



REACHING OUR NEIGHBOR – STUDY # 5

INTRODUCTION

If fish could think the last thing they would think about is the water in which they swim, move, live and have their being.

This statement underscores the subtle but pervasive nature and influence culture has over us. A culture's influence and effect upon us is in many instances unnoticed and yet it is still powerful and ultimately deadly, much like radon gas.

This study is somewhat shorter than the preceding ones but I believe it will still be beneficial to the student. In a similar manner one can obtain major messages from the minor prophets ☺ .

When we look at the assumptions that our culture embraces for morality and truth we are engaged in the study of *presuppositions*. Presuppositions are the building blocks that direct our outlook at life as we seek to make sense of what we see, of what we call reality. Every person comes to a subject matter with a preconceived bias. This is called our *presupposition*. No one, and I mean no one is truly neutral.

In a similar manner we are told in politically correct circles that we should approach a subject without any preconceived ideas. Really?! It is well nigh impossible for a thinking person to *not* have preconceived ideas.

EVANGELISM: TO THE CHURCH AND TO THE UNCHURCHED¹

This study will use Scripture to see what missionary or evangelism approach St. Paul and the apostles used with the people they met. In the book of Acts the apostles would meet unbelievers whether they were ethnic Hebrews, today called Jews, or, whether they were Gentile Greeks.

We will go through Bible verses in the book of Acts to see if we can determine a specific approach that Paul and the other apostles might have used for the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. Did the evangelism approach employed speak of “prophecy fulfilled,” using the OT, or was the message about creation out of nothing? After each Bible verse there will be a underlined blank for you, the participant, to write in “Jew,” or “Gentile,” to see if we can find a pattern which might benefit us today “... always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; [doing] it with gentleness and respect,...” (1 Pet 3:15).

¹ To a large degree much of what is presented in this section has been gleaned from: Brian Young, *Doubts About Creation?: Not After This* (Bend, OR: Maverick Publ., 2008): 21-23.

Scripture to Read:	Jewish or Gentile Audience?	Prophecy Fulfilled OR Creation Taught?
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2 Kings 5:1-14, esp. v. 7		
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Acts 10:1-43 esp. 1-5, 34-51		
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This one may be a little tricky. Yes, being a Roman Centurion Cornelius was certainly an ethnic Gentile. But where was his “world-view?”: with the pantheon of Roman gods, or elsewhere? See v. 1-24, 22, 30-31.

Acts 13 esp. v. 4-12		
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Acts 14:11-15		
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Acts 16 esp. v. 11-15		
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This one is more nuanced and I would submit is implied in the text. Whether ethnically Jewish or Gentile Lydia’s world-view was in which camp? Therefore when Paul preached he preached prophecy – fulfillment.

Acts 17:2-3		
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Acts 17:16-34		
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Acts 18:5-11		
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In vs. 5 we see Paul testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. This was done solely through the Word of God—prophecy and fulfillment—not by proving creation.

Acts 19:21-34		
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The teaching of creation is implied in the text. In vs. 26 this is seen. The Ephesians understand that Paul is saying the true God made the heavens and the earth, your Ephesian gods are made by human hands; nothing more!

Acts 23:1-11		
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The Old Testament quite clearly and repeatedly proclaims the resurrection from the dead. See specifically Job 19:23-27; Dan 12:2-3; Ps 118:22-24; Is 53:10. (See also *TLSB*, p. 1764, “In Light of the Resurrection,” the last paragraph in that particular section.)

Acts 26:19-29		
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Yes, it is true that King Agrippa was a Gentile. But he was well acquainted with the beliefs or world-view of the Old Testament. His great grandfather had converted to Judaism. (See *TLSB*, p. 1890, footnote Acts 26:3.)

Acts 27:1, 21-26		
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This one is not obvious. Certainly the sailors and centurions were Gentiles. Paul speaks of creation when he proclaimed the existence of the one true God who came in flesh, born of Mary. Paul is saying they should have listened to him when he instructed them to not sail to Crete after having received the message from God’s angel. But don’t worry, all your lives will be spared! These verses also have to God’s providence which still comes under the sub-heading of creation.

