

What of Scripture?

As part of my epigraph, I chose these excellent words of Evans:

Elders must lead by teaching according to the clear principles of the word [of God] (for Christ rules his church through his word). They must give sufficient scriptural arguments, fair reasoning and proper examples for [any] suggested change.¹

Very well. Let us see.

When, at last,² Evans begins his scriptural justification for his thesis, the first place he goes to is Exodus 18:13-26. Remarkable! In pointing this out, I am not saying a word against the Old Testament, but to *start* there when setting out a new-covenant practice is, as I say, remarkable. But then, Evans is not really doing that: he is not setting out a new-covenant principle or practice. Not at all! He does not go to Exodus to *set out* biblical teaching on Relationship Evangelism, since Exodus 18 can have nothing to say about the *ekklēsia* and its efforts to see sinners saved.

But this, in a sense, is academic. The fact is, Evans turns to Exodus in order to attempt to justify his going outside Scripture to find guidance for his pre-determined scheme. Let me underline this – it must not be missed or glossed over. There is no suggestion that Exodus 18 teaches Relationship Evangelism. No. Evans turns to that passage to justify what he has already decided on. Having radically altered the biblical mandate for taking the gospel to sinners, he goes to the world to see how they make their system (which he copies) work. Then, fine-tuning his system, he tinkers with it according to the world's principles. Thus when Evans goes to Scripture, he turns to Exodus 18, not for biblical guidance, but to justify

¹ Evans p57.

² Where, exactly, does Evans begin his scriptural justification? While he uses Scripture before this, I would place it at chapter 8 on p143.

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going outside Scripture in order to improve his scheme! Mark that! Going to Scripture to justify a position, a course of action, in order to tweak it, but not to find Christ's law!

This sets the tone for the rest of what I want to say in this chapter. To call a spade a spade, we are meeting the prostitution of Scripture at first hand.

As Israel journeyed through the wilderness leading to Sinai, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, observing how Moses was handling Israel's complaints, soon spotted that his son-in-law was wearing himself out. Moses was well-meaning but lacked common sense. Jethro could see a better way. So the older man gave the younger man sensible advice, which he took, to everybody's advantage. What permanent mountain does Evans make of this local molehill? Just this:

In this passage, God mandates listening to wisdom from an outside source. If you slightly changed the names and circumstances, this could easily be an account of an external consultant brought in to do a quality-assurance check on a struggling organisation coming up with recommended changes; a kind of Ofsted³ 3500 years ago.⁴

In other words, according to Evans, by a slight adjustment here and there, in this passage in Exodus we have strong scriptural support for going outside Scripture; not to put too fine a point on it – going to the world to set up Relationship Evangelism, to measure its success, to consult the world's experts on how to improve the scheme, and so on. Actually,

³ Government statement: 'Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. We report directly to [the UK] Parliament and we are independent and impartial. We inspect and regulate services which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages. Every week, we carry out hundreds of inspections and regulatory visits throughout England, and publish the results on our website... We work with providers which are not yet good to promote their improvement, monitoring their progress and sharing with them the best practice we find'.

⁴ Evans p47.

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Evans sees an even higher use for the incident, a much higher use:

This [Jethro's conclusion and advice] was a missional⁵ piece of good advice, for 'the nations' would take note of all of it. As Moses came to the time of his departure [that is, his death], and the law was given for the second time, he said: 'Observe them carefully. For this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say: "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people". What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?' (Deut. 4:6-8).⁶

Well! This certainly raises the stakes! Do not miss the massive gloss, the breathtaking gloss, in all this. Jethro's advice is placed on a par with God's revelation, both in the matter of his (God's) instruction for Israel, and what the nations would deduce from the episode with Jethro. That is to say, apparently by seeing the improvement in the day-to-day administration of the practicalities of settling Israel's internal disputes brought about by Jethro's down-to-earth advice to Moses, the nations would recognise the uniqueness of Israel as the one people in all the world to have been given the all-majestic law of God! Really?

But, in terms of business consultants, football managers and management gurus, this is precisely the sort of thing Evans is doing here. If churches set up Relationship Evangelism and fine-tune it according to the advice of the world's experts, then the world will sit up and take notice because they can see how wonderful God and his gospel are! To make the case, all we have to do, according to Evans, is to 'slightly change the names and circumstances' in Exodus 18.

'Slightly change'? It strikes me that what Evans is doing with Relationship Evangelism is more than making a slight change in the New Testament with its mandates and principles

⁵ 'In Christianity, missional living is the adoption of the posture, thinking, behaviours, and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the gospel message' (Wikipedia).

⁶ Evans pp47-48.

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(which, by the way, we have not reached yet in Evans' book, still being in Exodus and Deuteronomy). Slightly change? A hatchet job, more like! Giving the *ekklēsia* a new mandate, inventing a system in order to fulfil that mandate, and setting up a worldly way in which to evaluate it all – and all by going outside Scripture – is a lot more than tinkering at the edges.⁷

In any case, was Jethro an external consultant, one whom Moses called in? I fail to see it. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, merely volunteered homely advice. Good advice, I admit, but he was hardly a 'consultant'.

Was Jethro an external inspector? Don't forget, Evans likened his advice to Ofsted. Well, did Jethro have authority over Moses, authority to insist on changes? Did he issue a mandatory report? Did he monitor Moses' compliance? I am not nitpicking. Evans' subtle glosses cast long shadows.

Above all, while the Moses/Jethro incident fully justifies the application of common sense to incidentals – incidentals, I emphasise – it must not be used to effect a root and branch change in revealed, scriptural principles essential to *ekklēsia* life and practice; that is, Christ's law – his *law*, I stress. The merest whiff of a suggestion of linking Jethro and Jesus in arranging the affairs of the *ekklēsia* is anathema – or ought to be!⁸ And to put Jethro in the same bracket as unbelieving but worldly-wise football managers, business executives, and the like, renders one speechless!

Moses was facing a new situation, a unique situation: he was quite in order to adjust his practice by common-sense advice from his father-in-law; he was working himself to

⁷ I see Evans getting very close to a transgression of God's warning to Israel: 'And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you' (Deut. 4:1-2). See also Prov. 30:6; Eccles. 13:12; Rev. 22:18-19.

⁸ Think of applying Evans' approach to conversion, baptism, the Lord's supper...

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death; he couldn't see the wood for the trees. Jethro, being detached, could see things more clearly than Moses and gave him advice, which Moses took. What Moses could not do – and what Moses did not do – was tinker with God's law: the truth is, Israel had no law concerning the day-to-day handling of a complaints procedure from a practical point of view. Moses did not invent a completely new law for Israel, and then claim that it was his (or Jethro's) invention which made all the nations realise how great a people the infinite God had made of Israel: far-fetched seems hardly strong enough to describe this farrago. Evans, on the weakest of grounds, and using the thinnest of arguments, stretches the incident far beyond what is warranted. Of course we use common sense – what time of day should we hold a meeting, for instance, or the level of the thermostat, or whatever – but the notion that we should decide a major principle, meddle with a revealed principle, on the basis of common sense – who should sit at the Lord's table, for instance, how we should govern the *ekklēsia*, and so on – is utterly out of order. Specifically, we have no warrant to decide for ourselves – or 'call in consultants' from the world to tell us – what the gospel is, how to reach sinners with it, and the like. The authority for deciding such things must be Scripture.

In short, while an outsider might point out some alteration in the seating which might make things run more smoothly for us, this is a far cry from organising the *ekklēsia* along 'best management studies' practice. Evans should have established the principles of his scheme from Scripture – that is, in particular, the New Testament – giving us clear examples of apostolic practice in the use of it. Instead, he has drawn his principles from the world and its management techniques, and then gone to Scripture (the Old Testament, at that) to scrape together some sort of justification for his use of ungodly business experts to tell us how to work it.

Before I leave Evans on Exodus 18, listen to Calvin's sane words in his *Commentary*:

Moses... lays down a rule for all the greatest and most excellent [teachers], that they should not refuse to receive the

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admonitions of those whom they admit to teach rightly, although they are not of such high dignity.

And Gill's remarks in his *Commentary*:

'Hearken to the advice given [by Jethro], and put it in execution, by choosing out of the people, and placing over them, judges qualified, as directed: and God command you so'; for [Jethro] did not desire [Moses] to follow his advice any further than it appeared to be according to the will of God, which he doubted not he would inquire about; and if [Moses] found it was agreeable to it, and should pursue it.

As Gill observed:

[Moses] considered what he said, weighed it well in his mind, and judged it good advice, and determined to follow it.

So much for Evans' first foray into Scripture. Nothing could better show the utter inadequacy of his scheme than this opening attempt to find a scriptural justification for it.

