

The Scripture in Evangelism

A brief study on the flexibility of evangelistic methods which are in accordance
with the Scripture.

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For ongoing dialogue on the methodology used in ministry to unbelieving international students.

Introduction

Knowing that the Scripture is the supreme authority on all things pertaining to faith and practice, what does it teach in regards to its own utilization during evangelism? There are reasonable biblically conservative perspectives that range from the proud display of an open physical Bible to the strategic concealment of a physical Bible during evangelism. Most evangelicals fall somewhere in between. And so the primary focus of this study is to build a bridge between each of these extremes on which most Christians can exist. The reader will notice that the vast majority of disagreement will not take place in theoretical areas of biblical, historical, and systematic theology as much as it does in the practical areas of methodology. In other words, the disagreement will surround what is best practice (*bene esse*) rather than what is correct/incorrect (*esse*). But before revealing potential disagreements, it would first be helpful to state where agreement takes place.

It comes as no surprise that all truly conservative evangelical ministries affirm the necessity of Scripture within evangelism. “The Word [written word] is the prime agency under the Spirit of God for the mission of the Church in evangelism.”¹ The mutual acceptance of this statement is a praiseworthy one that should not be neglected because many ministries have floated into liberalism by rejecting such a sentiment. Yet this agreement still leaves a pesky opportunity for debate about *how* Scripture is utilized in evangelization. Therefore, knowing that the word of God is the bedrock and the foundation of all true evangelism, I hope to persuade you that the methodologies for *how* to evangelize *according to* the written word of God ought not be restricted.²

The scope of this study will be limited to the following three areas: (1) biblical theology as it pertains to the ministry of Jesus and the New Testament writers, (2) historical theology as it pertains to the ministry of the early church, and (3) systematic theology as it pertains to general wholistic implications for the church in the modern period. This study will not be exhaustive in each of these

¹ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 211. My parenthetical.

² Notice that this thesis agrees that all evangelism ought to be founded upon an orthodox interpretation of the written word of God.

areas, but should serve as a platform for further discussion. Accordingly, while it is best to lay out various conflicting interpretations for each particular datum, I will limit my interactions with various antitheses. Nevertheless, these opposing viewpoints will be implicit throughout the analysis.

Biblical Theology - the ministry of Jesus and the New Testament Writers

First let us establish the guardrails for our conclusions – the Scriptures themselves. As with most dissent among otherwise amicable Christian communities, definitions are vital. So in this first section on biblical theology I hope to outline various related elements to evangelization in the New Testament, focusing on the textual evidence (lexicon and syntax) along with its contextual evidence (sitz-im-leben). The determination of how to use the Scriptures in evangelism will be influenced by defining 4 nouns, and 5 speech verbs along with their range of meanings. These words are: (1) λόγος (2) γραφή (3) ῥῆμα (4) βιβλος and (5) εὐαγγελίζω/κηρύσσω/μαρτυρέω/λαλέω/διδάσκω.³

The usages of these words can be summarized as follows: when the authors of the New Testament wanted to strictly refer to the written word they used γραφή primarily, βιβλος secondarily, and λόγος in limited cases. When they wanted to convey the message of the Christian gospel message in oral speech they primarily used λόγος and secondarily used ῥῆμα. The following citations and subsequent analysis should make this clear.

Λόγος

To be clear, this paper is not arguing for an existentialist view on the Scripture's interface with the Incarnate Word. It would be improper to hogtie the NT usage of λόγος in order to elevate the centrality of one's experiential relationship with Christ, as Barth did when describing his approach to the Scripture.⁴ Jensen warns about such a restriction saying, "There is a methodological difficulty in

³ Commonly translated as (1) word (2) scripture/writing (3) word/thing (4) book/scroll (5) to evangelize/to preach/to witness.

⁴ He says, "The Christian apprehension of revelation is the response of man to the Word of God whose name is Jesus Christ." in Karl Barth, in J. Baillie and H. Martin (ed.), *Revelation*, tr. J. O. Cobham and R.J.C. Gutteridge (London: Faber & Faber, 1937), 42.

taking what amounts to a particular use of a word and insisting that it control the rest...and one that leaves us without genuine revelation accessible by faith... The divine word comes to us in, and not apart from, the words of this gospel.”⁵ What I will propose for λόγος is a range of meaning by which our current controversy takes place, while at the same time showing how this range leads us to a particularly consistent usage in the New Testament - λόγος as spoken word.

In referring to a number of different New Testament and Septuagint lexicons this word can be defined as a thing that is spoken.⁶ Beeks provides an important etymological reference that λόγος is derived from the verb ‘λεγω’ which is nothing other than oral in nature.⁷ In Bauer’s comprehensive lexicon on the Greek New Testament and early Christian literature, he uses three pages to discuss the oft-misunderstood λόγος. He provides a broader range of meaning than the prior citations by giving 3 uses within the New Testament, the first of which is fitting for our purposes. He defines this usage as “a communication whereby the mind finds expression.”⁸ Beneath this definition he lists two subcategories by which this can be understood: The first, (1) chiefly oral, is his most expansive, and the second, (2) of *literary* or oratorical production, provides the complexity for this debate.

(1) On the first usage he provides an abundance of citations within the Scripture to show that this word is primarily used in the oral sense. I will share my own judgment on a few of these citations below.

Mark 16.20

While this verse is not within the original text of Mark’s gospel, it does provide an early and accepted view on the lexical use of this word within the nascent church. In it we see that λόγος and its partner participle is paired with the main verb κήρυσσω, showing an obvious example of λόγος being

⁵ Peter R. Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 48-49.