Acts 28:1-10		
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Being of Phoenician descent (see *TLSB*, p. 1896, n. 28:2) these natives were Gentile. Initially they thought Paul was a murderer who through the possibility of a snake bite would be brought to justice by the daughter of the Greek goddess Zeus (see *TLSB*, p. 1896, n. 28:4).

When St. Paul survived the snake bite—no, they weren't in eastern Kentucky ☺—the Phoenicians then thought Paul was a god come to earth (v. 6). This same misunderstanding took place in Lystra (Acts 14:8-13) and Paul corrected the situation by proclaiming the truth of creation. It is safe to assume that Paul did the exact same thing here during the three days when he was hospitably entertained by Publius vs. 7. Additionally, Paul then healed those with illnesses. A miraculous healing has more to do with the message of creation being restored than prophecy being fulfilled.

EVANGELISM TODAY

How does our District and Synod go about evangelism today? Do we follow the pattern we see with the apostle Paul, or, have we deviated from it and gone in a new direction? If we have gone in a new direction is this a better or perhaps, a weaker direction? Discuss this amongst yourselves.

Also, in light of what we have seen with the above study perhaps we can ask ourselves this question for today: “Do we worship in order to gain converts, or; do we evangelize in order to gain worshippers?”² What did St. Paul do in his missionary outreach? Did St. Paul develop worship services in order to gain converts, or, did he evangelize in order to gain worshippers? Discuss this question and distinction amongst yourselves.

Have we improved things over St. Paul, or do we need to re-learn some things from God's chief apostle? What do you think?

CONCLUDING THOUGHT³

“God as Creator” style of preaching among the Gentiles is essential because “we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23). The Gentiles did not have the knowledge of the Old Testament as the Jews had, and therefore, this Christ who rose from the dead seemed foolish because they were unaware of the coming Messiah or the deliverance He was to bring. The Jews, however, had Moses, and the prophets, all of whom spoke of the coming Deliverer who, in their minds, was to set up an earthly kingdom. When Christ did not establish their earth-bound kingdom He became a stumbling block to them. As a result, when Paul was among Jews he needed to open their eyes to the prophecies of the Messiah and His deliverance. But when among the Gentiles, Paul had to establish a foundation, one which the Jews already had, that the one and only God created the universe and that this same God has provided a Redeemer for our sins.

When we examine these different evangelistic styles we need to apply them to our mission today. Ken Ham, of *Answers in Genesis*, grew up in Australia and observed the much needed missionary outreach which took place in his country. Ken once noted the huge success of bringing people to Christ which Billy Graham had in Australia in the early 1950's. Unfortunately, the evangelists in Australia today do not have nearly the success that Billy Graham had preaching the Gospel because today's society has become more like the Gentiles

² Charles J. Evanson, “Service of the Sacrament,” in *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, Fred Precht, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 435.

³ Brian Young, *Doubts About Creation?: Not After This* (Bend, OR: Maverick Publ., 2008): 22-23.

and less like Jews, lacking Biblical knowledge, especially that of Old Testament. Despite this lapse, we continue to preach to them as if they were of Jewish background, knowing Scripture in both heart and mind. The information contained in the Old Testament is vital to the Gospel. If we do not understand the bad news (fall into sin) in Genesis, how can we comprehend the good news (means of salvation) in the New Testament?

There has been a change in the attitude and Biblical knowledge of society. Church and Sunday School attendance has dropped for young and old alike; school prayer has been taken out of the public schools; sexual perverseness has grown; Adam and Eve have become mythical characters and Christianity as a whole has become a quick Sunday fix for the guilty conscience. Even our laws show signs of a wicked generation. We have the same constitution that we had before abortion. Did the constitution change? No, rather the hearts of men changed.