

197 *Evangelism as relationship?*

I still want to reach the 95%, and I'm still on about the difference between the first-century church and now. I mentioned this to one of the prime movers of 'A passion for life'^[195,196] and he recommended Michael Green's 1979 book *Evangelism then and now*.

Last time, I looked at the decision–discipleship model of church,^[196] and Green's book confirms that this *is* the model on which we operate, and he was both a highly respected academic theologian and a committed personal evangelist, so evangelism was indeed his 'passion for life'. Here's how I read his analysis:

In the preface, he states as a given that 'the New Testament church existed for the twin purposes of dynamic worship and bold and imaginative evangelism.' I'd like to discuss that, but more importantly, I do agree with him that it isn't true of today's (UK?) church.

Why not? He lists five problems:

- We have an emaciated abbreviation of the New Testament good news.
- Our methods of evangelism are stereotyped.
- Our after-care is negligible (I assume he means discipleship).
- The whole thing is human-centred.
- The greatest obstacle of all is apathy.

So 'how did they succeed?' he asks (as do I!), and he says: 'The main secret of their impact was the outstanding change in their own lives.' I can accept that.

Later he says that the NT church has 'a tremendous concern for the lost' and so they 'seek to persuade, to warn, to teach, to cajole others into that relationship with the risen Christ which has become the mainspring of their own lives.' Hmm, interesting!

The rest of the book deals with how we must (1) change our church life, (2) improve our discipleship programmes, (3) improve our evangelism, and (4) involve the Holy Spirit.

Now, look back over that brief summary, especially in the light of what I've been exploring, of how we've reduced the gospel to a human-centred 'how I receive my salvation'. But that's what Green believed it was, and for a few hundred years, it's what we've all been taught the gospel is.

I have argued in my articles that it is *part* of the gospel, an important part, yes, but I think it's 'an emaciated abbreviation of the NT good news'. Sorry, I'm cheating because that's not what Green meant: he was referring to the gospel having no real power.

And as for the greatest obstacle being apathy, how is that even possible?! Do we really believe that Christ rules the universe? that God lives in our hearts through his Spirit? that God has a plan to redeem this world we live in? If so, how could anyone possibly be apathetic about that?!

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But if you think your responsibility is 'to persuade, to warn, to teach, to cajole others into that relationship', I'll forgive you for feeling apathetic – can you cajole someone into a relationship?! Sorry, yes, I'm being negative, but I believe there's a better way. Let's keep talking together.