With 'The Barnabas factor',⁹ at least Evans moves into the New Testament. He turns to the way Barnabas wisely went looking for Paul and got him to come to Antioch (Acts 11:24-26). However, 'The Barnabas factor' was not the first time he had referred to the episode:

Should you import staff or develop 'home-grown'? The former is certainly not wrong; Barnabas went and got Saul from Tarsus to help him in Antioch (Acts 11:25), and Paul took workers with him on his travels (e.g. Acts 16:1-5). Maybe the equivalent of this is to provide extra mentoring to those finishing at Bible colleges before they go into ministry, or offer apprenticeships to young people to expose them to church life. Talent in your church could be released by a part-time or full-time appointment. The benefit of using people from within is that they know the church already and you know them. The downside is that developing a proper professional relationship while still being friends with those you serve and have known for ages can be daunting.

⁹ Evans pp102-103.

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Staff need caring for and organising. Job descriptions, contracts, pay scales, appraisals, disciplinary procedures, pastoral support, legal requirements, deploying, and directing all need addressing. Many leaders aren't trained in these vital tasks, or see them as distractions. If the church is to grow, however, they need attention.¹⁰

As you can see, Evans gets quite a lot out of Barnabas fetching Paul to Antioch, does he not? I wonder if Barnabas would recognise that this is what he was, in essence, doing? I have my doubts!

What is more, when he gets his teeth into the passage proper,¹¹ Evans has very little to say about the passage itself (just over a page, including the actual extract from Acts), but a great deal to say about the organisation of his scheme, using the episode to declare:

Implementation of this [that is, Relationship-Evangelism's] particular mental map¹² has two elements. First is a 'bottom-up' emphasis where individuals commit to each of the three areas. Each person needs to see how maturity, ministry and mission can develop. It also needs a 'top-down' lead and practical organisation, which leaders must facilitate.¹³

And so on. Evans gives us some personal experience:

¹⁰ Evans pp83-84.

¹¹ Evans pp102-103.

¹² 'The concept of the mental map, which has been adopted in the disciplines of geography, history, and cultural anthropology, originated in cognitive psychology. The term "cognitive map" was coined by the American psychologist Edward C. Tolman (1886 – 1959), who researched the sense of direction of rats and went on to discuss the representation of spatial knowledge in the human brain. Subsequently, developments in the areas of geography and urban planning contributed to the concept of the cognitive map or mental map becoming a paradigm for interdisciplinary research on the spatial orientation capacity of humans in the 1960s' (Frithjof Benjamin Schen: 'Mental Maps: The Cognitive Mapping of the Continent as an Object of Research of European History'). One trouble with mental maps is that they are distorted. Also, think 'pre-suppositions'.

¹³ Evans p104; see pp108,114 (twice), and so on.

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One of the best things we did was run an induction/new members' day explaining to people how the church worked, and not just what it believed. As well as talking about the faith, we needed to guide people into avenues of service. They needed not only to understand our structure, but to be told how teams worked, what role they could play, to be told *not* to overcommit to too many teams, and how they could try out different teams or transfer between them. This helped engage many more new people.¹⁴

Oh? This is what Evans advises. Is it what Barnabas did at Antioch? Could we be shown it from the New Testament?

So much for Evans' look at Barnabas.

All this, of course, only serves to add to what I said in the chapter 'The Fundamental Flaw', and confirms the rightness of the title of that chapter; it bears out my claim that all this is a fatal mark against Relationship Evangelism. The first and fundamental source for believers, for both doctrine and practice, must be Scripture. Indeed, we may be more precise than that. We should be more precise. When thinking about how we may reach the unconverted, we may narrow Scripture down to the kernel. While all Scripture instructs us in this matter, the main source of our guidance must be apostolic teaching and practice. After all, the apostles were the first to be given Christ's commission, receiving it directly from Christ himself (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8). What is more, they had success in the field – huge success: they turned the world upside down with the gospel; they reached the lost; they saw conversions; they saw churches raised; they saw saints edified (see, for instance, Acts 2 – 4; 6:1,7; 8:6-8,12,14; 11:1,18; 12:24; 13:48-49;17:6; 19:10,20).

And we know how they preached. *First*, what they saw in the commission:

God... reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against

¹⁴ Evans p109, emphasis his.

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them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

The first believers were given Christ's commission. But how did they go about it? Let Paul speak for them all (in the continuation of the above):

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says: 'In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you'. I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 5:20 – 6:2).

We do not, of course, go to the apostles simply because they were successful. Rather, *secondly*, Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you... The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:16-17,26).

When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me... When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 15:26; 16:13-15).

Thirdly, the apostles, in their turn, laid down the doctrine and practice which must govern all believers, in every generation (including our own), until the end of the age:

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Learn from us the meaning of the saying: ‘Do not go beyond what is written’... I urge you to imitate me... Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you (1 Cor. 4:6,16; 11:1-2).

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you... Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice (Phil. 3:17; 4:9).

You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord... And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus... Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus... Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God... We urge you, brothers, to do so [that is, to obey] more and more. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you... (1 Thess. 1:5-6; 2:13-14; 4:1-2,8,10-11).

Brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter... We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command... In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers... You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example... We did this... in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule... Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ... Brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed... (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:4,6-18).

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I give you this instruction... I am writing you these instructions so that... you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God... If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed... I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 1:18; 3:14-15; 4:6; 6:13-14).

You... know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings (2 Tim. 3:10-11).

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles (2 Pet. 3:1-2).

And so on. The apostles claimed to set down absolute truth and practice for all believers for all time. Thus we know Christ's mind in Scripture as to our duty, and we know, from Scripture, the way in which the first believers carried out that duty in their day. For all these reasons, the fundamental source for believers in all things must be the apostolic Scriptures.

I do not apologise for quoting at length in showing this. I am eager to set out the contrast with Evans' book at this critical point.

Christ gave the apostles the task of taking the gospel to sinners throughout the world, starting at Jerusalem. Now, although they saw many conversions and great advances of the gospel (witness the Acts), they, of course, could not complete the task; in any case, new generations of sinners are being born all the time. The task, therefore, inevitably falls to believers in each succeeding generation. It is now our turn. We have the duty and privilege of taking Christ and his gospel into all the world, looking for the conversion of as many sinners as possible. We have the same task as the apostles. We know what our task is. Scripture tells us, and tells us in no uncertain terms. And that is to see sinners converted by

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preaching Christ to them (1 Cor. 1:17-18; 2:1-5; 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:1-6, for instance).

Surely, all this speaks for itself. If it doesn't, words have lost all meaning. We know both our duty and the way we should fulfil it, and we know both from Scripture, by apostolic preaching and example. We know that the apostles (along with all the first believers in general) were successful in seeing Jews and pagans converted. Their way must be our way.¹⁵

Although times have changed since the early church, nothing fundamental has altered. Fallen man is as fallen as ever he was. The gospel is unchanged (or ought to be) and unchangeable. But, even in cultural matters, there are some striking similarities between then and now. For one thing, there is strong resemblance between Christendom and Judaism. (And this should cause no surprise, since the Fathers went to the old covenant to get their principles).¹⁶ In our day, we, in the West, are surrounded by both Christendom and paganism, not so very different to the early church facing Judaism and paganism. Now the early church reached – successfully reached – both Jew and pagan. Thus, allowing for changes in mere incidentals with the passing of 2000 years, our world is very similar to that faced by the apostles. In any case, as I have observed, the natural heart is the same as it has always been. Let me underline all this. It is of the utmost importance.

We, today, face the same challenges as the first believers faced. Our task is no different to theirs. If they came back, allowing for changes in externals, they would recognise what we have to do. Read, for instance, Acts 13 – 20, and put it in a modern setting. That is the way Paul would go about taking the gospel into all the world today. And it must be our way.

¹⁵ I hope that what I have just said will not be misinterpreted as dismissing Jews or anti-Semitic. I want to see Jews saved, as much as Gentiles. Rom. 9:1-5; 11:1 is explicit. See my *Romans 11*.

¹⁶ They also went to the pagans (when imposing 'sacrament' on the *ekklēsia*). See my *Pastor*.

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So, I ask again, why does Evans not open his book with a clear *biblical* exposition of the church's purpose in sinners' conversion, and the way to fulfil it in practice? Should he not establish Relationship Evangelism from Scripture – that is, set out its biblical principles, its methods and the way we should evaluate whether or not sinners truly have been converted? Why does he not do this? Why does he take us, instead, to extra-scriptural sources and material? When may we expect Evans' follow-up volume giving us apostolic warrants for all he proposes? Why should it be a 'follow-up' volume? Should it not have had pride of place?

Let me raise an objection. What about 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, especially verse 21?