⁶ Michael Scott Robertson, “Divine Revelation,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014). In the Septuagint, this word translates the majority of instances of Hebrew דָּבָר, ‘to say’.

⁷ Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek, Vol. 1* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 868.

⁸ Walter. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, 3rd edition*, ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2000), 599. Henceforth BDAG.

used to convey a spoken message. As I will revisit throughout this paper, the γραφή is the material cause of the message; it is not the formal cause. Rather the λόγος, or spoken message, is the means by which the essential central message of the Scripture is conveyed.⁹

Acts 8.4,

As will be detailed later on in our discussion on εὐαγγελίζω, this usage of λόγος is paired with a participle which describes the manner in which the early believers “went about.” They went about evangelizing the λόγος, which refers to the simple core message of the Christian faith rather than the written word.¹⁰

Acts 10.36,

In this verse λόγος is again paired with εὐαγγελίζω in the form of a participle of means. Again, it is used in the manner of a spoken message rather than a written text. This can be seen by its attachment to the following verse which states that John the Baptist “proclaimed/preached” (κήρυσσω) this message.¹¹

Acts 14.3

It is paired with a genitive in order to specify the gracious type of message which was being proclaimed, this verse pairs λόγος with two speech participles, παρρησιάζομαι (to boldly speak) and μαρτυρέω (to witness). One of which is acting as a participle of manner and one which is acting as an attributive participle.¹² In this, the Lord is said to have vindicated the message which was spoken through Paul and Barnabas by granting signs and wonders. It is more likely that this genitive of source, ‘of grace’, is in reference to a message rather than the written word. In other words, it was the speech and message which were gracious, not ink on papyrus.

⁹ c.f. BDAG, 600.

¹⁰ c.f. BDAG, 600.

¹¹ c.f. BDAG, 600.

¹² c.f. BDAG, 617 and 782.

Acts 15.7

Here is an especially important verse because it pairs together λόγος with the genitive of content for εὐαγγέλιον (gospel) and then describes how this message of the gospel was disseminated to the Gentiles – namely by word of Peter’s mouth. So λόγος is characterized as a spoken word of glad tidings.

Acts 17.11

Here we notice the commendable Bereans testing the message of Paul and Silas by examining the Scriptures. Notice the distinction between the λόγος of Paul and Silas and the γραφή which was utilized by the Bereans. It is clear that there is a close connection between the two, but also ample divergence between them which encouraged Luke to tell us that the Bereans examined the γραφάς rather than the λόγους. This shows that the written Scriptures were used to corroborate the spoken gospel message.

1 Thess. 1.5

This verse shows that the gospel was brought to the church in Thessalonica by spoken word. Here λόγος is used as a dative of means along with the other datives of means – miracles and the Holy Spirit – by which this church was founded. Since the miracles and Holy Spirit would have been connected with the physical presence of the apostles (i.e. laying on of hands), we can be reasonably certain that λόγος has a spatial sense to it. By the insinuation of a physical presence, we can ascertain that it was not a written word but a spoken word which came to this church.

2 Thess. 2.15

This verse is self-explanatory, showing that Paul distinguishes between a written word and a spoken word. This conditional statement shows that λόγος is a spoken word in comparison to the

written letter. And it reinforces that the tradition of the gospel teaching of the apostles can be retained by either one.

1 Peter 1.23,

This usage of λόγος denotes the simple message of Christianity rather than the written Scripture. This can be seen by its supportive direct citation of the LXX version of Isaiah 40.6-8. The word used for ‘word’ in Isaiah 40.6-8, ῥῆμα, is exclusively used to refer to spoken messages rather than written text.¹³ Notice that the verb εὐαγγελίζω (preached) is used to denote how the ‘word’ was disseminated. In citing this Isaianic prophecy to support his argument for the ‘living and abiding λόγος of God’, Peter has semantically linked λόγος to ῥῆμα, and thereby shown the former’s oral nature. This is another key citation to show that evangelism does not necessarily involve an open Scripture, but depends on the source of the Scripture – the message of the Lord.

1 John 2.7

John writes to the beloved reminding them that the command (ἐντολή) which he is writing to them is the λόγος which they heard (aorist indicative). This shows that John distinguishes between reading of the command and the hearing of the λόγος.

Rev 1.9,

This gives substantial evidence that the ‘word of God’ was the proclamation of the gospel message. John says he was exiled to the island of Patmos on account of the ‘word of God’. It was not because of the written word that John was exiled, but rather because of his proclamation of the message of the written word. This becomes even clearer when he linked this phrase to the ‘testimony of Jesus’ by the connective conjunction καί.

¹³ c.f. BDAG, 905.

(2) The second definition speaks into the interface between the spoken and written words. How is the message of God transferred from the ear to the pen? In this usage he cites five passages which are helpful for our purposes of distinguishing, if possible, λόγος from its lexical cousins. The following five passages, to which we turn our attention, were determined by Bauer to refer to *writings that are part of Holy Scripture*.

John 10.35

This verse shows an intimate connection between the λόγος from God and the written word (γραφή). One could read this and reasonably equate the two meanings, thus semantically connecting λόγος with γραφή. I prefer, with Bauer, that λόγος is less to be equated with writing than it is to be seen as a command of God before the writing.¹⁴ While a more intimate relationship between these words is found here, clearer ones can be found elsewhere.

John 12.38

Here John makes a direct connection between λόγος and the written word. This is a clear connection which shows how λόγος refers to the written word.

