

2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series  
Part 5 “The Evangelistic Church Family”  
By Doug Hamilton

Acts 2:43-47 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;<sup>45</sup> and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.<sup>46</sup> Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,<sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- The apostles, the leaders of the church, were carrying out many wonders and signs as Jesus predicted they would (John 15:26, 16:7; Mark 16:20; Act 1:8). This would be a source of evidence of persuasion needed to establish the church and His New Testament. These miracles codified the teachings of the apostles by backing them up.
  - 2 Cor 12:12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.
  - 1 Pet 1:12 “...those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven...”
  - 1 Thes 1:5 “...for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction...”
  - Romans 15:19 “...in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit...I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”
- The point of the text was that the apostles were ministering to them in the word with authority. They were leading like apostles were to do and because of it, we have the NT.
- The text states that they “were together and had all things in common”. This is not to say that they were living in a commune, but developed a strong sense of community among them. The commune model was true of the Qumran community that gave us the Dead Sea Scrolls shortly before the time of Jesus. To belong to that group one would have to turn all their holdings of land and funds over to a trustee. The first-century Christians did not have a system like this, but one that ministered to each other. The verb tense for “selling” implies that the properties were being sold over time as the needs of the church came up. This was not mandatory, but voluntary.
- They were meeting in the temple, likely Solomon’s Porch (5:12). This would have been available for worship o Sunday mornings. They also met in homes, “*from house to house*”. Some of the more wealthy converts would open their homes to large numbers of Christians for the purpose of fellowship. Wealthier households in that day would have had homes that could have hosted large numbers of Christians. They were a family that planned much together for the sake of the kingdom of God. It was the kind of faith that was put into action.
- Verse 47 states that they were praising God and “finding favor with all the people.” When people see the faith of a spiritual family in action, the Lord will be able to respond by adding many saved souls to His church.
  - Acts 9:31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

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- Acts 16:5 So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

Reality Check

In leading others to Christ, the perception of the church family is extremely important to those who are searching. If we are drawn to God through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, then the church must be seen as the “Death, Burial and Resurrection” people of God. In other words, if we ever want to be a church that is evangelistic, we must present ourselves in way that is unique. Part of the offer of the salvation that is to be presented to the new convert includes the offer to be part of a thriving and loving church family that is different from the world they are being called out of.

- The word “church” is the word *ekklesia*, meaning “called out”. When the ancient Greeks of a town would want to assembled a meeting of the citizens, they would “call out” the residents from their homes and meet in the designated location of business to discuss matters. Those people were the *ekklesia* “called out” ones that assembled together for the common good of each other.
- The church is the called out people of God. This is likely the reference to 1 Pet 2:9-10 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup> for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.
- The primary function of Moses in the lives of the Jewish people was to call them “out of Egypt” (The term is mentioned verbatim 41 times in the scriptures).
  - Exodus 3:10 “Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”

The Church is a Home for those who have been called out of the world!

The purpose of the “called out” ones is to be called out of where we were previously at and into a realm which is radically different. We are the church and we are unique when it comes into contrast with the world.

- The church is built upon the unique principle of death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Mt 16:18).
- The church is to follow the unique principle of loving discipline (Mt 18:17).
- The church is to follow the unique principle of autonomy (Acts 14:23).
- The church is to adhere to the unique principle of apostolic authority (1 Cor 4:17).
- The church is to have unique principles of congregational leadership (Titus 1:5).
- The church is to have unique principles of daily living (1 Cor 6:11).

The church was called out of the world and into the marvelous light of God.

- Ephesians 2:9 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household...”

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- Phil 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

We are unique in so many ways and should take joy in knowing that we are not a blend for the world. We must celebrate that we are different from the world! The problem concerning evangelism and this concept is found in the question, “How do we reach out to the world when we are not of this world?”

The World Says “Come and Get Me!”

Time and time again I have read studies that tell us that we must take direction from the world when it comes to the gospel of Christ. Smart people with PHDs from Ivy League Schools and other liberal institutions make the boldest solutions.