An objection to what I am saying drawn from 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Does this passage justify the use of anything and everything short of sin in trying to reach sinners with the gospel? Does 1 Corinthians 9:21 teach us that we can and should be *totally* adaptable in our approach to the lost, that anything goes, as long as it does not involve sin? – 'yet without sinning', as Evans puts it.¹⁷ In particular, does this verse justify Relationship Evangelism? At first glance, it would seem so. Evans clearly thinks it does:

We need to be Christians who, like Paul, bend over backwards yet without sinning, to win the lost for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-23).¹⁸

Thus far, I agree. But there is more to be said. Let me quote the passage:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not

¹⁷ Evans p213.

¹⁸ Evans p213.

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having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

We need to think about this for a moment – and think seriously: if we get this wrong, we open the floodgates to any amount of nonsense. For instance, take sin; how do we know what 'sin' is? Only by Scripture, do I hear you say? Excellent! No believer in his right mind would dream of calling on the likes of Clive Woodward, Peter Hitchens or David Brailsford to define sin for him, would he? That, I hope, will be treated as I intend – as a rhetorical question, even a daft question! We do not ask the world – even its most clever and successful entrepreneurs – to tell us what sin is. Of course not! So why does Evans turn so readily to such men to justify his way of reaching the ungodly? If Scripture defines sin – as it does and as it must – where else can we go but to Scripture to tell us how we must 'bend over backwards' to reach the lost? What did Paul mean by it? What did Paul do and not do? We should not be wondering about what Clive Woodward might or might not do. The principles and actions of Paul, not Clive Woodward, must govern us.

Straightaway, then, even on Evans' system, we are driven back on Scripture – as we should be. We must not break Christ's law – that is, all Scripture as set out by the apostles – in anything. No! Not even for the sake of evangelising the lost! Accepting that – and it is a major point – can we now go on to say that, excepting sin, in evangelism anything goes?

1 Corinthians 9:21, of course, can be abused to justify everything and anything in the name of pragmatism. But it surely has its own inbuilt limits.¹⁹ Paul was willing to go as

¹⁹ Compare: 'Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus' (1 Thess. 5:18). 'The anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you' (1 John 2:27). Surely there is an understood – though unstated – limit in such passages.

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far as he could in not transgressing local taboos in order to reach men with the gospel. He would put up with any personal inconvenience or insult; he wanted to keep himself out of the way, yes. He would go to the synagogue to reach Jews (Acts 9:20; 13:5,14; 14:1; 16:13 (the nearest equivalent); 17:1-2,10,16-17; 18:4,19; 19:8). He would go to the market place or the Areopagus to reach pagans (Acts 17), yes.²⁰ All this, beyond question, is true. Certainly! But the idea that he would adopt Jewish or pagan principles, things which made Judaism tick or paganism thrive, in reaching the lost, is simply absurd and worse.²¹ If anybody thinks that 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 justifies Relationship Evangelism, he has stretched biblical elasticity to new limits. He has stretched it far beyond breaking point.

Calvin, commenting on 1 Corinthians 9:21:

But while it is proper that we should accommodate ourselves to the weak, according to the apostle's injunction, and that, in things indifferent, and with a view to their edification, those act an improper part, who, with the view of consulting their own ease,²² avoid those things that would offend men, and the wicked, too, rather than the weak. Those, however, commit a twofold error, who do not distinguish between things indifferent and things unlawful, and accordingly do not hesitate, for the sake of pleasing men,²³ to engage in things that the Lord has prohibited.

I am of one mind with Calvin over this. 'Those... who do not distinguish between things indifferent and things unlawful' 'commit a twofold error'. By 'things indifferent', Calvin was clearly referring to Romans 14:1 – 15:7, which deals with debateable things, things that are not dealt with in Scripture. If

²⁰ See the chapter 'Paul at the Areopagus: The Antithesis of Relationship Evangelism'.

²¹ He was not doing that in Acts 21. See my 'Does Acts 21 Confirm Sabbath Keeping for Believers?'

²² Or for getting large numbers into the toils of Churchianity – church attendance – in order to be evangelised.

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‘things indifferent’ includes carrying out Christ’s commission with tools of our own devising, using principles which were open to the apostles but which they did not use, then we might just as well ignore Scripture altogether, and do our own thing from start to finish.

But you see the point that Calvin makes, do you not? Paul was not saying that in order to reach sinners he would ask the world’s advice as to how to evangelise. Nor was he saying that he would tone down – if not avoid altogether – the ‘difficult’ bits of the gospel. He knew that the gospel offends (1 Cor. 1:23; Rom. 9:33; Gal. 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:8). Yes, Paul wanted to avoid giving ‘offence’ (1 Cor. 10:32; 2 Cor. 6:3), but this has nothing to do with cutting out what is unpalatable to the natural man. If anyone suggests that the apostle devised user-friendly systems to please the ungodly so that he could evangelise them, he is grossly insulting Paul, and abusing Scripture.

Matthew Henry on the Corinthian passage:

[Paul] became all things to all men, that he might by all means (all lawful means) gain some. He would not sin against God to save the soul of his neighbour, but he would very cheerfully and readily deny himself. The rights of God he could not give up, but he might resign his own, and he very often did so for the good of others. He assigns his reason for acting in this manner (verse 23): ‘This I do for the gospel’s sake, and that I may be partaker thereof with you’; that is, for the honour of Christ, whose the gospel is, and for the salvation of souls, for which it was designed, and that he and they might communicate in the privileges of it, or partake together of them. For these ends did he thus condescend, deny himself as to his liberty, and accommodate himself to the capacities and usages of those with whom he had to do, where he lawfully might. Note, a heart warmed with zeal for God, and breathing after the salvation of men, will not plead and insist upon rights and privileges if this hinders²⁴ this design.

²⁴ Matthew Henry had ‘privileges in bar to’.

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This is right. To reach the lost, we should spare no expense with regard to our own safety, ease or reputation, meet any cost in that direction, *but there must be no compromise with God's truth – whether in doctrine or practice.*

In short, we are free to decide incidentals (that is, peripheral things not defined by Scripture, 'things indifferent') by the light of nature – common sense – *once we have fixed the principle on scriptural grounds.* But to fix principle by the light of nature, or by the wisdom of the world, must be wrong.

Evans, however, does not restrict the seeking and taking of worldly-wise advice to titivating the *circumstances* of his approach to sinners. As we saw in the chapter 'Pragmatism Rules, OK?', the *whole ethos* of Relationship Evangelism is founded on the market place, business management, commercial enterprise and organisational techniques. This can only be done by going outside Scripture, even to the extent of calling on the ungodly for their advice.²⁵ And using 1 Corinthians 9:21 to justify it is, I repeat, an abuse of the verse. Above all, we must not use (abuse) that verse to trump the many other passages of Scripture which are explicit about the way to approach the ungodly. Commerce, government and business practice, sports management, public relations, the shopping mall, the world of advertising, accountants, and all the rest of it, have their place in the world no doubt, but they surely come a long, long way down the list when we are deciding the *principles* of our approach to sinners. Indeed, do they have any part to play in our efforts to fulfil Christ's commission and see sinners converted? Take a look, then, at what percentage of Evans' book is taken up with *serious exposition* of Scripture, and how much is taken up with business management. That simple computation will tell you almost all you need to know about Relationship Evangelism.

Any idea of business methods being foisted on the *ekklesia* can only work when Christendom is regarded as 'a good

²⁵ As I have already noted, this is the very mistake the Fathers made when dragging the word 'sacrament' into the *ekklesia*. See my *Pastor*.

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thing'. Evans, in truth, is really polishing Christendom. Polish Christendom? I am convinced we should separate from it, regarding it as it really is, seeing it in its true colours – an anathema (2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:2). Do not miss the unbreakable and indispensable link between God's word and separation (the root meaning of 'sanctification') in Christ's prayer (John 17:17-19). The two stand or fall together; any weakening of separation can only involve a corresponding weakening of the hold on, and obedience to, God's word.

When the apostle was reproofing and correcting the Corinthians for their excesses, he laid down a vital principle: 'All things should be done decently and in order' (1 Cor. 14:40). And this has something to say about the issue in hand. Calvin commented:

The Lord has... not allowed us a rambling and unbridled liberty, but has enclosed it (so to speak) with railings, or at least has laid a restriction upon the liberty granted by him in such a manner, that it is after all only from his word that we can judge as to what is right.

Gill:

The words may be considered as a general rule for the decent and orderly management of all things relating to the worship of God, and discipline of his house; that in all things a good decorum, and strict order, be observed, that nothing be done contrary to the rules of decency, and the laws and commandments of Christ.

