the distinct impression that I could be a Christian and not engage in evangelism at all!

Every now and again we were given a ‘beat-up’ on the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 at church, with the result that my evangelistic activity would begin again. It didn’t last long. Evangelism was not a way of life for me.

What helped the go-slow campaign was a new suggestion that the gospel I had learned was really Paul’s gospel and not that of Jesus. Jesus’ gospel was about the Kingdom of God. Paul’s was about the death and resurrection of Jesus. I didn’t really know if this constituted a real problem or not. But doubt was now cast on the validity of my gospel so it seemed better to wait until *somebody* sorted it all out.

Then I met Christians who had discovered a ‘theological’ reason which enabled them not to bother about evangelism. They pointed out that in Ephesians 4:11 one of the gifts which the ascended Christ had given to the Church was that of the evangelists. It was obvious that everybody was not an evangelist. If you were, you did the work. If you weren’t, you didn’t have to. It was as simple as that. To give them their due they did believe that the evangelists were to be encouraged and helped by us all, but only those who had the gift had to do the work. I

decided that as I found evangelism so difficult, then I obviously did not have the gift and so all I had to do was to pray for those who did. From then on, whenever I was reminded about the Great Commission to “go into all the world and preach the gospel”, I immediately transferred it to the apostles to whom it was originally given and the evangelists whom Christ had provided. It had no direct application to me.

In spite of this I was still uneasy. I felt that I should be trying to lead people to Christ, although now I didn’t know why. But every time I tried, it was so hard that I concluded I did not have the gift.

Someone encouraged me to do evangelism by the suggestion that, although we were not all evangelists, we were all to be “witnesses” and as such were obliged to take the gospel to the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It seemed like a good reason until I decided, when I read that verse in its context in the Acts of the Apostles, that the *witnesses* were really those who *had witnessed* Jesus Christ’s *resurrection* from the dead. Once again I didn’t qualify!

Confusion was now made greater by my own discovery in the Bible that it was God who took the initiative in calling people back to himself. He predestined them. He drew them back—because he purposed to save them. It was a jolt. I had always thought that my will was totally free and that I had chosen God as mine, not the reverse. This had ramifications in the area of evangelism. I reasoned that, since God had chosen the elect, he would most surely call them to himself. Doing the work of leading people to Christ seemed less important than I had thought.

Little by little I seemed to find more reasons for doing less.

After I was ordained as a minister I decided that my role was one of a pastor/teacher and not an evangelist. I was to concentrate my efforts and energies on God’s people, the

Christians. Others would have to do the work of the evangelist. Hand-in-glove with this went the idea that church was meant to build up the Christians and so was an inappropriate place for evangelism.

Thank goodness there were those people who were not deterred by any of this. They plodded on, leading their friends and neighbours to Christ. However when I asked for a biblical reason for this, I was generally given an inadequate or incorrect one.

Why another book?

Some of these problems I resolved sooner than others, and have come to the point where I am convinced that the Bible clearly states the gospel. I have come to understand that the gospel of the Kingdom of God is not really different from the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus for forgiveness of sins. In spite of the specific gift to the Church of the evangelist, and the command of the Great Commission given to the apostles, the Bible teaches that *all* Christians are to directly engage in evangelism.

The Bible also teaches that the individual Christian, not the Church, is the unit for evangelism. To do this work, we all need to be strongly motivated by God's Word. The ordained minister is to be the pastor/teacher of his congregation and as such needs to evangelize, train and encourage the members in this work—as well as doing it himself. The Bible says that even though God does initiate evangelism, and he does call people to himself, our part in telling the gospel is very real and significant.

I still find evangelism difficult, but I am not discouraged by that. The Bible has shown me that it is a fairly common difficulty, rather than an indication that I do not have some special gift which would make it easier.

Over the 27 years I worked in the Department of Evangelism of the Anglican Church in Sydney, I encountered such problems many times. I know that there are many people whose experience is parallel to mine and I am writing this book to show how we can arrive at the position where evangelism should become a way of life. It is God's will for *all* his people.

This book is in two sections. In the first, I have set out to show what the Bible says on the questions mentioned earlier. Only a clear biblical perspective on evangelism will enable us to have a proper Christian practice in evangelism.

The second section deals with practical aspects of doing and training ourselves and others for evangelism. It has been a surprise and joy to me to see how the most unlikely people have become effective in evangelism through careful training, especially when time was taken to find a method which was suited to the individual's gifts.

The very word 'evangelism' intimidates some people. It conjures up pictures of emotional meetings where people are manipulated into doing things which in more sober moments they would never dream of doing. Others have had unpleasant experiences of being 'button-holed' by insensitive bores who have talked loudly and at length. The thought of having to become one of them fills most people with dread.

When I use the term 'evangelism' I am talking about the process whereby a person tells other people the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with a view to persuading them to put their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Whether that telling is a simple chat over coffee or preaching to a hundred thousand makes no difference. Methods vary with people's abilities to use them.

This book is written to help us all find where we, with our gifts and opportunities, fit into the ongoing work of evangelism.