- “If we want to reach out to the lost, then we need to change the style of worship.”
- “We need to have an entertainment-based worship with the lights and a band.”
- “Why not lower the standard of teaching so they will understand it?”
- “We must preach a social gospel method.”
- “We need to change the style of teaching to be a prosperity gospel.”
- “We have to stop holding firm to the teachings of the Bible that do not line up with the social issues of the day.”
- “If you want to grow your congregation, then send out the message that you can live in any lifestyle as long as you do not hurt anyone.”
- One religious group actually pays visitors to come to worship.

This methodology has miserably failed for decades. Churches that have gone that route have dwindled down in membership, morality and ministries. The most diminishing Christian religious groups are those that took their direction from the world. They were called back into the world.

Christ’s Church Says “Come and Get It!”

If we are the called out people as a result of a God that called us out through the blood of Christ, then we must not compromise in the pattern. We are to earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Our obligation is to live the lives that God has given us, share the hope that we hold and point in the right direction based on the Bible.

The Survey Says

In the publication *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, researcher Thom Rainer compiled information that reveals a deeper observation on how congregations can reach out to the unchurched. The “unchurched” were defined as those whom have not regularly attended a congregation in the last ten years or if at all. Most evangelism studies of the past have focused on input from the unchurched, resulting in many churches focusing on what doesn’t work. If you want to know what draws unchurched individuals into a church family, ask someone who recently went through the process. That is one of the focuses of

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Rainer’s research, interviewing those who in the last two years have gone from the sidelines of the world to becoming active, faithful members of a local church family.

I am well aware that Thom Rainer and those interviewed for the survey are not members of the Churches of Christ, but the research is insightful and valuable. If we are going to put forth our best congregational effort to reach the lost, we must be informed as to the nature of the lost. Rainer’s focus was not on those who transferred from a church or simply became more active within their own congregation, but made the transition from “unchurched” to “churched”.

“Over 350 persons representing a diversity of locations, incomes, races, denominations, and backgrounds have provided us with a wealth of information. They have shared with us key reasons and key influences in this life-changing process. Our research team has listened carefully, and we have learned much.”

What factors led you to choose this church? \*some terms modified for discussion

Elders / Preacher	90%
Doctrines	88%
Friendliness of Members	49%
Other Issues	42%
Someone from Church shared Christ to me.	41%
Family Member Attends	38%
Atmosphere of the congregation	37%
Relationship other than family member	25%
Children’s Youth Ministry	25%
Other Ministries	12%
Worship Style	11%
Location	7%

Did we catch that? This list looks totally different from what the world would say. I will refer to this data in some further lessons, but let us discuss the above information for now. The people who chose to make a life-changing commitment to Christ were not running from the truth and responsibility, but seeking it out.

- If the leadership was good, that was what they were looking for. In order to be a follower, one must first choose good leaders.
- What the church taught concerning the Bible was extremely important to those that made the commitment. They were not seeking for relativism, but absolutes in this crazy world.
- They felt it important to have friendly interaction with the flock.
- They wanted what someone from the congregation shared with them.
- They loved the atmosphere of the congregation because they were the family that they always wanted. In fact they were able to develop strong, healthy relationships that were safe.

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- They wanted a nice place to bring up their children with morals, valued peers and faith. They want the very best for their children and they saw that occurring at that location and among that people.

Not to take anything away from other ministries, worship style and location, for those can be important. Without ministries, an enjoyable worship and a decent location a congregation can suffer, but they were quite a ways down the list. People who were called out and acted upon the call came because they wanted a life-changing experience.

This is what is most exciting about the congregation in Camp Hill, for we have so many of the qualities that people want in a church family.

- We have great elders and deacons that genuinely care for souls.
- We are making every attempt to hold to the teachings of the Bible.
- We have one of the most-loving and caring congregations that I have ever known.

There are some things that we could be doing that would make it even better. Those things we will be focusing on in the lessons to come.

Challenge this week:

CELEBRATE! Thank God for our wonderful church family! Thank God for the wonderful Savior that He sent to bring us all together. Pray that we become the best callers to those who want to come out of the world.