Yes, I know that in 1 Corinthians 14:40 Paul was addressing the management of the *ekklēsia*, not dealing with evangelism, but surely there is a principle here, a principle of general application. In any case, in Evans' scheme – that is, in Christendom – church life and evangelism are inextricably linked. Indeed, I get the distinct impression that, in the new system, evangelism is fast becoming the church's *raison d'être*. If Evans is right, why did Paul not consult the gurus of his day, the experts in the Greek and Roman world? They knew how to gather crowds and influence them. So why did the apostle not call upon them for advice?

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But I now want to penetrate this even further; I want, in a more nuanced way, to expose the wrongness of Evans' approach, which I have called the prostitution of Scripture; a provocative even pejorative term, I admit, but one I will justify.

The prostitution of Scripture

What do I mean by 'a more nuanced approach'? And what do I mean by 'the prostitution of Scripture'?

When I speak of the need for 'nuance', I mean that when we read Scripture we have to distinguish between that which is apostolic practice in the sense of being particular and peculiar to the apostles, and only to them (in other words, exceptional), and that which is normative (in other words, applicable to us). This distinction is not always easy to draw. Great care, therefore, is needed, when taking apostolic practice and applying it to ourselves. For instance, at times, the apostles were enabled to speak and write infallibly, to lay down Christ's law for all believers for all time, to work miracles, and such like. We do not have those powers. Consequently, we have to think very carefully before we transfer apostolic practice to ourselves today. Indeed, before we get to practice we need to be clear on principle. What did the apostles set out in writing as the law of Christ? That is the primary question.

And even here we need care. Let me illustrate the point I am trying to make. Have you not noticed how often evangelicals take (selectively) the powers and statements about apostles and transfer them to 'pastors' without turning a hair? The consequences can be grim. This is what I mean about the need for care at this very sensitive point.

Evans, however, fails miserably in these respects. He moves freely from the practice of the early church to what he wants to establish in Relationship Evangelism, and does so without offering any justification for the leap. I should like to see his warrant for it. Until I do, I can only call it 'the prostitution of Scripture'. If prostitution is considered too strong, let me replace it with 'warping, twisting, distorting'. Evans' approach has all the appearance, not of expounding the

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text, but of using the text to justify a predetermined scheme, of ransacking the Bible for proof texts, of leading the text, not following it. Strong words. I need to justify them. Very well.²⁶

Take Acts 6, and let us see what Evans does with it. First, the sacred record:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said: 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word'. And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose... These [men] they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:1-7).

Now Evans:

They [that is, the apostles] realised that they had to fight on at least two fronts: 'Word *and* Deed'. It is easy to misread their comments in [Acts 6:2]: 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables'. This can sound like a 'a no-brainer'! How can you

²⁶ In a sermon, Evans showed what I am saying. 'Jesus said: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you"'. And with that he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven"' (John 20:21-23). Under Evans' hand this became: join the mission of God, including 'expand the building, grow the church, God's great passion'; 'Christ gives the Holy Spirit; spread the gospel; not being forgiven means die and meet God as our judge'. And so on. A very difficult passage, demanding careful nuance, treated with gay abandon, and simply applied to us, to Kempston Grace in particular. See Evans' sermon: 'Knowing Christ – Mission', a sermon on Acts 16:13-34.

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even put those two acts in the same sentence for comparison – preaching God’s everlasting gospel compared to hearing: ‘*Garçon*, bill please’? Surely no-one who had been saved for eternity by the good news of Christ would ever want to distract anybody into something as menial, trivial and non-essential as ‘table-waiting’. Yet that would be to miss the point of what the disciples are saying.²⁷

Fight on two fronts? What fight was this? Evans has already explained that the early church was meeting attack after attack from Satan. This was the latest. So what should we make of it? Evans:

Let’s look in detail at Acts 6:1-7, using five ‘P’ headings: Pain, Priorities, Plans, Performance and Pointers.²⁸

Evans, developing his thesis, quotes John:

John put it like this: ‘This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence, whenever our hearts condemn us’ (1 John 3:16-20).²⁹

Moving to Acts 6, Evans declares:

They [that is, the apostles and, therefore, the whole church] were faced not with an either/or, but with a both/and. Helping some of the neediest people in their community (and widows were amongst the most vulnerable) was not an optional extra, but an expression of their faith and their love. Not to feed the hungry amongst them would have been a denial of all that they proclaimed. But they still had to get the word out; the gospel had to get to other people too.³⁰

²⁷ Evans p71, emphasis his.

²⁸ Evans p66.

²⁹ Evans pp71-72.

³⁰ Evans p72.

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Now we need be in no doubt as to what Evans has in mind. ‘Word and deed’ is just another way of saying Relationship Evangelism. Provide food for the hungry in the community (in the world, he means) – ‘helping some of the neediest people in [the] community’ – and this will make a way for the gospel:

What the apostles are doing here then is, in effect, organising corporate hospitality. They are not neglecting their own personal responsibility to be hospitable, as in this all Christians are required to be involved, and leaders should excel (see 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). ‘Corporate hospitality’ has a different ring about it today, but it’s significant, as with many good things, that Christianity came up with it. It’s just that in our corporate hospitality, we Christians, rather than buttering up those who might return the favour, help those who can’t (see Matt. 5:46-48; Luke 6:32-36; 14:12-14)... I don’t think a prescriptive and mandatory pattern is given to us here, but it is suggestive of good practice. It’s what leadership wisdom looks like in action.³¹

‘Corporate hospitality’! Evans’ phrase, please note! Do not miss Evans’ admission that ‘corporate hospitality’ is a modern phenomenon, but, having made that token admission, he has no qualms about reading it back into apostolic practice. Here is one definition of what he is talking about:

Corporate hospitality: the entertaining of clients by companies in order to promote business, especially at sporting or other public events.

Let me translate. Big business spends big money to set up big schemes to bribe business executives – seats at Wimbledon, special lounges at football matches, boxes at the theatre, fun days with racing cars, and the like, all accompanied with lavish food and drink. What for? To reward customers or clients for past custom, and to angle for new custom. Relationship Evangelism cashes in – not to make money, of course, but, not to put too fine a point on it, to entertain and bribe pagans with events and food in order to get them into

³¹ Evans pp74-75.

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church attendance. And all of it read into – foisted on – Acts 6, and then read out of Acts 6. Incredible!

Let's look at it a bit more closely and a bit more carefully. Hospitality? Yes, OK, but what we are really talking about in Acts 6 and 1 John is staving off hunger for desperately poor believers in dreadfully reduced circumstances. Does it really need pointing out that the hospitality in Acts 6 and 1 John 3 is entirely internal in the *ekklēsia*? Notice how the passages speak of (believing – see 1 Timothy 5:3-16) 'widows', 'disciples' and 'brothers'. Neither passage in Acts 6 or 1 John 3 has anything to do with putting on meals for pagans to attract them into church attendance.³² Moreover, do passages such as Matthew 5:46-48; Luke 6:32-36; 14:12-14 really justify it? Christ was not speaking of 'corporate hospitality' when he commanded:

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:46-48).

If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:32-36).

³² Just to point out the obvious, but inviting sinners to 'the gospel supper' (Luke 14:16-24) does not mean inviting them to 'come to church'. As for the supper, that is no more literal than the streets and lanes, the poor, crippled, blind and lame of the parable. The work is to get sinners to come to Christ, not church.

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When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:12-14).

I suggest that putting on meals for pagans to attract them to church, adopting the world's principle of 'corporate hospitality', flies in the face of Christ's words. Doing good to people with no ulterior motive – certainly not 'churchifying' the 'unchurched'³³ – is what Christ demands of his people.

Jesus' words on hospitality, as on so many other topics in the Gospels, make uncomfortable reading – very uncomfortable reading, I admit; anything less like 'corporate hospitality' it would be hard to imagine. Relationship Evangelism has turned scriptural hospitality into 'corporate hospitality' – a business venture whose purpose is to drum up 'business' for the sponsor! The bottom line for the

³³ I repeat an important note. I have put the word(s) in inverted comas throughout, even in extracts where it was (they were) not used originally. This is important. We are talking about an import, an invention, of high significance in this vital debate. I am convinced this should be made clear throughout. Evans does not use the phrase 'churchifying the unchurched'. But this is what Relationship Evangelism depends on. Evans: 'Many believers begin to spend more and more time with other Christians. Churches of all sizes can also draw them into an increasingly crowded programme, gobbling up all their discretionary time, so that there's little time left over for relationships with people far from God, or they don't think the ones they already have are of interest to the Lord. Churches can set up some programmes at which the majority of attendees are believers with just a sprinkling of non-Christians. Think of church football teams, church hobby clubs, for example' (Evans p190). Clearly, Evans wants the 'unchurched into church'. But what of his: 'As new people came, they seemed to be added to the fringe. I assumed they weren't committed, but were consuming the parts of church they liked. So I would urge more dedication (Evans p104)? In addition to the 'consuming', note the 'as new people came'. Is Evans talking about believers or unbelievers? In his scheme, does it matter?