1 Corinthians 15.54,

The ESV renders this “the saying that is written,” showing that λόγος is connected with writing. The question remains, how is it connected? Notice that the perfect participle γεγραμμένος from the lexical form γράφω (to write) indicates that the λόγος is presently in written form. Thus the conclusion that λόγος is a form of writing is credible.

Luke 3.3-4

Here we see a double connection of λόγος to writing in the form of the oft used perfect indicative ‘γέγραπται’ (it is written) and the material of such writing, βιβλος. This shows that Luke

¹⁴ c.f. BDAG, 599.

considered very close, if not identical, the connection between the written words of Scripture and the message of God.

Revelation 22.7.

Similar to the above example, John connects λόγος to βίβλος. This shows that there is at least some connection between λόγος and writing.

Γραφή

This word solely refers to “writings in general, but is often used in the NT with reference to sacred writings.”¹⁵ This word is oriented toward inscription in its etymology. Beekes determines it comes from the idea to scratch or carve.¹⁶ Bauer establishes the usages of both γραφή and its verbal cognate γράφω, and detects that this word was used only in reference to thought inscribed on material.¹⁷ This is very important for our purposes, but as it is universally agreed upon by most scholars, we will not spend time looking at particular usages.

ῥῆμα

On this word Robertson indicates that it is “something that is said. This word is the second most frequent translation of Hebrew דָּבָר (dābār, “word”) in the Septuagint. It primarily refers to things spoken, including words.”¹⁸ Bauer makes crystal clear that this word only has reference to speech or expression in all of its meanings within the New Testament.¹⁹ To suffice for our purposes one may look at John 12.47-48 and Romans 10.8 to see how ῥῆμα marks a spoken message.

¹⁵ Adriani Milli Rodrigues, “Scripture,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹⁶ Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 285.

¹⁷ BDAG, 206-207.

¹⁸ Michael Scott Robertson, “Divine Revelation,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹⁹ BDAG, 905.

Βίβλος

Similar to γραφή, βίβλος is restricted in its meaning. It refers to “any written composition, including sacred books. The word ‘Bible’ that now commonly refers to Christian Scripture comes from this Greek word, which itself derives from the name of the city of Byblos on the eastern Mediterranean shore, an important center of papyrus production.”²⁰ Bauer likewise agrees that this word refers to a written account.²¹

Εὐαγγελίζω/Κηρύσσω/Μαρτυρέω

The verbs which we will cover have the effect of bringing clarity to the nouns above. And these verbs will complete our study within the sphere of biblical theology. I will briefly note each of these proclamation verbs and then lay out how these verbs pair with the nouns mentioned above in order to provide a sense of which of these nouns were primarily used in terms of spoken voice rather than written text. Similarly, it would only be fair to acknowledge the adjacent tendency of using the verb of writing (γράφω) with the nouns above in order to determine which were more typically used in terms of written text rather than spoken voice.

Speaking on the primary word for evangelization, Spicq contends that εὐαγγελίζω became a religious, cultic, and messianic verb which was always an oral announcement.²² He attributes this to the familiar oral verbs used in context with it in Acts 8.4 (κηρύσσω), 8.25 (λαλέω), 5.42 and 15.35 (διδάσκω), and 1 Peter 1.12 (ἀναγγέλω). Though he does note that the last evolution of the cognate noun εὐαγγέλιον became a reference to the inscribed writings of the apostles (i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).²³ Bauer notes this as a proclamation of news via the mouth.²⁴

²⁰ Adriani Milli Rodrigues, “Scripture,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

²¹ BDAG, 176.

²² Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1994), 84-87.

²³ Spicq, *Lexicon*, 90. Eusebius writes that the early missionaries of the church “put their honor to preaching the word of faith to those who had heard nothing of it and transmitting to them the text of the divine Gospels (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.37.2)” Also c.f. BDAG, 403.

²⁴ c.f. BDAG, 402.

Per Bauer, κηρύσσω is restricted to verbal announcement.²⁵ On the other hand, μαρτυρέω has a broader range of meaning by which it could be understood in a declarative manner or in a supportive/assenting manner. Evidence suggests that it leans heavily toward verbal support rather than mental assent.²⁶ Similarly λαλέω and διδάσκω have strictly verbal elements in their usages.²⁷

Now that we have grounded each of these verbs in spoken voice, let us look at the statistics for how they pair with the previously mentioned nouns within the New Testament.²⁸ These statistics are restricted to instances where the noun is meaningfully and syntactically related to the verb within a given thought structure:

	εὐαγγελίζω	κηρύσσω	μαρτυρέω	λαλέω	διδάσκω
λόγος	Mark 1.45; Acts 8.4; Acts 8.25; Acts 10.36; Acts 11.20; Acts 15.35; 1 Cor. 1.17; 1 Cor. 15.2; Heb. 4.2	Mark 1.45; Mark 16.20; Luke 3.3; Luke 4.44-5.1; Acts 8.4; Phil. 1.14; 2 Tim. 4.2	John 4.39; John 5.37; Acts 14.3; Rev. 1.2; Rev. 22.18	Matt. 12.36; Mark 2.2; Mark 4.33; Mark 8.32; Luke 24.44; John 8.30; John 8.37; John 12.48; John 14.24; John 15.3; John 17.13; Acts 4.29; Acts 4.31; Acts 8.25; Acts 10.44; Acts 11.19; Acts 13.44; Acts 13.46; Acts 14.25; Acts 16.6; Acts 16.32; Rom. 15.18; 1 Cor. 2.13; 1 Cor. 14.9; 1 Cor. 14.19; 2 Cor. 2.17; Phil. 1.14; Col. 4.3; 1 Thess. 2.4-5; Heb. 2.2; Heb. 13.7	Matt. 7.28; Matt. 28.15; Luke 4.31; John 6.59; John 7.35; Acts 1.1; Acts 15.35; Acts 18.11; Col. 3.16; 2 Thess. 2.15; 1 Tim. 6.2
γραφή	Acts 8.35		John 5.39	Acts 18.24; 2 Peter 1.20	Acts 18.24
ῥῆμα	1 Peter 1.25	Luke 3.2; Acts 10.36-37; Romans 10.8		Matt. 12.36; Luke 2.17; Luke 2.50; Luke 3.34; John 6.63; John 8.20; John 12.48; John 14.10; Acts 5.20; Acts 6.10-11; Acts 6.13; Acts 10.44; Acts 11.14; Acts 11.15; Acts 13.42; Acts 26.25; Acts 28.25; 2 Cor. 12.4	Acts 5.20;
βιβλος		Luke 3.3			

²⁵ c.f. BDAG, 544.

²⁶ c.f. BDAG, 618.

²⁷ c.f. BDAG, 582-583; 241.

²⁸ This includes all verbal forms of each particular verb within a given thought unit.

	γράφω
λόγος	Luke 3.4; John 10.34; John 15.25; Acts 15.15; 1 Cor. 15.54; 1 John 2.7; Rev. 1.3; Rev. 19.9; Rev. 21.5; Rev. 22.18
γραφή	Luke 24.44; Luke 24.45; Rom. 15.4
ῥῆμα	Matt. 4.4; John 5.46; 2 Pet. 3.1
βίβλος	Luke 3.4; Acts 1.20; Acts 7.42; Rev. 20.15

Conclusion

While it is reasonable to conclude from the above data that λόγος and ῥῆμα are used to refer to written text, they are chiefly favored when the sense is to convey a spoken word. When (i) pairing together these options for ‘word/writing’ in the New Testament with these verbal cognates of speech and (ii) realizing that the option was available for the authors to testify to a strict utilization of the Scripture in evangelization (c.f. Acts 8.35, Acts 17.2), the evidence suggests that evangelization of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not to be restricted to the strict methodology of direct Scripture utilization/citation so long as it is in *accordance* with the written word.

Historical Theology - the ministry of the Early Church

While tradition and the history of the church is not the supreme authority on all things pertaining to faith and practice, the study of the early church does give us some insight into how early Christians would have understood the faith and its practices. I hope to show that the early Christians esteemed the Scriptures as the ultimate authority and yet left room for how that authority was utilized in the proclamation of its message.

Tertullian is noted as the source for the famous “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” In this he attempted to distance the church from Greco-Roman Gnostic philosophies which challenged much of the church's teaching. And it is this which clarifies the heart of the discussion. While Tertullian was correct to distance himself from the anti-Christian philosophies of his day, we must ask if his intention was to do away with any creativity in contextualizing the gospel for a particular culture? In other words, was it then and is it now appropriate to ‘translate’ the gospel for different cultures or should we expect such cultures to conform to a particular methodology and tradition?

Perhaps some will see this previous question as a straw-man characterization (“surely we should translate the gospel so that people understand!”), but let me share why it is not. The concern of this paper is to persuade the reader that evangelism can be done in a number of ways in order to reach a variety of people. If it is true that the Scriptures convey the message of the gospel in its most pure form (and I believe it does), is it then appropriate to condescend by translating that most pure form, and in so doing “contaminating” it, in order that the message is palatable upon first taste? (To be clear, it is assumed that this would be done in hope that the said person would be nurtured to cherish the most pure form of the gospel — the Scriptures.) Some would say yes to this question (myself included), while others would respond no. In what follows I hope to show that the early church would have affirmed the suitability of condescension and nurture in evangelism.

Paul

It is clear that the early church had an acrobatic way of sharing the gospel. Green, to whom much of this section is indebted, notes that “neither the strategy nor the tactics of the first Christians were particularly remarkable.”²⁹ While the same Christian message was preached throughout the known world it would be a mistake to “assume that there was a crippling uniformity about the

²⁹ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 23.

proclamation of Christian truth in antiquity.”³⁰ After noting the early church’s evangelization to Jews, Green observes three primary elements of its evangelizing to the Gentiles, none of which included a direct appeal to the Scriptures.³¹ The Scriptures served as the foundation for evangelism, not the front door. “Jews were approached via the Old Testament; pagans, it seems, through the light of natural revelation, leading on to Christ.”³² Even Paul is an example of this type of culturally appropriated evangelism in the early church. Speaking about Paul on the Areopagus Green notes:

To be sure he does not quote the Old Testament; that would have betrayed lack of sensitivity and would have been quite meaningless to them. This is true apologetic, and also true evangelism, where the content of the gospel is preserved while the mode of expression is tuned to the ears of the recipients.³³

Comparing Acts 17.2 with that of Acts 17.23-28 the reader will notice that Paul reasoned (διαλέγομαι) with the Jews from the Scriptures (ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν), and yet in the same chapter he proclaimed (καταγγέλλω) the message of the gospel by using pagan poetry (τινες τῶν καθ’ ὑμᾶς). Knowing that the language and emphasis on Paul’s use of the physical copy of the Scriptures (17.2) was available to Luke during the writing of Acts, it is noteworthy that he doesn’t acknowledge such a methodology throughout the rest of Acts. It is probable that he did use the Scriptures more often than what is indicated throughout his missionary journeys, but it was not important enough for Luke to mention it other than here. For instance, Acts 17.17 states that Paul had again reasoned with the Jews,

³⁰ Green, *Evangelism*, 164-165.

