

Edited by
STEPHEN BAKER

Editorial on
Evangelism
Page 1

CONSUMERISM
Thoughts about
Thinking
Page 2

ADVENTURES IN ACTS
Acts 17 -
Metropolitan
Evangelism
Page 5

THE VALUE OF
fellowship
Page 7



Volume 12
Number 4

NOVEMBER
2015

Editorial on Evangelism Local Church Evangelism

In our recent YPS editorials I have been focusing on evangelism. As local assemblies we need to constantly refocus on this key issue. In this edition we are going to think about how a local church could get the message of the gospel out and about. In addition to this, Jeremy Singer continues to guide us through the Acts of the Apostles, Paul Robinson from Manchester challenges us about the influence of friends in our lives, and Michael Buckeridge makes us think. I am praying that all of this will stimulate you to walk and work for the glory and pleasure of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Local Assembly Based Outreach

As we continue to look at the need to spread the good news of salvation, let's think of some ways this can be achieved. Please bear in mind that this list is not exhaustive. You may have other methods of reaching out with the gospel that have not crossed my mind, but the Lord has opened up for you. Some of the suggestions I give may not be possible in conjunction with an established local assembly. For instance, an outreach at football matches could simply work with you going to the area where a match is taking place and giving out leaflets, or preaching to the crowds. In the example I give in this article the outreach is linked to an assembly, as the assembly premises are located close to a football stadium.

The second point I would like to make is this. The instruction given to Christians about spreading the message is threefold:

1. 'Preach the word', 2 Tim. 4. 2;
2. Go out with the gospel – 'go, ye therefore', Matt. 28. 19; and
3. Go into the entire world with the message – 'go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature', Mark 16. 15.

We do not have biblical guidelines about where we can preach, to whom we can preach, or the situations in which we can preach. To listen to some preachers you would think we had detailed rules about when and where we

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED is a supplement of *Precious Seed International* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. YPS is published by *Precious Seed International*, Pitcot Farm, Pitcot Lane, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Radstock BA3 4SX, UK, and is available separately from the main magazine.

can preach the gospel. All we have is specific and clear instructions that state we must go, we must go to all peoples in all places, and we must preach scripture. The maxim 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' must underpin all of our outreach and preaching, Rom. 10. 17.

Always seek the Lord's guidance and direction before starting any work. This is not an excuse to be lazy or visionless, but a reminder that 'except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it', Ps. 127. 1. A careful reading and study of the book of Acts, and Romans chapter 15, will give some examples of visionary planning to spread the gospel, aligned to a sensitive awareness that the Lord will open or close doors as He sees fit.

I will finish with a list of suggestions. If you want more details behind the suggestions please email me at stepcar61@gmail.com and I will send the full article to you.

1. Public meetings to preach the gospel (public venues or in your assembly premises).
 2. Bible exhibition (in your assembly premises, schools, or public venues).
 3. Community gospel tea.
 4. Community visits (more commonly known as door-to-door work).
 5. Parent and toddler work.
 6. Leaflet distribution in town or city centres (event based or ad hoc distribution).
 7. Outreach at football matches and other large public events.
 8. School – based work.
 9. Language classes.
 10. Book and leaflet stalls.
- Until the next YPS...

CONSUMERISM

Thoughts about Thinking

BY MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE GRANTHAM, ENGLAND

This is the first of four papers dealing with issues that we all face in modern society even if we are not aware of it. You may not immediately recognize the terms I am using, but I imagine that most of my readers will be familiar with them but may not wish to give a precise definition. If, at first, you are put off by the technical terminology, please bear with me and read on. My aim is that by the end of the article you will see where I am going, and how it applies to your life.

In Hebrews chapter 13 verse 5, we read the instruction, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness and be content with such things as ye have'. This verse is a necessary reminder in a culture where, 'to keep the economic machine

moving, people have to be dissatisfied with what they *have*; hence, who they *are*'.¹ Which leads me on to my topic – consumerism.