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commercial enterprise is profit for the business, while for evangelicals it is getting more 'unchurched' to attend church.

Consider Christ's actions on the issue. Christ provided food, certainly – to satisfy the hunger of those whom he had been addressing for a long time; but there was no thought whatsoever that he provided bread in order to attract attenders. Indeed, having worked this humanitarian miracle, almost immediately he deliberately delivered what must count as his most penetrating and divisive discourse (John 6:26-59) in order to put a stop, once and for all, to the dangerous nonsense of trying to attract hearers by means of food. Clearly, he will have nothing to do with the use of such bribery. He well knows the risk: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves' (John 6:26). Christ was blunt, confrontational, not to say downright aggressive in what he said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you (John 6:53)

The result of his discourse? This:

When many of his [professing] disciples heard it, they said: 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?' (John 6:60).

Jesus immediately responded, driving his point home even harder:

But Jesus, knowing in himself that his [professing] disciples were grumbling about this, said to them: 'Do you take offence at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe'... After this many of his [professing] disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve: 'Do you want to go away as well?' Simon Peter answered him: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God' (John 6:61-69).

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So much for putting on meals to attract sinners to hear the gospel! If that does not put the kibosh on such talk, nothing will!

Take another case. Matthew had a dinner. Jesus went. The Pharisees complained. Yet Evans, calling on Hybels, turns this into a justification for the church to put on meals for the ‘unchurched’:

Then there is Matthew’s first act on becoming a follower of Jesus. ‘Follow me’, Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples: ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and “sinners”?’ Jesus answered them: ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’ (Luke 5:27-32). No wonder the American church leader, Bill Hybels, calls events where you get a whole load of people far from God together with a few followers of Christ, ‘Matthew parties’.³⁴

As we have seen, in the New Testament hospitality in the *ekklēsia* is an in-house thing (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9), never used, never even thought of being used, as an evangelistic tool or bait. There is not a glimmer of support for the notion that the early church used hospitality – food and drink – to attract the ‘unchurched’. And yet people ate and drank in those days, and, I have no doubt, got as much pleasure out of it as we do.

What is more, Peter’s words – ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you’ (Acts 3:6) – play into this. Let me modernise his words. I do not see that I am taking a massive leap. ‘Prunes stuffed with peppered olives, canapés and profiteroles, all with constant coffee, from Latte through Long Black to Espresso, on tap, I do have, and all to get you to come to church’. Hmm! And what did Peter give the crowd – after the unique working of the miracle? Just a walloping sermon with this as its punch line: ‘Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given

³⁴ Evans p149.

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among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). Nonsense, intolerant, totally exclusive confrontational preaching of Christ, with no mention of church attendance.

Getting back to Acts 6, the sad truth is, Evans takes – manipulates – a one-off crisis in the early church, something wholly concerned with an internal problem within the *ekklēsia* – nothing, nothing at all to do with pagans – and turns it into an attempted justification for a deeds ministry in the community – that is, in the world – to make a way for pagans to be evangelised; in other words, 'churchified'.

Evans commends previous approaches to 'word and deeds' where its advocates (Keller and Hybels, for instance) in Evans' estimate got it right:

The evangelical church has looked at this plenty of times over the last century. The key to grasping their solution was their understanding that the church had both to speak *and* act, but they, within that mission task, had their own personal priorities for which they were gifted and called. It was about establishing some organisational order to accomplish the twofold task, rather than elevating one to a high priority at the expense of the other. It was not Word instead of Deed, or Word at the cost of Deed, or Word with Deed following a poor second (or *vice versa* for any of these). It was word and deed, but with the apostles focussing on their own priority of prayer and Word [Acts 6:4].³⁵

This abuse of Acts 6 is not an isolated example. Evans shows that he is very fond of taking scriptural passages concerning the internal life of the *ekklēsia* and applying them to outreach in the pagan 'community'. Consider, for instance, 1 Timothy 5. This is what Evans makes of it:

Other structures may need to be in place to promote growth. Timothy, for instance, is given an action plan to help widows (1 Tim. 5:3-16).³⁶

Yes, in this passage, Paul certainly does give instruction on how the *ekklēsia* should care for its widows; its widows, I

³⁵ Evans pp72, emphasis his. See also Evans p226.

³⁶ Evans p108.

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stress. But the idea that the apostle was telling Timothy how to set up a deeds ministry to cater for the pagan widows in Ephesus, or was giving him instructions on how to run such a scheme to maximise the attendance of the ‘unchurched’ ‘at church’, is grotesque. The whole matter from start to finish was internal, entirely within the *ekklēsia*.

Let me quote the passage:

Honour widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work (1 Tim. 5:3-10).

All in-house, you see.

Incidentally, there is an inherent, but unexpected, danger in institutionalising hospitality as a bribe. I have heard of a church (not Kempston Grace Community) where a widow in her eighties, one who has serious medical problems, one who has been a member of her evangelical church for about 65 years, and who now needs her garden tidied – and whose jobbing gardener fails to turn up. She approached the leader of ‘the gardening team’ within the church. ‘We cannot help you’, was his reply. ‘We only do the gardens of those outside the church. We don’t do them for members’! What now of: ‘Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, *especially to those who belong to the family of believers*’ (Gal. 6:10)?

Leaving that to one side (though it is a serious warning), Evans’ misuse – abuse – of 1 Timothy 5 is just that: that

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which was established for internal church life is applied willy-nilly to evangelism, which is defined as the effort to get the ‘unchurched’ to ‘come to church’. With either the thinnest of scriptural justification or downright prostitution of the text, Evans tries to make his case:

The Bible encourages doing good to all – whether they convert or not (see especially Gal. 6:10) [why not whether they are converted or not? – DG]. God shows his kindness to the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45), and so should we. Acts of kindness can indeed connect people to the gospel.³⁷

Nobody denies it. But, in 1 Timothy 5, was Paul teaching organisational methods, time and motion studies for it?

But all this is the merest skirmishing. Evans’ largest attempt – largest by far – at scriptural justification for his scheme is drawn from Acts 16.³⁸ He takes three incidents in that chapter, incidents which took place at Philippi when Paul and Silas first entered Europe with the gospel, so that he can ‘use’ – note the word – so that he can use them to fine-tune Relationship Evangelism. He is quite open about it:

I am going to use each story to help churches develop strategies for reaching people, devoting a chapter to each one.

Before we immerse ourselves in this, we need to ask if this really was the Holy Spirit’s purpose in recording this series of remarkable episodes. Does Acts 16 let us into the secret of Paul’s strategies? Did he even have a strategy? That is, on entering Europe, did Paul have a plan of action worked out so that he could accomplish a measurable aim? And does the

³⁷ Evans p170.

³⁸ Why does Evans never refer to Acts 14 or 17? For Acts 17, in my view a most important chapter in this debate, see the chapter ‘Paul at the Areopagus: The Antithesis of Relationship Evangelism’. As for Acts 16, Evans owns his debt to Keller: ‘I am indebted to Timothy Keller for highlighting the structure of Acts 16’ (Evans p231). But is Evans’ (Keller’s) scheme ‘the structure of Acts 16’?

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Spirit record this in Acts 16 so that we, today, can use the apostle's principles and set up our own 'strategies for reaching people'? Indeed, would Paul have needed to read Evans' book to find out what his strategies ought to have been in order to reach people?

The three episodes are:

1. The conversion³⁹ of Lydia.
2. The healing of the demoniac girl.
3. The conversion⁴⁰ of the jailer.

Evans turns these episodes into three chapters:

1. 'Reach out in Mission: "Come and See" creates wins for everyone'.⁴¹
2. 'Touch a Community: "Care and Serve" changes lives for ever'.
3. 'Transform a Life: preparing everyone for "Go and Tell"'.⁴²

This is a very important section in Evans' book, not only in terms of the space Evans allocates to it, but because it has all the appearance of being his main attempt at setting out a scriptural justification for Relationship Evangelism. According to Evans, in our working of the scheme, God has not left us without a map and compass; we have both in our quest for a 'deeds ministry'. Indeed, we are not on a 'quest' at all. Calm study of Acts 16 will confirm Relationship Evangelism. So says Evans. Hmm! We shall see.

Evans:

Happily, we aren't left to our own devices.⁴³

³⁹ My word, not Evans'.

⁴⁰ My word, not Evans'.

⁴¹ I have already noted the sharp contrast between Evans' 'Come and see' and Christ's 'Go and tell'.

