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THE MEANING OF EVANGELISM

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NOT for very many years has evangelism been the widely debated subject which it is today. There appears to be a remarkable evangelistic awakening in the churches. At the same time, Evangelicals find themselves freely criticized both for their message and for their methods. It is important that we should meet these criticisms honestly and humbly, and re-examine our practice in the light of Scripture.

The purpose of this article is to investigate apostolic practice as it is described in the Acts of the Apostles. It may seem a little arbitrary to restrict ourselves to the Acts, but it is here that the earliest apostolic preaching is recorded, and the Acts will always remain the evangelist's principal textbook.

THE MIRACULOUS

True, there is much in the Acts which we shall probably not expect to witness in our day, as the Apostles still lived and worked in an atmosphere of the miraculous. 'Signs and wonders' are frequently mentioned in its pages. Ananias and Sapphira die a dramatic death (v. 1-11) and Tabitha is raised from the dead (ix. 36-42). Prison doors are opened by an angel (v. 19, xii. 1-11) and prisoners' fetters unfastened by an earthquake (xvi. 25-26). Handkerchiefs and aprons from Paul's body cure diseases (xix. 11, 12) and the sick are carried into the streets so that Peter's shadow may fall upon them (v. 15). Peter sees a strange vision and hears God's voice on a housetop in Joppa, while Paul on the Damascus road is blinded by a light brighter than the sun (ix. 3, 8 and xxvi. 13) and hears Christ's voice addressing him in Hebrew (xxvi. 14).

This is not the place to assess the nature and purpose of miracles, nor to discuss why they do not appear to be performed today. It is enough to say that we neither experience nor expect them. If this is so, it is clearly a mistake to regard the conversion of Saul of Tarsus as in any sense the norm. Indeed, it is significant that he did not seek to reproduce in others the precise personal encounter with the risen Christ which he had himself been granted. Personal encounter there must be in every conversion, but the dramatic outward accompaniments will vary considerably or else be totally absent. The essential experience of Saul was neither the light nor the voice, but that Christ revealed Himself and spoke to him. So Barnabas explains the incident to the Jerusalem apostles, declaring 'how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him' (ix. 27; cf. xxii. 14). Men must still meet Christ. They must still see His face and hear His voice, albeit normally with the opened eye and ear of faith. They may not need to be blinded or knocked to the ground. They may not be kicking against the pricks. The Ethiopian eunuch, for example, needed only that someone should open to him the Scriptures and preach to him the good news of Jesus. He was not rebellious like Saul, but only ignorant.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

The next introductory point which needs to be made is that evangelism in the Acts is primarily the work of God. True, He uses human agents. He sends Ananias to Saul in Damascus and uses Barnabas to introduce him to the apostles in Jerusalem. He answers the prayers of Cornelius

through the ministry of Simon Peter, and takes Philip the evangelist from Samaria to the Gaza desert to preach the gospel to the Ethiopian. It is true also that Peter regards witness as an activity shared between men and the Holy Spirit (Acts v. 32; cf. John xv. 26, 27). Similarly, Paul twice speaks of God as co-operating 'with' him and his companions (xiv. 27 and xv. 4, Gk. *meta*), as well as working 'through' their ministry (xxi. 19; cf. xv. 12).

Yet, the work is God's. The Acts of the Apostles are the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The deeds and words of the apostles are the things which Jesus continued to do and to teach after He was taken up (i. 1, 2). Men received power for witness only after they had received the Holy Spirit (i. 5, 8, ii. 4, 17, 18). Their 'great power' was due to God's 'great grace' (iv. 33). It is not just that sinners must call on the name of the Lord to be saved (ii. 21), but that the Lord our God must call sinners to Himself (ii. 39). It is He who adds to the Church daily those who are being saved (ii. 47). It is He who gives repentance as well as forgiveness (v. 31; xi. 18). Men only believe 'through grace' (xviii. 27) and if they are 'ordained to eternal life' (xiii. 48).