Very simply, consumerism is, 'a way of life built on the centrality of **taking for oneself** goods and things, and where human well-being is assessed in the light of our success in doing this'.² Its growing importance has arisen from observation that, 'in the context of material abundance focal interests in much of everyday life had been reoriented towards possession and use of goods and services'.³ 'Consumer society' is a term that has arisen mainly through critiques of the misuse of affluence in post – war years,⁴ although many will date the seeds of consumerism back to the

1800s and especially the industrial revolution.⁵ The early advertisers recognized the danger of the Christian mindset to its development, setting it as their goal to overcome the Protestant ethic of work, savings and simple living.²

In light of this pervasive mindset, I would suggest that there are a number of questions we need to ask ourselves:

Who am I? – my identity

Traditionally, goods were assigned a value based on their use or exchange value but, since the rise of capitalism and mass production, objects have increasingly carried a sign value.⁶ Things have meaning, and identities are built from things, leading to one person making this startling statement, ‘my view of myself is my neighbour’s view of me’.² It may be argued that goods have always had meaning to individuals, but the increased danger in a mass media age is that these now come with ‘complex meaning in them or attached to them’.⁶ Advertisers dress up goods not just to tell you what they will do *for* you, but what they say *about* you.

Understanding my relationship to God, as a believer, is the only way I can honestly answer the question – Who am I? Primarily, I am the child of a God who has promised to always be there. He is the great I AM, the Lord who changes not. My value in this relationship is based on His eternal immutability, and derived from His matchless glory and virtue. I am free to seek His kingdom first, knowing that everything material will be added unto me according as I have need.

Who am I trying to please? – my individuality

‘The first step in consumption is establishing a mental association with the objects to be

consumed’.⁶ The devil was the first master advertiser, mixing just enough truth with plenty of lies to firmly fix the desire of Eve on the fruit. With a daily bombardment of adverts, we need to take refuge in setting our affections on things above, not on things on the earth, Col. 3. 2.

A characteristic of a consumer society is the availability of choice and credit.⁴ ‘Take the waiting out of wanting’, might give instant gratification, but the value of such goods to us will often diminish quicker than the credit card balance we bought them with, leaving us in debt and hindering us in providing ‘a treasure in the heavens that faileth not’, Luke 12. 33.

Could consumerism affect our attitude to the local church?

The personalized goods market is large and growing,⁷ but should we personalize the moral and spiritual? Is the fact that there are so many churches out there a justification for seeking one that suits me? The scriptures are clear; the church is God’s and He tells us how we ‘ought to behave in the house of God’, 1 Tim. 3. 15.



What about relationships?

It may also affect the way we think about our relationships. If I have the right to choose in order to gain instant satisfaction for myself, the idea of commitment begins to be lost! Rather than persevering when the going gets tough, do we end up shopping around for what pleases us? Consumer societies are characterized by 'an increased breakdown in family and community'.¹ Is this because we are consumers, rather than committed in our relationships?

Does consumerism promote the 'selfie' attitude?

Our Lord made it quite clear that, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive', Acts 20. 35. Have we experienced the joy of, 'my half tasting better because I've given away the other?'¹⁸ This is seen ultimately in the joy we will have as we do what we were designed to do and worship God. The 'prince of this world' has turned God's order on its head, where true happiness is achieved through a complete giving of self to God. I would suggest, therefore, that consumer thinking stands in opposition to the Lord's great summary of the Law; God first, our neighbour second.

Consumerism and the reputation of the Christian

'Consumerism, feeds on feelings of malaise, alienation, and discontent. To heal this malaise, we place a primacy on "things", because we have lost our trust in "relationships". People, "under the influence of consumerism", never feel completely satisfied because owning something cannot help one achieve the security of heart and mind which are the deeper needs of humanity'.⁹ The application is clear. The world ought to see a people moving among them with a peace that

passes all understanding; the peace of God, from God, because we know peace with God.

The challenge!

Do I have a consumer mindset? The old definition of consuming was to, 'use up, waste, destroy'. Is it possible, in light of the answers to the questions we have asked, that, unless we are careful, to be a modern day 'consumer' really has no different meaning? The Christian ought not to be a mere consumer, but a good steward of what God has entrusted to them.

NOTES:

- 1 http://www.consultmcgregor.com/documents/resources/features_of_consumer_society.pdf.
- 2 O.S. GUINNESS, *The good life or a life of goods*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uw35PLnD4WQ>.
- 3 BRYAN S. TURNER (Ed.), *Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology - Consumption*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 88-89.
- 4 Ibid., p. 88.
- 5 Of necessity, in an article of this length, a simple generalized definition and history has to be given to a term and subject which has many factors. (Some of which are more positive than the issues I have focused on.) It should also be noted that I am not professionally qualified in this subject (or any of the following areas to be covered), and they are observations made by a lay person which has stimulated additional research due to recognizing some of these things having an influence on my own thinking.
- 6 ALAN BARNARD AND JONATHAN SPENCER (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology - Consumption*, Routledge, 1996, pp. 128-129
- 7 http://www.sideroad.com/Entrepreneur/personalized_products.html.
- 8 Anne of Green Gables on receipt of her first ever box of caramel chocolates!
- 9 <http://www.kon.org/archives/forum/13-2/mcgregor.pdf> Postmodernism, Consumerism and Peace.