³¹ Green, *Evangelism*, 179.

³² Green, *Evangelism*, 180.

³³ Green, *Evangelism*, 182.

as in 17.2 during which he utilized the Scriptures. It is likely that a primary location where the Scriptures were utilized were in the places of worship, in this case the synagogue.³⁴

Clement

Green goes on to detail other methods of early church in their evangelization:

They used Greek epics; they used Homeric myths, and also Stoic and Epicurean philosophy when it suited them. We even find Clement of Rome, after arguing for the reasonableness of the resurrection from the fact that seeds die and come to life again in new flowers, laying enormous stress on the phoenix. This Eastern (mythological) bird was said by the poets to die and be reborn from its own ashes every 500 years. Clement really believed this! It is the climax of his argument. He was in this respect as others a child of his age. Even so, it was not the phoenix he was interested in, but Christ. Anything in Greek thought that would help his listeners to lay hold of the wonder and the reality of the resurrection was good enough for Clement. And this is the characteristic aim which the Greek exponents of the gospel set themselves: to embody biblical doctrine in cultural forms which would be acceptable in their society. Not to remove the scandal of the gospel, but so to present their message in terms acceptable to their hearers that the real scandal of the gospel could be perceived and its challenge faced.³⁵

Clement's preaching in the early church can give more insight into his evangelism. His preaching took a much different form in the early church than it does within many conservative evangelicals circles today. His idea of exegetical preaching was much different from taking a lengthy segment of text and preaching through it systematically. Rather, based upon the principle of 'Scripture

³⁴ While explicit mentions in the New Testament of evangelization using a physical copy of the Scriptures are few, one can see this happen in Acts 8.35. While others might also refer to Luke 24.27. But the reference in Luke 24.27 to Jesus explaining the Scriptures on the road is almost certainly without an example without a physical scroll.

³⁵ Green, *Evangelism*, 200-201.

interpreting Scripture', he felt free to gleefully bounce through all the texts of Scripture to prove his central point. Hardly would he be known as a competent exegete by today's conservative evangelical standards. I imagine watching him preach would have made many of us blush. According to Holmes's count, Clement utilized no less than 32 Scripture references in 115 verses of his homily known as 2 *Clement*.³⁶

Epistle to Diognetus

While the author and audience remain a mystery, Lightfoot mentions that this epistle is unique when compared to other early church literature because it addresses outsiders rather than insiders.³⁷ Thus it forms a sort of evangelistic apologetic appeal to the pagans. Throughout the entire letter, though he makes allusions to various principles based upon the Scripture, he does not strictly cite Scripture until the very last paragraph where he quotes 1 Corinthians 8.1.³⁸ It might be tempting to view this evangelistic method as a drift away from the apostolic message, but this would be a blatant mischaracterization of the writer's theology. Though there are Hellenistic tendencies which reveal a kind of dualism that typified much of the Greco-Roman culture, he retains the core of the gospel message. In what must be considered an evangelically orthodox statement, the author says:

So then, having already planned everything in his mind together with his child, he [God the Father] permitted us, during the former time, to be carried away by undisciplined impulses as we desired, led astray by pleasures and lusts, not at all because he took delight in our sins, but because he was patient; not because he approved of that former season of unrighteousness, but because he was creating the present season of righteousness, in order that we who in the

³⁶ J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers in English, 3rd edition*, ed. trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 77-86.

³⁷ Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 288. 'Diognetus' (Διόγνητος) is the formal name of the audience, but this simply could be a pseudonym for a larger community. It means 'God born'. Similar thinking could be applied to the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostle which were written to Theophilus, 'Lover of God'.

³⁸ Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 301. My parenthetical.

former time were convicted by our own deeds as unworthy of life might now by the goodness of God be made worthy, and having clearly demonstrated our inability to enter the kingdom of God on our own, might be enabled to do so by God's power. But when our unrighteousness was fulfilled, and it had been made perfectly clear that its wages – punishment and death – were to be expected, then the season arrived during which God had decided to reveal at last his goodness and power (oh, the surpassing kindness and love of God!). He did not hate us, or reject us, or bear a grudge against us; instead he was patient and forbearing; in his mercy he took upon himself our sins; he himself gave up his own Son as a ransom for us, the holy one for the lawless, the guiltless for the guilty, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. For what else but his righteousness could have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us, the lawless and ungodly, to be justified, except in the Son of God alone? O the sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous person, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners!³⁹

This type of evangelistic fervor could only be enabled and supported by the testimony of God inscribed in the Holy Scriptures. Accordingly, it would be unjust to consider this as deficient evangelism simply because there were not strict Scripture citations.

The problem of illiteracy

Perhaps one of the most cogent pieces of evidence for the flexibility of evangelism in the early church was its illiteracy. It is sometimes unintentionally assumed that the world in which we live is the world that has been through the ages. This innocent anachronistic view can get us into trouble

³⁹ Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 298.

practically because it fails to consider the faith through the ages and only esteems the present. This is evident in considering the prospect of Bible reading.