This does not at all mean that the apostles were idle, supposing that all the work of evangelism and conversion would be done by God without them. On the contrary, they had a clear grasp of their responsibilities and discharged them faithfully. There are in fact, in the Acts, certain recognizable and repeated features of primitive evangelism. Not every feature is present in each sermon or mission (at least, as Luke records it), but the general pattern is clear and constant.

1. THE PROCLAMATION OF A WORD

The early church understood its task to be the diligent and systematic proclamation of a message. If God's part was to give the power, their part was to give the word. The apostles were resolved not to give up preaching the Word of God (vi. 2) but rather to devote themselves to it (vi. 4). It is significant how often evangelism is described in the Acts in terms of preaching, teaching or proclaiming the Word, and conversion in terms of hearing and receiving the Word. Thus, on this first missionary journey, the apostles Paul and Barnabas 'proclaimed the word of God' in the synagogues at Salamis in Cyprus (xiii. 5), and 'spoke the word of God' in Antioch of Pisidia (xiii. 46; cf. xvi. 32), while Paul 'taught' it in Corinth (xviii. 11). This 'word of God' or 'word of the Lord' is sometimes simply 'the word'. It was just 'the word' which was preached by those scattered after Stephen's martyrdom (viii. 4, xi. 19), as also by Paul in Perga (xiv. 25), whereas in Corinth, he was 'occupied with' the Word (xviii. 5; R.S.V. 'with preaching'). Correspondingly, the congregations to whom the apostles preached 'heard the word of God' (xiii. 7, 44) or 'the word of the Lord' (xix. 10). Some of those who heard 'gave heed' (viii. 6). An outstanding example is Lydia. She was one of those who 'heard us', says Luke (xvi. 14), at the riverside on the Sabbath day. But she did not merely hear. 'The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.' It seems clear that her 'heart' is her mind which welcomed the message. The Lord opened it, as He had opened the minds of the Emmaus disciples to understand the Scriptures (Lk. xxiv. 45). 'To open is the part of God, to pay attention, that of the woman' (Chrysostom). Those who paid heed to the Word are further described as 'receiving' it. It was not just a man's word which they received (ii. 41), but God's (viii. 14, xi. 1; cf. xvii. 11; 1 Thes. ii. 13).

With this emphasis on the preaching of the Word, it is not surprising that the evangelistic advance of the Church is described by Luke, in several

of his summary verses in the Acts, as the increase (vi. 7, xii. 24, xix. 20), the spread (xiii. 49), the multiplication (xii. 24) and the prevailing (xix. 20) of the Word of God.

SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION

Moreover, one is greatly impressed by the long periods of time during which the early evangelists preached the Word and the hearers came under its influence. Paul and Barnabas 'remained (in Iconium) for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord' (xiv. 3). Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke 'remained in this city (sc. Philippi) some days', so that Lydia 'heard us' in the imperfect tense (xvi. 12, 14). In Thessalonica Paul reasoned in the synagogue 'for three weeks' (xvii. 2). His mission in Corinth was particularly long. He 'argued in the synagogue every Sabbath' (xviii. 4), 'stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them' (xviii. 11), probably in the house of Justus (xviii. 7), and 'after this . . . stayed many days longer' (xviii. 18). At Ephesus he first preached boldly for three months in the synagogue (xix. 8) and then lectured daily (some MSS adding 'from the fifth hour to the tenth') in the hall of Tyrannus for two years (xix. 9-10). Finally, when he reached Rome as an imperial prisoner, he used his own hired house for the same purpose. His first conference with the local Jewish leaders lasted 'from morning till evening' (xxviii. 23; cf. xx. 31 'night and day'), and after that he spent 'two whole years' welcoming 'all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered' (xxviii. 30, 31).

