

# OFFERING CHRIST TODAY ONLINE

Archives Evangelism Home Page Resources Events Links Comments Staff

Table of Contents

## The Method of Evangelism

by James T. Reuteler, Ph.D., Pastor of Christian Discipleship, Grace United Methodist Church, Denver, Colorado



In light of the current cultural opposition to evangelism, we no longer have a clear method of evangelism. The culture dictates that we respect the faiths that people hold and that it is inappropriate to invite anyone (other than those who have no faith) to become disciples of Jesus Christ. However, there is a method we can follow. The principles are similar to those found in the Bible and in early Methodism.

### Be Different



The Lord says: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."<sup>1</sup> The meaning of *holy* is *different*. The Sabbath was holy because it was different from other days; the Temple was holy because it was different from other buildings; and the Bible is holy because it is different from other books.<sup>2</sup> God's people were to love God<sup>3</sup> and their neighbors,<sup>4</sup> but they were also to follow ritual and ceremonial laws — differences they could not hide.<sup>5</sup>

In the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to be *different*; that is, to be *holy*.<sup>6</sup> God's call to holiness is repeated in the New Testament.<sup>7</sup> The purpose is then given: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."<sup>8</sup>

### Answer Questions!

The Apostle Peter proposes the second principle in an evangelistic method: "... in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence."<sup>9</sup> Early Methodism did that. Although such leaders as Luther and Calvin argued, Wesley and his leaders did not argue. They even instructed the members of the Methodist Societies not to defend them. Their appeal was not to constructive reason, but to the hearts and minds of ordinary people.



John Wesley was fond of answering people's questions about faith and morality with living arguments. When people asked him to defend himself, he always pointed to people who had been transformed by the gospel. These people, and not constructive reason, were his living arguments.<sup>10</sup> This is also the way we need to deal with the questions our culture throws at us.

### **Enter Into Dialogue!**

The early Christians were successful in dealing with the surrounding culture because they were so transformed by the gospel that they outthought, outlived, and "outdied" that world. We need to enter into dialogue with something to say. At the same time, we need to listen to what others have to say. We cannot do this if we are trying to eliminate our differences. The purpose of dialogue is not to create a generic religion, nor is it to force our beliefs on others. The purpose of dialogue is to share with one another the transforming power of faith. If our own faith does not transform us, then maybe we are the ones who stand in need of the gospel.

Evangelism is the activity of every Christian. It has to do with announcing the good news that we have experienced in Jesus Christ. God calls us to be holy so that we will have to explain our differences. What we need to explain is how faith in God transforms us. The church or religion that can do that will have discovered the true method of evangelism, for it will have become a light shining in a dark place.<sup>11</sup>

• • • •

<sup>1</sup>Leviticus 19:2, NRSV.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, *Ethics in a Permissive Society* (London: Fontana Books, 1971), page 17.

<sup>3</sup>Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

<sup>4</sup>Leviticus 19:17.

<sup>5</sup>Leviticus 19:19.

<sup>6</sup>The Sermon on the Mount contains many examples.

<sup>7</sup>1 Peter 1:15-16, NRSV.

<sup>8</sup>1 Peter 2:9, NRSV.

<sup>9</sup>1 Peter 3:15-16, NRSV.

<sup>10</sup>John Wesley, "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," *The Works of John Wesley on Compact Disk*, pages 46ff, 136ff; and 201ff. This sermon is not an argument for doctrine, but a statement of how faith transforms the lives of people.

<sup>11</sup>Matthew 5:14-16 and 2 Peter 1:19

Posted 5-1-03.