⁴² Evans pp143-210.

⁴³ Evans p144.

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I must break in here. Evans, of course, means that we have Scripture to guide us. I find this a remarkable statement from a man who writes a book which is so heavily taken up with telling us how to do the job he specifies, yet doing so in a way which is the very opposite to what he says here; I mean, of course, that he demonstrates clearly how much and how heavily he depends on sources other than God's word. I say that Evans falls foul of his own rubric. Evans, as I have shown, justifies his scheme by going outside Scripture and calling in professional advisers and consultants from the world. Why does he do it – if, as he said, 'we aren't left to our own devices'? As he declared:

The Lord speaks in his word, and speaks clearly. For Acts 16 represents a description of how the gospel can reach every city, town, village and hamlet.⁴⁴ If you care about gospel progress, this passage merits your very careful attention.⁴⁵

So it does! But not only does this explode all his previous consultation of pagan experts, Evans now fails to give 'very careful attention' to the passage in his exegesis. He goes on:

Luke shows the gospel reaching very dissimilar people – a woman, a slave and a Gentile – and in different ways. Whereas the message is prominent in all three, *how* the person comes into contact with it varies. I am going to use each story to help churches develop strategies for reaching people, devoting a chapter to each one.⁴⁶

Here we run smack into the issue I am addressing. Acts 16 records God's sovereign will, grace and power in action in the conversion of sinners. It shows how he breaks into a sinner's life and changes it. It shows no planning or scheming by Paul and Silas. It has not the slightest connection with Relationship Evangelism. Quite the reverse; it shows God's eternal, electing purpose and plan being worked out through men who, in themselves, were impotent, men who had no church to

⁴⁴ Evans owns his debt to Keller for this (Evans pp144,231).

⁴⁵ Evans p144.

⁴⁶ Evans p145, emphasis his.

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organise into ‘community outreach’, or ‘deeds ministry’. As Peter told Cornelius: ‘I too am [only] a man’ (Acts 10:26). Paul said of himself, addressing pagans: ‘We also are men, of like nature with you’ (Acts 14:15). I am reminded of the apostolic assessment of Elijah: ‘Elijah was a human being, even as we are’ (Jas. 5:17). Included in those descriptions, surely we can see the truth of Paul’s assertion that God does not choose the slick and the polished to accomplish his eternal purpose, to fulfil *his* plan, but turns to and uses the weak and foolish, those without clever schemes and plans (1 Cor. 1:18 – 3:23). Do not miss the large amount of space Paul devoted to making this point. It shows its importance to the apostle.

It is utterly self-evident that the apostle had no thought whatsoever of setting up a scheme to attract the ‘unchurched’ to ‘church’. Take Lydia. Why did Paul walk along the towpath at Philippi that sabbath? Because he had heard that a group of Jewish women were gathering there for some spiritual purpose. He had no blueprint that he was working to. Not at all! Far from it! He simply went along the riverside, approached the group, sat down, and kept his eyes and ears open for any opportunity that might crop up, trusting no doubt in the providence of God. I dare say he had even prayed about it! But he had no scheme worked out whereby he might reach these women! To all appearances, everything hinged on a series of ‘accidents’ or ‘coincidences’.

Gill, wisely commenting on Acts 16:13, said:

It looks as if there was no synagogue of the Jews in this place, or otherwise the apostle and his companions would have gone into that, according to their custom.

Calvin, in his *Commentary*, went further:

It was not lawful for [the Jews] to assemble themselves publicly at Philippi, which was a free city of Rome.

I can only say that the account has all the appearance of Philippi having no synagogue. Otherwise, I can think of no reason why Paul would have forsaken his usual practice of going where he had opportunity to address Jews – the

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synagogue. So, he used his ‘nous’ (common sense) and, since there was no synagogue, he went where he knew he would find a gathering where, perhaps, he could speak.

As for the other two episodes – the girl and the jailer – once again Paul had no plan or scheme. You could say that he was stumbling along at the mercy of events.⁴⁷ He simply let his words burst out when he was being pestered by the girl, and took the opportunity afforded him by the earthquake and the jailer’s question. Does this represent a strategy? Would Evans recommend this as a strategy today for ‘reaching people’?

Yet this is precisely what Evans tries to do – warp all this into devising strategies! Where does *that* come from? It would be closer to the mark to expound and apply Acts 16 to give a ringing encouragement for the saints to see and look for the sovereign grace of God in action, to use common sense, to make the most of every opportunity, and strike while the iron is hot, trusting the Lord to open doors and make use of any feeble contribution they might make, even in, and as a result of, suffering for the gospel. The idea that Paul entered Europe with a file of management plans in his toga pocket is simply fantastic. While Evans wants a professional approach, the new-covenant approach of the apostles was clearly amateur, in the fullest sense of the word; namely, with no clever plan, but out of sheer love. Only the Holy Spirit of God has a plan!

Let us probe a little deeper into these three episodes.

Lydia’s conversion⁴⁸

Paul, uninvited, off his own bat, drew close to some Jewish women gathered by the riverside, and sat down. In due time, he spoke. Lydia was converted. The Lord had opened her heart.

Evans utterly inverts this. According to Evans, what we must learn from this is that the church is to set up meetings for

⁴⁷ A young reporter asked Harold Macmillan what had given him most difficulty in his time as Prime Minister. Macmillan, in fine patrician form, did not hesitate: ‘Events, dear boy, events’.

⁴⁸ Evans pp143-168.

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religious (though, I presume, unconverted) people. Really? At the time, there was no church whatsoever in Philippi! Nobody set up an event to gather religious people so that the gospel could be preached to them. In putting this construction on Lydia's conversion, Evans displays a staggering gall. If his is the right approach, why bother with Scripture?

He goes on to talk of inviting people to 'events', 'the journey to faith', 'just meeting some Christians with whom they have some fun or a nice conversation can take away suspicion and move them towards faith'.⁴⁹ A bit different to Acts 16:13-15, isn't it? Evans gets to his position by speculating about the way Lydia had been prepared: 'Many people and life events had been used by God to move her along'; along to her conversion, I suppose. But what believers had Lydia met before Paul came across her that sabbath? There was no church in Philippi (or Thyatira, where she had come from, before that) to organise a 'deeds-ministry' to 'move her along'. To say that the church should set up a whole host of activities to provide for the Lydias out there, and argue this from Acts 16:13-15, is rather a leap, is it not?

Listen to Evans as he reads what he wants to find into Acts 16, and then reads it back out again, and all in order to justify Relationship Evangelism. Before we look in a little more detail at Evans' speculations, let us remind ourselves of the facts. In Acts 16, we are not reading about a church; there was no church in Philippi. Paul was not organising anything, let alone a 'deeds-ministry'; he was simply attaching himself to a group of Jewish women hoping that an opportunity might crop up (in God's plan, no doubt) for him to speak of Christ to the women. Evans, however, is on another planet. This following extract, please remember, comes from Evans' reading and use of Acts 16:13-15. Here are his words. Even though I must admit that presenting Evans' words in the following truncated way leaves me feeling somewhat sand-blasted with Christmas-speak, I think it gives a fair representation of the high esteem with which Evans regards the Christendomed-

⁴⁹ Evans pp150-151.

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pagan festival. If he went in for patron saints, Prince Albert ought to come high on his list of candidates. But remember, all this is said in the context of Christ. Phew! Evans:

Friendship... some fun, eat some food... Then come events with 'gospel tasters'... church picnic... Christianity Explored... Creating an invite culture... create multiple entry points... events... gospel tasters... events... Christmas... Christmas is a great place to start... church carol service... carol service... Community Carol Service... local mayor... meal with a message... beautifully produced invite cards... put on the best buffet food possible... services need to be accessible to outsiders... organise a range of events... planning... invest in excellent publicity... spa therapy day... a chilli farm... a golf day... at Normandy... battlefield tour... friendship builders... Something spiritually down the track... wait until... real signs of interest before... Explore or Identity courses... food and friendship... summer barbecue... Christmas bring-and-share... picnic in the park, wood or beach... large... offer them food... Christmas events... events... events... events.⁵⁰

How on earth does all this come from the scriptural account of Lydia's conversion? Where shall I start?

Take Evans' emphasis on food. And it is a big emphasis.⁵¹ He advocates a 'meal with a message', properly organised of course, with 'beautifully produced invite cards', 'best buffet food possible'.⁵² Having dealt with this earlier in this chapter, I will say no more at this point.

In addition to that, notice how Evans majors on capitalising on Christmas – and how! That, in itself, is another topic that needs a radical examination. Evans simply accepts Christendom's commandeering of the pagan festival and the heap of sentiment it has piled upon it. Christmas to Evans is the bee's-knees when it comes to 'churchifying' the 'unchurched'. As a result, we get Christendom gone mad. Listen to Evans under: 'Happy Christmas, I'd love it if...':

⁵⁰ Evans pp150-168.