During these periods of instruction in different centres it is evident that the apostle Paul and others were not just exhorting but teaching. It is illuminating to observe the verbs which Luke employs to define the business of preaching. One of the commonest seems to be *diamarturasthai* translated to 'testify' (e.g. ii. 40, viii. 25, x. 42, xviii. 5, xx. 21, 24, xxiii. 11, xxvi. 22, xxviii. 23). This is 'earnestly, religiously to charge' (Thayer), but is no doubt a popular word because the apostles were bearing witness to events and facts of which they had themselves been witnesses. The claim to be a witness is frequently made in the Acts (e.g. i. 8, 22, ii. 32, iii. 15, x. 39, 41, xiii. 31, xxii. 15, xxvi. 16). Three other fairly common verbs are *kataggellein*, 'to proclaim' (iv. 2, xiii. 5, 38, xv. 36, xvii. 13, 23), *euangelizein*, 'to preach the gospel' (v. 42, viii. 4, 12, 25, 35, 40, xi. 20, xiii. 32, xiv. 7, 15, 21, xvi. 10, xvii. 18) and *kērussein*, 'to herald' (viii. 5, ix. 20, x. 42, xx. 25, xxviii. 31). These three verbs indicate, as we shall see later, that the Word which the apostles preached was good news which needed to be 'proclaimed' or 'heralded'. But in some ways the two most important verbs employed by Luke in this connection are *didaskein* ('to teach') and *dialegesthai* ('to argue'). The apostles were not just proclaiming news; they were teaching a body of doctrine and arguing towards a conclusion. *Didaskein* is used in iv. 2, 18, v. 21, 25, 28, 42, xiii. 12, xv. 35, xvii. 19, xviii. 11, xx. 20, xxviii. 31, and *dialegesthai* in xvii. 2, 17, xviii. 4, 19, xix. 8, 9, xxiv. 25.

It is no doubt because the apostles were giving careful instruction that the Jewish authorities became so alarmed. 'You have filled Jerusalem with your *teaching*', they expostulated to the apostles (v. 28). Of course there was a place in their evangelism for urgent exhortation (e.g. ii. 40), but there was a place for patient explanation also (e.g. xxviii. 23), and for closely reasoned argument.

This explanation or exposition of the truth aimed naturally at an intellectual conquest. The apostles do not seem to have been excessively wary of an intellectual approach! Luke uses two words for 'to reason', namely,

to 'dispute' (*suzētein*, ix. 29) and to 'argue' (*dialegesthai*), and four words for 'to convince', namely, to 'confound' (*sunchunein*, ix. 22), to 'prove' (*paratithēmi*, xvii. 3 and *sumbibazein*, ix. 22) and to 'confute powerfully' (*diakatelegkein*, xviii. 28). The purpose of the apostles was to 'persuade' their hearers of the truth of their message (xvii. 4, xviii. 4, xix. 8, 26, xxviii. 23, 24). They presented the Word in such a way as to require its acceptance or rejection. Men were obliged either to be 'obedient to the faith' (vi. 7) or disobedient.

2. THE PRESENTATION OF A PERSON

If the apostles proclaimed, taught and argued the Word of God, the subject of this Word was Jesus Christ. True, sometimes the situation required a different approach. Peter on the day of Pentecost began with Joel's prophecy of the coming Spirit, and Paul at both Lystra and Athens began with a reference to God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and as the Lord of heaven and earth. But essentially and ultimately they preached Christ.

We may distinguish six aspects of their preaching of Christ.

(a) *The Man*. In proclaiming the past achievement and present power of the Son of God they did not forget that He was the historic Jesus of Nazareth, the facts of whose life were both known to them and verifiable by others. 'I am Jesus', said the glorified Christ to Paul, using His human name (ix. 5). He is still 'this man' (xiii. 38), who had been 'attested . . . by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know' (ii. 22). He had been 'anointed' by God with the Holy Spirit and with power, so that He 'went about doing good and healing . . .' (iv. 27, x. 38). He was the 'servant' of God (or 'child', iii. 13, 26, iv. 27, 30), and 'the holy and righteous One' (iii. 14, vii. 52).

