

435 Let me try that again...

Sorry, folks, my previous article was ‘too clever by half’, and I completely failed to communicate my message.^[434] Let me try again...

A theology student gave what I thought was a terrible evangelistic sermon, and yet two people came to faith. Yes, God’s ‘signature dish’ is to take our poor efforts and use them as part of The Plan to restore the whole of creation, but as I said, ‘...we really should read our Bibles and do our best to work out how to play our small part in that overall Plan.’ With a better sermon, maybe *four* people would have come to faith?

The chap shouting about ‘the wages of sin!’ on a busy Saturday in Lincoln *might* have been used by God to lead someone to Christ, but how many people did he put off? He was reinforcing their view (which my mum expressed *repeatedly*) that Christians just try to *scare* people into believing. (In later years, Mum was invited to the same sort of church cafe that Sue and I now run; I don’t know if she ever came to faith, but she said *repeatedly*, ‘It was the best thing I ever did, going along to Good Neighbours!’)

Yes, the early church did perform lots of miracles, and thousands did come to faith, but when I said *therefore* we should do the same, that was a wind-up, sorry. Is that ‘what the Bible teaches’? No, it’s false biblical exposition to say that the early church did such-and-such, and therefore we should do the same. Just imagine applying that to Acts 5! After the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, ‘Great fear came upon the whole gathering’ and ‘none of the others dared join them’^{5:11,13} – I’m not surprised!

My own personal experience involved my friend Ray (who has since died). He had clear healing and prophetic gifts which God used to help people, but his followers (including me) thought that his gifts validated his teaching. Wrong! I do believe they were genuinely God-given gifts, but he *misused* them, so that several of us came into dependence on him. Not good!

Now, back to how we handle issues where Christians disagree on matters of biblical interpretation (e.g. remarriage of divorcees, male-only leadership and faithful gay relationships). As someone who spent 40+ years knowing he was ‘right’ and seeking to persuade others (= bigotry/pharisaism), I want to urge us to be more willing to graciously agree to disagree.

If you hold any of the above issues strongly and think ‘they’ want us to compromise our biblical principles, maybe look back over the history of the abolition of slavery? Thankfully, God managed to get Christians to change their minds.

And what if, in the end, it turns out that God actually *is* trying to get Christians to change their minds? For example, think of the damage done when not-yet-believers simply can’t take churches seriously who say that women *must not* teach men?!