⁵¹ The word alone appears nearly 20 times in Evans' book.

⁵² Evans pp157-158.

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If organising ‘Come and See’ is a good way to foster real growth as a result of the gospel getting to places it hadn’t before, then it’s worth working extra hard to see it develop. And Christmas is a great place to start. We can invite anyone we know to a church carol service – with a big smile and a friendly ask. Most people will say ‘No’ – it may be competing with *Sports Personality of the Year* on TV. But some will say: ‘I’d love to’ and you might be surprised that a church of just thirty could hold a carol service with a hundred present – so long as the invites are *personal*, and not leaflets through a door. That is key. Remember people like to be asked, even if they say ‘No’. The impersonal doesn’t go far with people today in an era of junk mail.

Leaders should model this. Too many pastors, vicars, ministers, elders only *challenge* members to bring people, but don’t do it themselves. Once *you* start, others will begin to catch the vision that God reaches people through Word settings.⁵³

You can go and personally ask neighbours two or three doors either side of you and give them a warm invite to a carol service. You know their faces; they know yours. They may be of no faith or another faith, but a positive invite goes miles.

Ask people from your leisure activities too. And if you are a minister, you will bump into some who are not yet Christians.⁵⁴ Maybe you speak at a school and you could ask the head or the person who facilitates your speaking there. You could invite those on your Christmas card list living locally – maybe some friends you made when your children were at school. If your children are still at school, you and your wife can ask all the people you smile to at the gate. Once you think about it, you could ask a lot of people to a carol service. Some may come. And what is true for you, using some initiative and imagination, needs communicating to the whole church, for the same will be true for them, too. Every member knows people who can be invited at

⁵³ I do not know what Evans means by this. Does he mean ‘where they can here preaching’?

⁵⁴ This is a loaded way of speaking. How does Evans or anybody else know if such people are going to be converted? Why does he seem to want to avoid ‘unconverted’? As I have noted, he never once uses the word in his book.

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Christmas and this is still culturally acceptable almost everywhere in the UK, Europe, and in many countries around the world.

Any size of church can work at this, for it's not just the province of the biggest. Years ago, our medium-sized church had a normal carol service. We put leaflets through doors, and waited to see who might show up. We had a few (alright then, a tiny handful) of visitors most years. But then we began to seize the day. We really started to encourage people to invite others. We showed them it was normal to invite anyone they knew. We reminded them: 'Don't say people's "No" for them'. We also underlined that a 'No' was not a problem; it was still a positive contact with someone, rather than no contact at all. We hired a much bigger hall. We called it the Community Carol Service. We invited the local mayor. He was delighted to be asked, and came! We all invited like mad, and had over 300 new people turn up – we usually had about a hundred attending altogether [at that time in our church life]. People realised: 'It can be done'.

I need to be honest here and confess. I encouraged all of this, but I wasn't optimistic. Temperamentally, I am more of a pessimist than even a 'glass half-empty' person. Those setting out the hall put out all the chairs: 400. When I saw what they had done, I thought they were being ridiculous. I put about half [of the chairs] away. Out they all had to come again. 'O you of little faith'. I am not allowed to forget that day – and rightly so!

A serious word of advice: make sure you sing traditional carols that people expect. I heard of some new Christians being disappointed when their church used the Street Bible for a Christmas outreach service. The whole thing bombed [that is, failed], and their visiting relatives felt alienated. Being too trendy was a bigger barrier than being traditional, ironically!

Yet we aren't naïve about all this. People come because it's the time of the year, rather than because of a direct interest in Christ. In a culture losing its sense of Christian heritage, however, don't underestimate the impact of large numbers coming to Christmas services. Many never go inside a church (building), and to have a positive experience helps break down barriers to further gospel exposure. For young adults in particular, it may be an eye-opening experience, and they may begin to question why their culture so prejudicially

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misrepresents Christianity. Beyond that, we have seen significant numbers progress in their journey to faith, and some have even become believers.⁵⁵ It all started by being invited to a carol service.

This is a great way for Christians to discover that inviting people is not difficult. Warm feedback about how friendly it all was, plus seeing the whole church achieve more than any individual could on their own, gives a positive sense of gospel impact. A ‘win’ here can foster a habit of inviting friends to other things.

Once the church sees it can be done, they will follow your lead. By the way, this change from being a leader-as-preacher to a leader-as-model/example/equiper is an important mindset shift, both for the leader and the church. Instead of just telling people how it should be done, you show it, and then the call to ‘follow me’ is so much more powerful (1 Cor. 11:1; also recall comments about Paul and Timothy in Phil. 2:18-19).⁵⁶

There is yet more (yes, there is more) in the same vein,⁵⁷ but I break off. I leave Evans’ use of Lydia’s conversion there. Evans has utterly prostituted what we are told in Acts 16:13-15, accommodated it wholesale to Christendom, in order to justify his scheme.

Will he do any better with the second episode taken from Acts 16?

The cure of the demoniac girl⁵⁸

How the deliverance of the demoniac girl in Acts 16:16-23 can be turned into a ‘deeds ministry’, reaching the unconverted through church systems to ‘Touch A Community’, utterly baffles me. Nevertheless, Evans manages it – or thinks he does.

Let us start with what we know. Here is Luke’s record:

⁵⁵ What is this ‘progress in their journey to faith’ which falls short of trust in Christ?

⁵⁶ Evans pp153-156, emphasis his.

⁵⁷ Evans pp156-157.

⁵⁸ Evans pp169-183.

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As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out: 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation'. And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit: 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her'. And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said: 'These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice'. The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:16-24).

I am, of course, saying nothing against personal acts of charity and kindness (Gal. 6:10; Matt. 5:45); indeed, they are highly commendable. More – we are commanded to engage in such. But to turn this into setting up a system of church-based organisations and events in order to attract the 'unchurched' to 'church' in order to evangelise them, is nothing short of cavalier.

Evans, needless to say, has no compunction about reading 'deeds ministry' out of the scriptural record:

Demon-possessed slave girls aren't generally people's friends, and won't get reached however good your invite-culture [getting friends to events] is. You need to go and find people like this.⁵⁹

But that is precisely what Paul and Silas did not do! Luke's account gives not the slightest justification for this deduction;

⁵⁹ Evans p171.

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none whatsoever. It is a pure imposition on the text, nothing less.

Nevertheless, despite this fatal break in the chain of his argument, Evans spells out a host of ways this ‘deed ministry’ can be worked:

‘Care and Serve’... some kind of service for community well-being... Meals on Wheels or hospital transport or be a Girl Guide troop leader – the list of ways is endless [see Dorcas] (Acts 9:36-39)... [help] down-and-outs... the church can also play a role in organising community projects... organise deeds of kindness and ministries of mercy in a more deliberate way... developing Deed ministry in a community... counselling centre... homeless people... a food bank... crafts and other activities... Christmas hampers... people in debt... community... English for Speakers of Other Languages course... lunchtime meetings for elderly people [with] a free lunch...⁶⁰

Evans pauses: ‘Where does the gospel fit into all of this?’ he asks.⁶¹ Excellent! The very question we need to ask, but along with another: How does all this come from the curing of the demoniac in Acts 16?

Undeterred, Evans ploughs on:

Much of the time it is shared through conversations. Many want to find out more, and are given a warm invitation to church. Often when they have come and heard the gospel, they have kept coming. Those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds have found the church to be a place of acceptance and love.³ They see true community worked out in a situation where they are welcomed. This is a message that contrasts powerfully with our highly individualised and achievement-at-all-costs culture.

One working class man, Keith, once remarked that he found it amazing that his best friend, whom he had met at church, was a highly qualified research scientist whose wife was a lawyer. He could never have imagined that before becoming a Christian. Another couple, Brian and Sue, after a lifetime of problems, heard the gospel and became believers. They

⁶⁰ Evans pp171-174.

⁶¹ Evans p175.

