

## 194 *Why Fact or Friction?*

A couple of readers have already given me some helpful comments – many thanks! Some were about the detail, and I've made tweaks as a result (I've edited the article,<sup>[193]</sup> rather than creating a new article). But there were also questions as to what I was trying to achieve.

If I've learnt anything about myself through my recent journeyings it's that I tend to think I've found "the answer" and then to try to persuade others. In a sense, that's what I'm doing now!! But something has happened to me, and it does feel good and positive, and I do want to share it. Is that so wrong?

Well, I don't think it's wrong, but there is such a thing as over-selling, and sadly I've even done that in my professional life.

I write computer programs, for use by proofreaders and editors, and because they save so much time and make the job more enjoyable, some colleagues have even said that they are "life-changing". I started writing these programs 16 years ago, and in the early days, I tended to over-sell them ("sell", but they are free). Sadly, by my well-intentioned evangelism, I have built up a level of resistance and negativity that I'm still having to fight against. Does this ring any bells?!

Even if we put aside the pulpit-thumping "The wages of sin is death!" approach, if you look at any Christian book(let) that is aimed at not-yet-believers, isn't it always about persuading and proving that we've got the right answers? Is that necessarily the best way?

Speaking personally, I know how I react when I'm faced with a pushy salesman. I only listen in order to pick holes in their arguments. A good salesman must first be a **listener**.

Anyway, did the good news of Jesus spread like wildfire in the first century because the disciples were good at persuasion? Did they have a well-thought-out evangelistic strategy?

My studies have suggested that they shared their love for Jesus by their lives, and they witnessed by telling the story of Jesus, of what happened, and of what Jesus taught. They then called people to reorient their lives (repent), to be baptised (as a symbol of that reorientation), and to focus their lives on loving and serving the people around them – that's contagious!

I certainly do not think that they tried to persuade people to believe in a mechanism for personal salvation, saying that this is how you get to heaven.

In the hope that it will help *some people*, I've tried to set out the story of what happened in the first century, suggesting that it is at least historically valid. Then I've contrasted the positive contribution of the Christian community with some of the terrible negatives. These things actually happened. Interesting, isn't it?

OK, this is not a panacea, but if it prompts one person to sit down and read the story of Jesus (the good news, the gospel), then it was worth the effort.