The ancient world was largely illiterate and the vast majority of Christians through the ages never read a book throughout their entire lives. While the written word still played an important and necessary part in each Christian's life, it often did so in the auditory sense rather than the ocular sense. Even more, for those who could read, the cost of buying a personal copy of the Scriptures to read was unfeasible. Harry Gamble, who is renowned for his work at Yale in the study of literacy in early Christian communities, says that "the market for books was limited; prospective buyers were only a fraction of the small minority of literate people, and of them, only those with enough disposable income to buy luxury items."⁴⁰ Further he notes that most of the early manuscripts of the Bible were used in public settings to be read aloud to the congregations.⁴¹ He strengthens his point as he cites the fundamental study of literacy in antiquity completed by W.V. Harris by saying that only 10-15% of the entire Christian populace was literate.⁴² In the same work on the early text of the New Testament, Larry Hurtado interprets the use of codices, punctuation marks, and other diacritical marks as evidence that the manuscripts were to serve in the public service rather than the private study.⁴³ Burgess catches onto this and moors his modern-day 'sacramental word theology' in this historical premise. "Scripture is meant to be read aloud. It is primarily for the ear, not the eye."⁴⁴ Some Scriptural references for this custom are found in Colossians 4.16, 1 Tim. 4.13 and 1 Thess. 5.27, and Revelation 1.3.⁴⁵

To this evidence can be added the missionary work of St. Irenaeus. Irenaeus was a second century bishop to Lyons in ancient Gaul where he ministered to the illiterate "barbarians" in the region.

⁴⁰ Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger, *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25. He notes that it is a misconception to think that there were "mass production scriptoria" of "big publishers" in the ancient world.

⁴¹ Hill, *Early Text*, 32.

⁴² Hill, *Early Text*, 34.

⁴³ Hill, *Early Text*, 59.

⁴⁴ J. P. Burgess "Scripture as Sacramental Word: Rediscovering Scripture's Compelling Power." *Interpretation*, 52(4) (1998): 382.

⁴⁵ Also consider texts like Acts 8.30, 2 Macc. 15.39, and Epistle to Diognetus 12.1 which shows the particular emphasis on reading aloud, even when by oneself.

Even though they could not read the Scriptures he gave them due honor and legitimized their faith.

“The cumulative evidence suggests that Irenaeus had a profound understanding of the translatable nature of the gospel. This gave no preference to the literate but rather elevated non-Hellenic cultures. Irenaeus’s doctrines of the work of Christ and the Spirit formed the basis for his understanding of the gospel’s translatability.”⁴⁶ Further, Irenaeus’s *regula fidei* (rule of faith) was inclusive of both an oral tradition of the gospel and the written tradition of the gospel:

We have not come to know the economy of our salvation through any others but those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, [the Gospel] which at that time they preached in public, but later, according to the will of God, they handed down to us in the Scriptures, which are the foundation and pillar of our faith.⁴⁷

This broad illiteracy throughout the known world, including Christian communities, continued throughout the ancient and medieval times. Mosher situates the increased literacy rate known by the world today to the effect of both the printing press and the Protestant Reformation:

The printing press was introduced in 1440, and after that point, adult literacy rose from around 6% in the medieval period to a minimum of about 20% across Western Europe... the evidence suggests that Protestant doctrine promoting reading of the Bible and Protestant church promotion of reading the Bible could raise literacy 30 percentage points higher than the uniform minimum of 20% to about 50%.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Jacob A. Rodriguez, “Irenaeus’s Missional Theology: Global Christian Perspectives from an Ancient Missionary and Theologian.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no.1 (2016): 138.

⁴⁷ *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1

⁴⁸ Mosher, James S. “The Protestant Reading Ethic and Variation in Its Effects.” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (June 2016): 409..

Conclusion

The point from this historical analysis is not to extinguish the Scriptures *from* evangelism but rather to place them in their proper context as the foundation *for* evangelism. Personally speaking, in comparison to much of the early church's flexibility in methods of evangelism, I am more inclined to frequent the Scriptures by means of citation or allusion. I am skeptical of my own creative abilities to stay true to the gospel apart from the text. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the early church, which experienced perhaps the most explosive growth to date and in so doing conquered the Roman empire, evangelized even though their evangelism was not methodologically 'biblical' in the post-Enlightenment western sense of the word 'biblical'. Rather than implicating these early saints as Christians on the verge of methodological heresy, we must have the humility to consider that perhaps it was and is appropriate to use "whatever means necessary to save some."⁴⁹ Furthermore, if we are to demand that evangelism *must* be characterized within the mold of reading and studying the Bible, then we have extinguished the evangelical efforts which took place in most eras of the Christian church. We ought not allow the blessing of modern literacy to erase the gospel work done by countless faithful ministers throughout the millennia. We ought to give charity in our formulations of the utilization of Scripture in evangelism which matches the colorful history of the church with which we are united (Hebrews 12.1).

