

274 *The death of a salesman*

I've always been a salesman, right from childhood (maybe a touch nefarious in those days), finding things that were good, and persuading others to buy them – or to buy into my ideas. My very first article^[0] lists the latter [and their targets]:

- Christian faith generally [friends and family] 2/3 years
- conservative evangelical faith [charismatics, who are unbiblical] ~12 years
- charismatic faith [conservative evangelicals, who are unbiblical!] ~12 years
- Christian faith generally [contacts through business, via email] ~12 years
- (non-selling period, while in a sect) ~5 years
- (non-selling period, back at church, but not happy) ~5 years
- God's amazing love [anyone who will listen] ~6 years

And for you, my dear article-reading friends, I've been refusing to accept 'what I've always been taught', and gone back to 'What does the Bible actually say?' My target today is 'evangelism' (was that a groan I heard at the back there?!), but 'evangelism' isn't in the Bible, only 'evangelist' (×3):

OED: *A person who seeks to convert others to the Christian faith, especially by public preaching.*

1) 'Philip the **evangelist**, one of the Seven'.^[Ac 21:8] The Seven were chosen as being 'full of the Holy Spirit'^[Ac 6:1-5] and their job was to 'wait on tables'!

2) It's in the list of gifts.^[Eph 4:11ff] And those gifts are for what? Persuading unbelievers? No! 'to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up'.

3) Paul told Timothy to 'do the work of an **evangelist**'.^[2Tim 4:5] Why? To persuade people? Probably not, since he was the leader of a church.

[Penny drop] It sounds as if our persuader-evangelist isn't actually a biblical idea! Maybe the evangelist was simply someone good at narrating the story of Jesus (the evangel, the gospel, the good news), hence the 'four evangelists'. (Remember, they had no New Testaments then.)

This line of thinking started with 'Keith'^[273] saying that 'love and acceptance' was important, but don't we need a bit of God's wrath, too? After all, what if they say they are, on balance, 'happy as I am' and maybe don't even believe in God? How do we persuade them?

As someone who has spent his life trying (albeit with some success) to **persuade** unbelievers, maybe that's not what God wants us to do. Certainly, I now try to offer what people truly need: love and acceptance, community, belonging, inclusion. I don't try to justify my beliefs, but 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have... but with gentleness and respect.'^[1 Pet 3:15f]

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P.S. Not wanting to be rude or to upset anyone, but in my experience the people who are by far the most difficult to persuade are people like me – I spent the best part of fifty years certain that I was right!