ADVENTURES IN ACTS

Acts 17 - Metropolitan Evangelism

BY JEREMY SINGER BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

Paul is travelling west into Greece, still preaching the gospel message faithfully. The apostle appears to be strategic in his outreach but he is clearly guided by the Holy Spirit; he targets large population centres with established Jewish communities. In this chapter, Paul goes to three places that were, and still are, major cities in Greece.

Rioting in Thessalonica

When Paul visited some areas, he was able to stay for years (e.g., Corinth and Ephesus). By contrast, he only stayed for a few weeks in Thessalonica, Acts 17. 2. Despite this short time, Paul preached the word powerfully and people were saved. He started, as always, at the synagogue, Rom. 1. 16.

The Message: Paul used the Old Testament scriptures to argue that the Messiah 'had to suffer and rise again from the dead', Acts 17. 3 NASB. He may have quoted passages like Genesis chapter 22 and Isaiah chapter 53.

Then, he might have neatly transitioned to the oral accounts of the life of Christ, which we now have as the Gospel narratives, to argue that Jesus is the Christ, Acts 17. 3. When we share the gospel, we must adopt a similar style – both Bible-based and Christ-centred.

The Response: Paul reached out to Jews and God-fearing Greeks. Some were saved, and a local church was planted, Acts 17. 10. However, the jealous Jews, v. 5, caused trouble – expelling Paul, not only from their synagogue, but also from their city. But the apostle's visit had lasting consequences: the new believers remained faithful, and Paul wrote two letters to them over the next few months.

Reading in Berea

Berea (modern day spelling: Veria) is the next location in Paul's itinerary. As the headquarters of Greek resistance against the Nazis in World War 2, this city has an exciting and honourable history.



HOLY
BIBLE

The Message: Paul took the same approach that he used in Thessalonica. He went to the synagogue, and preached the truth about Christ from the scriptures. The substance of his message is not given explicitly, but we presume it to be similar to that at Thessalonica. Even though the message landed Paul in trouble, he never tired of telling it, 1 Cor. 9. 16.

The Response: The audience at Berea was 'more noble', Acts 17. 11, as evidenced by their desire to read the Bible for themselves. They investigated Paul's interpretation and application. 'Honest and good' hearts will always be ready to receive God's word, Luke 8. 15. People were not converted by Paul, but rather by the word of God, Rom. 10. 17. We need to have the same love for God's word, and the same readiness to communicate it.

Reasoning in Athens

Paul arrived at Athens in a hurry, bundled out of Berea by violent Jews. He took his time in this famous city, travelling about to sample the culture and view the monuments. Paul encountered two schools of philosophy in this academic hub: the *Epicureans* thought life should be *enjoyed*, whereas the *Stoics* thought life should be *endured*. Paul realized that their lives were empty without God, who gives true cause for joy, Phil. 4. 4, and true strength for endurance, Phil. 4. 13. Pseudo-intellectual disdain for this simple gospel message, Acts 17. 18, is similarly common today.

The Message: In this typical address to pagans (cp. 14. 15-17) Paul's cultural sensitivity is apparent. He adapts his style but retains all the

key elements of the good news, 1 Cor. 9. 19-23. Paul emphasizes the one true God is the creator and will be the judge of all men. God requires nothing from us, and gives everything to us. Notice how Paul requisitions typical Athenian sights (altar, Acts 17. 23) and sounds (poetry,¹ v. 28). He uses these concepts, which are entirely familiar to his listeners, to press home the claims of God upon them. Two new words enter the consciousness of the Athenian audience – *Jesus* and *resurrection*, Acts 17. 18. These themes are grand challenges to the classical mindset – Paul is presenting them with a genuine hero (Jesus) and a genuine hope (resurrection). Greek mythology, theology, and philosophy were deprived of such genuine articles.

The Response: Paul is addressing the Areopagus – an intellectual debating society in Athens. Some of the audience laugh at the call for repentance, Acts 17. 30, 32. They treat the messenger like his master, John 15. 8. Others procrastinate, unaware that delay is always dangerous with respect to salvation, 2 Cor. 6. 2. A few souls believe, which must have given great encouragement to Paul in his service. It would be good if we could see souls saved too!