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are learning to read, and now read the Bible. They are getting out of debt and have some money in an account, but it's never easy to manage on the little that comes in. They come to church and especially like the talks and friendship. Their health is poor though, and they have to take many tablets. Their little car constantly breaks down. They still live on a tough estate and get hassle from local jobs. But we pray with them and commit everything to our heavenly Father, and he gives them grace to cope every day. Their presence is a joy, and they love being part of the family of the living God.⁶²

That's not the end of it:

For those who can't make [that is, get to] church on Sunday, [we have set up] a course geared for women on the fringe called the Well Woman Workshop... childcare and food are provided... an instructor... on physical well-being... caring for... mental health... Christianity Explored. It's another pathway in, another of the multiple-entry points... Needy and disadvantaged men... It is critical to have stepping stones for ministry to connect people to the gospel. Meeting real needs is where it starts. Relationships and conversations are where it goes next. And courses and church are where the gospel can be explored in more depth... Come-and-See events... community... Care-and-Serve strategy... Social Action... Care and Serve... Girl Guide leader... Christmas hampers... Christian para-church organisations... food-bank system... offer courses... build relationships with local agencies...⁶³ establish networks with other service providers... develop a few projects really well... don't disconnect Word and Deed, but remember that Word needs accessing in a variety of ways... Keep making sure that Deed and Word go together, for another temptation for the large church is not to think about this, but to just organise deeds, because there is always a crowd under the word of God on a Sunday... Deed ministries... Deed ministry... discuss spiritual and sociological struggles that... outside people face as they are reached by Deed ministry.⁶⁴

⁶² Evans pp175-176.

⁶³ In Acts 16, the 'local agencies' flung Paul and Silas into prison and flogged them.

⁶⁴ Evans pp176-183.

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As to the real questions in Evans' estimation – as opposed to 'where is the gospel'? – we need be in no doubt. Judging by the time he takes to raise and answer the topics he has in mind, he is most concerned with setting up activities and dealing with things such as with the cost, staff, human resources, church size, cooperation with others (the local council, park rangers, charities), relationships involved in it all.⁶⁵

Significantly Evans talks about 'previous client stories' being good both for 'publicity' and 'one of the most powerful weapons in relaying the gospel'.⁶⁶ A bit like getting a favourable review on Amazon?

Let me remind you where all this is supposed to have come from. All out of the miraculous cure of the slave girl! Let me remind you of the scriptural account:

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out: 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation'. And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit: 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her'. And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said: 'These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice'. The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:16-24).

⁶⁵ Evans pp178-181.

⁶⁶ Evans p181.

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Does Acts 16:16-24 really teach Relationship Evangelism as set out by Evans? Is Evans justified in using the passage to this end? These questions should not be taken to mean that I am speaking against spontaneous, individual contact with unbelievers, and using all such contact as a way to spread the gospel. But this is a far cry from Relationship Evangelism. Once again, I can only register my contempt for Evans' prostitution of the record of the miraculous cure of the wretched slave girl.

And so to the third and final episode.

The conversion of the jailer⁶⁷

Since I have already referred to the episode of the jailer in the chapter 'Conversion', I will be brief here.

Evans quite rightly observes that 'Paul found himself in a situation where he had the opportunity to share the faith. He showed great grace to a man who caused him great pain'.⁶⁸ Excellent, except... it is more than that. I am not sure that Paul would agree that he 'shared the faith' with the jailer. Actually, Paul declared the gospel to the man, and did so with authority: he invited him – he commanded him – to trust Christ, assuring him of salvation if he did. So why does Evans invent (or at least use) these euphemisms for what can be put more scripturally? Why not stick to Scripture? Does he have an agenda here?

From this episode, Evans launches into:

Churches can set up programmes at which the majority of attendees are believers with just a sprinkling of non-Christians. Think of church football teams, church hobby clubs... The Master wants us mixed in and making a difference... provide 'Come and See' by organising good events... promote 'Care and Serve'... We wanted to help people by training them to come up with a clear and concise version of their own story...⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Evans pp184-210.

⁶⁸ Evans pp188-189.

⁶⁹ Evans pp190-198.

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I fail to see how all this – or, in fact, any of it – comes from the conversion of the jailer. What is more, it is utterly at variance with what we read in Scripture. As I have said, the New Testament certainly speaks of ‘come and see’, but it was always come to Christ (Matt. 11:28; John 1:39-46; 4:29-30; 5:40; 7:37). In Evans’ scheme, ‘come to Christ’ has become ‘come to a church event’. It reminds me of the evangelist who confuses his hearers by equating ‘coming to the front’ with ‘coming to Christ’.

Some parting shots in this chapter

As he comes to the close of his chapter ‘Touch a Community: “Care and Serve” Changes Lives for Ever’, Evans states:

Develop a few projects really well, rather than get over-stretched. The needs are huge, and the temptation is to want to do everything, to respond to every request that comes your way, or to develop ministries reflecting every burden the members feel. But better to be a small but effective part of all that is happening than to gain a reputation for doing lots but of poor quality.

Don’t disconnect word and deed, but remember that word needs accessing in a variety of ways. Low-key discussions while relaxing may be a better way for some men to access Christian truth than a direct ‘Here’s what you have to learn’ course. Keep making sure that deed and word go together, for another temptation for the large church is not to think about this, but just to organise deeds because there is always a crowd under the word of God on a Sunday.⁷⁰

Naturally, the world will like it.⁷¹ Free food, a warm atmosphere, a friendly social ambience, and all the rest? OK, they have to swallow the ‘religious bit’, but that’s a price worth paying. I am not making it up.

Let me illustrate. When walking in the Yorkshire Dales, close to Reeth, I tried to engage two wallers (men repairing a stone wall) by pointing out the size of the Congregational Church building close by on the rise of the field, making the

⁷⁰ Evans pp182-183.

⁷¹ See the following note.

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point that it showed how many people must have attended a hundred years ago. ‘Yes’, replied the waller as he continued to pick up his stones; ‘but they had to, didn’t they?’, he asked. Straightening his back, he looked me squarely in the face and said: ‘If they didn’t, they didn’t get a job!’ Having nothing by way of reply, I sidled off, my tail tucked between my legs.

So, I repeat, I am not at all surprised that, if offered sufficient bait, carnal people will attend ‘church events’. Allowing for the changes in incidentals, many of today’s unbelievers will pay the price demanded, and gratefully accept the benefits offered them by the advocates of Relationship Evangelism.

Evans knows this, of course. Let me remind you of what he himself recorded, recorded with approval, of the world’s gratitude for ‘deeds ministry’:

An MP⁷² once remarked to me that he’d love to see churches... grow to 1000 strong, for, he said, they do so much for the community. But he pleaded for us not to start ten churches of 100. He had worked out the economies of scale.⁷³

I raise this again, in company with the new material, because it so glaringly contradicts what we have in Acts 16, where Paul and Silas met stern opposition and punishment for curing the demoniac – not the grateful thanks of ‘the community’ and its social-services department.

With all this talk of ‘friendship’ with the people of the world in order to get them to attend church to be evangelised, what about James 4:4? Does that verse have any bearing on the practice? Evans does not seem to think so; he never once

⁷² I said I would return to this MP. I can imagine being told this MP was a believer. Very well. But he wasn’t speaking merely as a believer – even if he was one. He was speaking as an MP. Naturally, governments will be delighted with free social care provided by churches. MPs would be equally pleased by similar events at the local mosque and Hindu temple and the like.

⁷³ Evans p180.

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quotes it. Judge for yourself. Here are the apostle's stern words:

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4).

We know what C.H.Spurgeon thought:

In one sense, Christians are the greatest friends of the world, for they desire the good of all men, and seek their salvation. But, in another sense, viewing the world as a great conglomerate of evil, we are no friends of the world. There is a certain form of theology, popular nowadays, which teaches us that we ought to remove the line of demarcation between the church and the world. This kind of teaching may be called theology, but it comes not of God; it is a gross falsehood which we ought to abhor in the very depth of our spirit.⁷⁴

Summary of Acts 16⁷⁵

This is how Evans sums up his case:

Add... the strategies developed from the stories of the converts in Acts 16 to the two other goals of growing to maturity and serving one another in ministry, and the result is the founding of thriving gospel churches like that at Philippi. No wonder Paul said: 'I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now' (Phil. 1:3-5). Do you pray like that for your church? I hope you can soon begin to do so.⁷⁶

So now you know: adopt Relationship Evangelism and you will soon have a thriving church like that at Philippi in Acts 16.

I am bound to ask: Did the church at Philippi have an advance copy of Evans' book? Well, it couldn't have, could it? The

⁷⁴ Spurgeon exposition following sermon 2795

⁷⁵ Evans pp207-208.

⁷⁶ Evans p207.

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church did not even exist before Paul had travelled through the region spoken of in Acts 16. Did he give them a copy as a parting gift?

These are not flippant questions. We are talking about the sufficiency of Scripture.

I close this chapter with the extract from Evans' book with which I began it:

Elders must lead by teaching according to the clear principles of the word [of God] (for Christ rules his church through his word). They must give sufficient scriptural arguments, fair reasoning and proper examples for [any] suggested change.⁷⁷

At the time, I said: 'Very well. Let us see'.

Do you think Evans has stuck to his rubric, and met his own prescribed terms?

⁷⁷ Evans p57.