Systematic Theology - implications for the church today

Various perspectives from the evangelical and Reformed world have noted the necessity of the Scriptures in evangelization throughout their systematic treatment of the Scriptures. Yet there remains acknowledgment that the Scriptures in and of themselves do not bring life, but rather that the life is found in him about whom they testify (John 5.39-40). While all evangelization is founded upon the

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 9.22

testimony of the Scriptures, it would be wrong to limit the Spirit to a particular utilization of the Scriptures. It can be agreed by most evangelicals that:

The *gospel* stands at the beginning of the story that explains why there are Christians at all, on the boundary between belief and unbelief - often, for the hearer, prior to a knowledge of the Bible itself. For the person entering from the outside, the gospel is the introduction to the faith, the starting point for understanding.⁵⁰

In the subjective sense, the gospel can be understood apart from a strict knowledge of the written word. However, we would not know the gospel without the written word. The gospel presumes upon the Old and New Testament being the word of God, and there can be no authentic version of Christianity without the written word.⁵¹ Therefore, it would be a misapplication to limit the ministry of the gospel to a physical copy of God's word, but it would also be inappropriate to deny the position of the Scripture as the foundation for all ministry and to rely upon the flashy techniques so common in our entertainment-crazed western society. We must hold both in tension. The denial of Scripture to its place of prominence in evangelism is the particular cultural context John Murray had in mind throughout his scathing statement published during his time as Professor at Westminster:

It is the challenge of the secularized mind, the technologically conditioned mind, and the supposed irrelevance to this outlook of the gospel as historically understood, that have constrained the leading exponents of today's Protestantism to reconstruct the gospel so that it will be relevant...If the Scripture is the inscripturated revelation of the gospel and of God's mind and will, if it is the only revelation of this character that we possess, then it is this revelation in all

⁵⁰ Jensen, *Revelation*, 32.

⁵¹ Jensen, 153.

its fullness, richness, wisdom, and power that must be applied to man in whatever religious, moral, mental situation he is to be found. It is because we have not esteemed and prized the perfection of Scripture and its finality, that we have resorted to other techniques, expedients, and methods of dealing with the dilemma that confronts us all if we are alive to the needs of the hour.⁵²

This was not a rebuke against my notion of varying creativity and methodology of Scripture dissemination, but rather a rebuke toward the sheer embarrassment and disapproval of Scripture which was so rampant following the modernism of the 19th century. Murray goes on:

Some may be so enamoured of modernity, that without abandoning a basically sound proclamation of the gospel, they have nonetheless been to such an extent influenced by the flabbiness of present-day thinking that witness to the whole counsel of God has suffered at the points of both breadth and depth. Again, I do not say that God does not bless such a witness though it be impoverished and to some extent compromising. But what I do say is that both are failing to bring to faithful expression the finality and sufficiency of Scripture.⁵³

Here Murray demonstrates his resistance to the Barthian modernist understanding of the “word of God” as predicated upon experience rather than upon the written word. This, again, was not a rebuke of a certain missiology in which the word of God is proclaimed while the physical copy of God’s word remains closed. His rebuke becomes clearer in another of his writings for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He argues that the central message of the gospel cannot be properly presented

⁵² John Murray, *The Claims of Truth*, Vol. 1 of *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976. Reprint, Carlisle: Banner, 2020), 21.

⁵³ Murray, *Claims*, 21-22

unless in the context of the whole counsel of God. Yet he leaves flexibility for how the whole counsel of God is presented:

The message of God's counsel is multiform and the particular needs of men are varied. The message should, therefore, always be adapted to the peculiar need and condition of the persons concerned and great care should be exercised that the truths presented and the manner of presentation should be chosen and framed so as to make the most direct and effective impact upon those who are the recipients of the message. Great care and sometimes exacting labor are required in the interest of ensuring, as far as possible, that the inopportuneness of the time chosen for the presentation of a particular message and the inappropriateness of the manner adopted do not become the occasion for a distorted understanding on the part of the persons to whom the message is given...It frequently happens that the evangelist has to refrain from the presentation of certain truths until the proper foundation is laid in the minds of the persons concerned by the understanding and acceptance of other truths...There is need, therefore, for the greatest wisdom in dealing with the numerous diversities that exist among the subjects of evangelism, diversities of tradition, of education, of temperament, of religious knowledge and conviction, of social standing, and even of vocation.⁵⁴

This is in principle what I argue for in this study. Murray's main concern in the usage of Scripture in evangelism and ministry is that "there is no part of the revelation of Scripture that is not the fit subject for the message of evangelism."⁵⁵ To this I can happily assent and cheerfully subscribe. Something both Murray and I agree upon is that the Scriptures are certainly needed in the process of

⁵⁴ Murray, *Claims*, 125-126.

⁵⁵ Murray, *Claims*, 126.

evangelization, but they are not absolutely needed to be read by each and every subject in order for the Spirit to work.

In his most comprehensive work, Francis Turretin responds to the prompt: *Can the Scriptures be profitably read by any believer, and ought he to read them without permission?*, Turretin gives assent. However this ought not be misconstrued to prove the Turretin believed that the Bible must be read by every believer:

The question is not whether the reading of the Scriptures is absolutely and simply necessary to all. For both infants are saved without it and many unlettered persons among adults, who never read it. The question is whether it is so lawful for everyone that no one should be prohibited from reading them...The liberty of reading the Scriptures does not take away either oral instruction or pastoral direction or other help necessary to understanding.⁵⁶

He goes on to argue for the absolute necessity of the Scriptures for the church *now* as its foundation for gospel truths despite the fact that the written word was not always in existence (i.e. the pre-Mosaic infant church). In response to the prompt: *Was it necessary for the word of God to be committed to writing?*, Turretin also gives assent but in a qualified manner.