To summarize, 21st century society bears remarkable similarities to 1st century society. Some people are God-fearers, but they do not have a personal faith in Christ. Most people are pagans, with no spiritual understanding at all. We need firm evangelical convictions. Like Paul, we must have sensitivity to people's needs, and an earnest desire to share the word of God with them.

1 The original Greek writers were describing Zeus, but Paul appropriates the poetry to describe the one true God. Similarly, I have no trouble singing decent hymns by suspect authors. For example, 'Nearer my God to Thee' was written by a Unitarian, and 'Praise to the Holiest in the height' was penned by a member of the Oxford movement.

THE VALUE OF

fellowship



BY PAUL ROBINSON MANCHESTER

Introduction

In John's Gospel, we read four short phrases which begin with the words 'it was'. In themselves, they seem to be just simple statements of fact, which appear to add nothing of consequence to the narrative. But since we believe that there are no wasted words in the Bible and that the Holy Spirit directed the writers to write what they did, it would be wise to look for the lessons that can be learned from them! In this article, we will consider the third of these 'it was cold'.

It was cold – the fact

We read this little statement in John's account of the Lord's arrest and trial. Peter followed the Lord after His arrest and gained admittance to the courtyard of the palace of the high priest. As Peter passed through the door into the courtyard, the girl who opened the door for him asked him if he was one of the Lord's disciples. He denied it.

Once Peter was in the courtyard, we read in John chapter 18 verse 18

'And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for **it was cold**: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.'

We know that these events took place in the Jewish equivalent of our month of April, a spring month in Israel, and that it was late at night, for the Passover celebrations and the Upper Room ministry described in John chapters 13-17 had

begun at 6.00p.m. So, given the time of year and the hour of the day, it would not be unusual for it to be cold. Therefore, this seems an unnecessary comment, apparently adding nothing to the story!

Yet we know that it was around that fire, among that company of servants and officers, whose loyalty lay with the high priest and who were hostile towards the Lord Jesus, that Peter denied his association with the Lord two more times, before the cock crowed in fulfilment of the Lord's word to Peter, John 13. 38.

It was cold – the application

We know that the word 'cold' can have a metaphorical as well as a literal meaning. We use it this way in everyday life. We might describe a person as 'cold blooded' meaning that they have no feelings. The Lord used it in a similar way when the disciples asked Him about the signs and the times of His coming. He told them that one of the signs would be that 'the love of many shall wax cold', Matt. 24. 12.

It would seem that in that courtyard, in that company of those who had no love for the Lord, Peter's love also cooled, and led to his denial of Him.

None of us should be overly critical of Peter, but, perhaps, we can learn something from his experience concerning the company that we keep. That night, Peter found himself alone amongst people who, at best, had no sympathy for the Lord and, at worst, were openly hostile to him. This was a recipe for disaster! We should

learn from this that if we surround ourselves with those who have no love for the Lord, it could have potentially damaging effects on our spiritual life.

There is a really good example of the need to distance ourselves from bad company in the story of Jairus and his daughter. Jairus had just heard that his daughter was dead. There was no point in troubling the Lord anymore! At this stage, the Lord encouraged Jairus to trust Him. When they arrived at the house, the mourners were weeping and wailing. When the Lord told them that the little girl was not dead but asleep, they stopped their crying and started laughing. The object of their laughter was the Lord Himself. The Lord's response was to empty the room of those people whose attitude towards Him was hostile and unbelieving! He replaced them with those whose faith in Him was strong, namely Peter, James and John, Luke 8. 51.

In this way the Lord bolstered the faith of Jairus, by surrounding him with those who would

encourage him and by taking away from him those who were not. It is just the same for us. Christian fellowship should be very important to a believer.

Of course, in everyday life we rub shoulders with those who do not belong to the Lord – people such as our neighbours, work colleagues, etc. We need to be good examples of what it means to be believers, both in what we say and how we behave! We should be wary of spending too much time with unsaved friends as they have the potential to weaken our faith. If we neglect Christian fellowship we may soon find our love for the Lord growing cold. We need to get into the habit of spending time in fellowship with other believers at meetings, and socially! This was one of the hallmarks of the early church, Acts 2. 42. We are warned not to neglect this in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 25.

Life lesson – Be careful who you spend the majority of your time with. It will affect your development as a believer.