(b) *The Crucified*. The fact of the crucifixion of Jesus is bluntly stated as having been due to the sin of the Jewish people. It was their 'wicked hands' (ii. 23) which had been responsible for His death, even if it was through 'ignorance' (iii. 17) that they did it. But this is by no means all the story. He whom the wicked hands of men had killed had been 'delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God' (ii. 23). Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jewish people, had done to Christ whatever God's hand and plan 'had predestined to take place' (iv. 27, 28). They had hanged Him on a 'tree' (v. 30, x. 39, xiii. 29). According to Deuteronomy xxi. 22-23 to be thus hanged was to be under a divine curse. The truth of Galatians iii. 13 is nowhere clearly stated in the Acts, but it is implied in the offer of forgiveness which is made to sinners on the basis of Christ's death.

(c) *The risen Lord*. Great prominence is given to the resurrection in the apostolic preaching to the Jews (e.g. i. 22, iv. 2, 33, xvii. 18) because only by raising Christ from the dead did God publicly vindicate Him who was under the curse. Again and again in their early preaching to Jewish audiences did the apostles point the dramatic contrast: 'You crucified and killed him, but God raised him up' (ii. 23, 24). 'You crucified him, but God has made him both Lord and Christ' (ii. 36). 'You delivered him up and denied him, but God glorified him' (iii. 13; cf. iii. 15, iv. 10, v. 30, x. 39, 40, xiii. 28-30). Raised from the dead, Jesus is exalted to God's right hand (ii. 33), as 'the Son of man' (vii. 56), as Pioneer and Saviour (v. 31), and as 'Lord of all' (x. 36). He is seated on David's throne (ii. 30, 31,

xiii. 32-37), and thus the kingdom of God has been established through Him (viii. 12, xvii. 7, xix. 8, xx. 25, xxviii. 23, 31).

(d) *The competent Saviour.* It is through Christ's death and resurrection that He has acquired a saving 'Name'. This literal name 'Jesus' which He was given before His birth (Mt. i. 21; Lk. i. 31) foreshadowed this powerful, mystical 'Name' which is the sum total of all He is and all He has done. It is He who sent the Holy Spirit from His ascended glory (ii. 33). He is a 'Saviour' (xiii. 23) and the 'author of life' (iii. 15). So it is in His Name that the apostles preached (iv. 7, 17-18, v. 28, 40), and for it that they rejoiced to suffer (v. 41, ix. 16). It is 'in' or 'into' this Name that men are baptized (ii. 38, viii. 16, x. 48, xix. 5) and by it that they are healed and saved (iii. 6, 16, iv. 10-12, ix. 21, x. 43, xix. 13, 17). Indeed 'the name of Jesus Christ' was the content of Philip's message (viii. 12), and Paul was commissioned by Jesus to 'carry' His name 'before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel' (ix. 15).

(e) *The coming Judge.* The offer of present salvation and the warning of future judgment are never far separated in the apostolic preaching. The heavens have received Christ but temporarily, they taught (iii. 20, 21). He will return, and when He comes He will come to judge. It is He whom God has 'ordained . . . to be judge of the living and the dead', and to this fact the apostles were commanded to testify (x. 42). This they boldly did, and Paul was not afraid on the Areopagus to pass from the original creation to the final judgment. God commands all men everywhere to repent, he affirmed, because the day of judgment is fixed and the judge appointed. Moreover, God has given an assurance of these things by raising Christ from the dead (xvii. 30, 31).

(f) *The Christ.* This Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, the Saviour and the Judge, is the Christ of the Old Testament expectation. He is the prophet foretold by Moses (iii. 22-23) and the One in whom the Abraham promise is fulfilled (iii. 25). Through Him the new age has dawned, and it is to 'these days' that 'all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards' were referring (iii. 24). 'All that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old' will now be 'established' through Him (iii. 21).

It is this conviction which led Paul and the other apostles to reason with the Jews out of the Scriptures. It was their desire that all their hearers should, like the Bereans, be more noble than the Thessalonians, and 'examine the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so' (xvii. 11). When the local Jewish leaders came to Paul in Rome, he 'expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets' (xxviii. 23). So the burden of the apostolic message to the Jews was, either that 'this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ' (xvii. 3; cf. v. 42, ix. 20, 22) — or, 'that the Christ was Jesus' (xviii. 5, 28).

The Scriptures had foretold the necessity of His sufferings (iii. 18, viii. 30-35) and the certainty of His resurrection (xvii. 2-3, ii. 25-28 and xiii. 32-35). He is the stone rejected by the builders but now become the head of the corner (iv. 11). He is the King of David's line (xiii. 23) who sits on David's throne (ii. 30-31; cf. xiii. 34) and at God's right hand (ii. 34-35). From this exalted position He gives the Spirit in fulfilment of Joel's prophecy (ii. 17-21), and offers forgiveness to those who believe in Him, as the prophets bear witness (x. 43). The same Scriptures predict the opposition of the rulers (iv. 25, 26; cf. Ps. ii. 1, 2), and the rejection of Christ by

His people (xxviii. 26, 27; cf. Is. vi. 9, 10). Paul knows himself to be both on trial (xxvi. 6) and a prisoner (xxviii. 20) because of 'the hope of Israel'. He has been preaching 'nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass' (xxvi. 22, 23).

3. THE OFFER OF A GIFT

The apostles proclaimed the Word of God which centred on His Christ, and they presented Christ as the bringer of a gift. Theirs was no mere objective preaching of facts. It contained a personal offer. So the Word which they taught is called 'the word of the gospel' (xv. 7), and many times the apostolic preaching is said to have been the preaching of the gospel. It is a gospel 'of peace' (x. 36) and 'of the grace of God' (xx. 24). It is so called because the good news concerns the saving activity of God. The gospel is 'the word of his grace' (xiv. 3). It describes what God in His free and undeserved love has done for the salvation of sinners. It is in fact an offer of salvation. Men can be saved only 'through the grace of the Lord Jesus' (xv. 11); 'there is salvation in none else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (iv. 12; cf. ii. 47, xi. 14, xv. 1, xvi. 17, 30, 31, xiii. 26, 47, xxviii. 28). This offered salvation is 'eternal life' (xiii. 46, 47) or just 'life' (xi. 18), so that the message in which it is proclaimed is termed 'the words of this life' (v. 20).

If we ask of what exactly this salvation and this life consist, the apostles would (according to the Acts) have little difficulty in replying. There are two particular gifts to which they repeatedly refer, now singly, now together, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit. These are the two chief blessings of the New Covenant promised through the prophets (e.g. Je. xxxi. 33, 34 and Ezk. xxxvi. 25-27). So on the day of Pentecost Peter assures his congregation that if they will fulfil certain conditions they will receive both forgiveness and the Spirit (ii. 38). The blotting out of sins and 'times of refreshing . . . from the presence of the Lord' are promised in iii. 19, and in v. 30-31 it is said that through the exalted Christ God gives both forgiveness to those who repent and the Spirit to those who obey. Saul himself is urged by Ananias to be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord (xxii. 16), and is told of God's purpose that he should 'be filled with the Holy Spirit' (ix. 17).

Forgiveness is a remission of all past sins, while the Holy Spirit introduces the believer into the new life he will now lead by His power. Forgiveness includes the cleansing of a man's heart (xv. 9) and his 'justification' from everything from which the law of Moses could not justify him (xiii. 38-39; cf. x. 43 and xxvi. 18). It is also interesting to note that seven times the Holy Spirit is described as a 'gift' to be received (ii. 38, v. 32, viii. 20, x. 45, xi. 17, xv. 8 and xix. 2).

4. THE DEMAND FOR A RESPONSE

The apostles proclaimed a word for men to receive. They presented a Person for men to believe. They offered a gift for men to accept. At every stage which we have so far considered, the need for this response has been implied. Evangelism is not simply the giving of information, and the gospel is not just a lecture. It brings a challenge which cannot be ignored. This challenge is partly intellectual, as we have seen. The apostles engaged in a ministry of argument and persuasion. But it was clearly recognized that to be convinced was not enough. 'What shall we *do*?' was the people's cry on the day of Pentecost (ii. 37), and the Philippian jailor also understood that there was something he had to *do* to be saved (xvi. 30).

Apart from baptism, which we shall briefly consider later, the two aspects of response required were repentance and faith. John the Baptist had already linked these two together in his preaching, as Paul says at Ephesus: 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the One who was to come after him, that is, Jesus' (ix. 4). The apostle continued this ministry, 'testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ' (xx. 21).

This repentance, which was itself a gift of God (v. 31, xi. 18), was a definite moral change of mind and purpose. Men had to 'perform deeds worthy of their repentance' (xxvi. 20). It involved for the Ephesians the confession of their evil practices and the burning of their books of magic (xix. 18, 19). It led the Philippian jailor to wash the stripes he had inflicted on the backs of Paul and Silas (xvi. 33). It meant a turning away from wickedness which was required of 'every one of you' (iii. 26) and indeed of 'all men everywhere' (xvii. 30). See also ii. 38 and iii. 19.

Faith was equally a gift of God's grace (xviii. 27). Frequently, men are simply said to hear the Word and 'to believe'. The verb is, in these cases, used intransitively, and it is not clearly stated what is the object of their faith (e.g. ii. 44, iv. 4, xi. 21, xiii. 12, 39, 48, xiv. 1, xv. 7, xvii. 12, xviii. 8b, xxi. 20, 25). But since the Word centred on Christ, those who heard it and believed must have believed in Christ or in His name (iii. 16). Men are invited to repose their faith in Him. Sometimes 'in' is conveyed by a simple dative (e.g. xviii. 8), sometimes by the preposition *epi* (e.g. ix. 42, xi. 17, xvi. 31) meaning 'on to', and sometimes, as so often in John's Gospel, by the preposition *eis* meaning 'into' (e.g. x. 43, xiv. 23, xxiv. 24). Faith is therefore an act of personal committal to Christ which is mentioned many times in the Acts as a condition of salvation. It is 'by faith' that men's hearts are cleansed (xv. 9) and 'by faith' that they are sanctified (xxvi. 18). It is not surprising therefore that 'believers' is one of the first titles by which Christians came to be known (e.g. ii. 44 and v. 14).

Now both repentance and faith are described in the Acts in terms of 'turning'. Repentance is a turning from wickedness (iii. 26), whereas faith is a turning 'to God' (xv. 19, xxvi. 20) or 'to the Lord' (ix. 35, xi. 21). This then is the meaning of conversion (xv. 3). 'To turn' intransitive (iii. 19, A.V. 'be converted') is to turn from the vanity of idols to the living God (xiv. 15), 'from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God' (xxvi. 18), or from sin and self to Jesus Christ.

5. THE WELCOME INTO A FELLOWSHIP

It is quite plain from the Acts that the apostles were not satisfied when someone repented and believed in Christ. He might indeed have received the Word, believed in the Person, accepted the gift, and made the response, but there was more, much more, to follow. The disciples and the churches needed to be 'strengthened' (xiv. 22, xv. 32, 41, xvi. 5, xviii. 23).

So Paul and his companions retraced their steps in their missionary journeys. They revisited the churches they had been used to found, and 'appointed elders' in every one (xiv. 23) to feed and protect the flock (xx. 28-29). They wrote to the converts and prayed for them. They exhorted them 'to continue in the grace of God' (xiii. 43) and 'in the faith' (xiv. 22) and 'to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose' (xi. 23). They were confident that the Word of God's grace, to which they commended their friends, was able to build them up (xx. 32).

Now God's purpose, as revealed in the Acts, was that these young converts should be strengthened and sanctified within the fellowship of His Church. As James stated at the Jerusalem conference, God's plan was to 'take out . . . a people for His name' (xv. 14) who would include Gentiles

as well as Jews. This Church was in fact the rebuilding of David's tabernacle, as predicted by the prophet Amos (xv. 16-18; cf. Amos ix. 11, 12). So converts were not just 'added to the Lord' (xi. 24), but 'added to the church' (ii. 44, 47). They had to save themselves 'from this crooked generation' (ii. 40) and join the divine society instead. As members of this society they were not only 'believers' but 'brethren' (vi. 3, ix. 30, etc.), and it is very touching to read how Ananias, at first reluctant to go to the converted persecutor, finally greets him as 'brother Saul' (ix. 17).

Admission into this visible society was by baptism. Those who repented (ii. 38) and had received the Word (ii. 41) were baptized. Moreover, the baptism was not delayed. The Ethiopian stopped his chariot by a wayside pool, and Philip baptized him (viii. 36-38). The Philippian jailor 'was baptized at once' by Paul in the prison (xvi. 33). The Corinthians 'believed and were baptized' (xviii. 8). On three occasions it is stated or implied that the Holy Spirit was received after baptism (ii. 38, viii. 15 ff., xix. 5), but these seem to have been special occasions, namely the conversion of the first Jews and the first Samaritans and some of John the Baptist's disciples. On at least one occasion, that of Cornelius (x. 44 ff.), the Holy Spirit was given before baptism. In view of this and of the emphasis which is laid on repentance and faith, the Acts certainly does not make baptism the means or vehicle of salvation.

The baptized believer shares a common life with his brethren in Christ. It is a moral life. He is committed to this as one who belongs to 'the Way', as Christianity used to be known (ix. 2, xix. 9, 23, xxii. 4, xxiv. 14, 22). He lives in the presence of God, desiring to please Him. This is 'the fear of the Lord' (ii. 43, v. 5, 11, ix. 31). He is specially beholden to his fellow-believers and is bound to them with cords of love. The early Christians may have been mistaken to have 'all things in common' (ii. 44), but not to have been 'of one heart and soul' (iv. 32). They cared for the needy (iv. 32-35), provided for the widows (vi. 1-6) and sent famine relief to the stricken church in Judæa (xi. 27-30).

But life in the fellowship of the Church involved two particular activities upon which emphasis is laid in the Acts. The first is worship. The first converts who continued 'in the apostles' fellowship' continued 'in the breaking of bread and the prayers' (ii. 42). They joined still at first in the worship of the temple (ii. 46), but also broke bread 'in their homes' (ibid.). It seems already to have become the custom for the whole local Church to meet for the Lord's supper on the Lord's day (xx. 7). The second corporate activity in which they engaged was instruction. To continue in the apostles' fellowship was to devote themselves to their doctrine as well as to the breaking of bread and the prayers (ii. 42). There were gifted Christian leaders set aside for the ministry of teaching (xi. 26, xiii. 1), and all Christians who were 'believers', 'brothers' and 'saints' (ix. 32) remained 'disciples' all their lives (vi. 7, ix. 1, 19, 26, etc.).

Thus the Word was proclaimed and the Christ presented. The offer of salvation was given, and those who responded were drawn into the Christian fellowship through baptism and strengthened in the fellowship by common worship and the ministry of the Word. So the Church of God prospered as the Word of God prevailed.

A reminder

I.V.F. ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING

Friday, September 28th, 1956, at 6-30 p.m.

in Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate, London, S.W.1.