As to the state of the question, keep in mind that the word “Scripture” is used in two senses: either materially, with regard to the doctrine delivered; or formally with regard to the writing and mode of delivery. In the former sense we hold it to be necessary simply and absolutely, so that the church can never spare it. But in the latter sense we hold that it is not absolutely necessary with respect to God. For two thousand years before the time of Moses, he instructed his church

⁵⁶ Francis Turretin, *First Through Tenth Topics, Vol. 1 of Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1992), 148-149.

by the spoken word alone... So God indeed was not bound to the Scriptures, but he bound us to them...Although the Scriptures formally are of no personal use to those who cannot read, yet materially they serve for their instruction and edification much as the doctrines preached in the church are drawn from this source.⁵⁷

Finally, so as not to be disproved by a citation of Calvin, it would be fitting to address Calvin's belief that "it is impossible for any man to obtain even the minutest portion of right and sound doctrine without being a disciple of Scripture."⁵⁸ One would be stretched to conclude from this what Calvin meant when he said that one must be a "disciple of Scripture." It would be misleading to conclude from this quote that Calvin believed that the reading and studying of a physical copy of the Scripture is absolutely needed in the sanctification of the human heart. Calvin's ecclesiocentrism drove his interpretation of what it meant to be a disciple, so that being a disciple of the Scriptures most likely aligned with his insistence on consistent submission to the teaching of the local church.

A Spectrum of Methodologies

While it is understandable to land on either extreme of evangelistic methodology as it pertains to the written word, it is my belief that no methodology should be restricted so long as it is in *accordance* with the written word. The Scriptures themselves, church history, and systematic treatment of this topic show that there have been varying methods for proclaiming the message of the gospel in *accordance* with the written word. There is nowhere which suggests that there must be a certain length of time spent in the Scripture or a certain length of text to study (or even that a study must take place at all!). There is little to suggest an imperative for an open/closed copy of the Scriptures during evangelism. Conversely, there is much to say about using familiar cultural lingo and contextual knowledge to "translate" the gospel so as to remove any unnecessary obtrusive offense in order that

⁵⁷ Turretin, *Institutes*, 57-59.

⁵⁸ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 28.

the unimpeded gospel may be considered by the hearer. In its essence, *true* gospel proclamation has Scripture at the core, even if that core is concealed. Like a valiant warrior that rides into battle because of the passion for his homeland, the Scripture motivates the evangelist to proclaim the message. It is requisite, then, that the Scripture be utilized to snuff out unorthodox teaching or proclamation. On the same note, it is inappropriate to limit how the gospel is proclaimed when doing so in a manner that attracts those with distorted notions about the Scripture which dissuade them from even considering the message. There is a way to be wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove in the proclamation of the gospel message. When evangelizing certain demographics there will be challenges which, no matter how much the gospel is “translated”, cannot be overcome. In these situations it is necessary to “shake the dust off your feet” and move on. But determining when this point happens seems to be a subjective wisdom-based decision; and it is one that I believe all too often is made in haste. Could it be that their experience is one similar to the blind man in Bethsaida (c.f. Mark 8.22-26)? On another note, we ought to be careful on what we determine is fruitful ministry. Successful ministry is determined often by millennia rather than a few years. Faithful, steady-handed, sacrificial, Scripture-based ministry *will* produce fruit that endures to eternal life. So we must not discard any orthodox methodologies which are in accordance with the Scripture, but rather we must engineer new ways to increase our productivity.

A few *reductiones* may be in order for those who still oppose such creative methodology and hold to strict utilization and citation of the written word.⁵⁹ What then are we to make of young children who hear their parents tell them the things of God from an early age? Are we to conclude that this is

⁵⁹ Reductio ad absurdum. “Reduction to the absurd.” A rhetorical tool used to demonstrate the falsity of a statement by showing that its logical consequences are absurd or self-contradictory.

not true evangelism because they are not able to read and understand the Scriptures?⁶⁰ What about those who have mental disabilities? Are we to conclude that they cannot be saved because they are unable to read or understand the Scripture? Of course not! Rather we should nurture their faith in proportion with their ability. In this sense we nurture faith on a person by person basis. So while it can be said that the strict citation of Scripture normatively plays an important role in conversion, it is not absolute. There are creative ways to share the gospel message with people on an individual case-by-case basis.

Furthermore, if we restrict evangelism to the strict utilization of the Scripture, then what is to be considered as the true Scripture? Each translation is an interpretation of other persons and therefore is not formally the inspired word of God, but rather a “translation” of the original.⁶¹ As Warfield contends, “When exactness and precision are needed, as in religious controversies, then the inspired originals only can properly be appealed to.”⁶² So then, since the originals were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek should we require all to learn the original language in order to properly proselytize them? Or must we speak in these original languages in order to evangelize? No! We would say the core message of the gospel is retained even in the midst of “translation” of the Scripture. We should conclude like Warfield that “translations suffice for all ordinary purposes, and enable those who truly seek for it to obtain a thorough knowledge of what is necessary to be known, believed, and observed

⁶⁰ In 2 Timothy 3.15 Paul exhorts Timothy to continue in what he has known (οἶδας) from his childhood (ἀπὸ βρέφους) – namely the Scriptures. This word translated as ‘childhood’ is better translated as *infant*, *baby*, or *young child* – presumably the age at which children are illiterate. This word is only used in the gospel of Luke, who is considered to have written the gospel on the basis of Paul’s apostolic authority. Therefore on the basis that “Luke alone” was with Paul during his writing of 2 Timothy (2 Timothy 4.11), and assuming Luke himself wrote the letter of 2 Timothy on the basis of the Apostle Paul’s authority, we might gain more insight into Luke’s usage of βρέφους in 2 Timothy 3.15. In Luke 1.41-44, 2.12-16, and 18.15 we see this same word used to describe preborn infants, babies, or very young children. This understanding of the word shows that Luke considered that Timothy was capacious to be acquainted with the ancient writings, even though he was illiterate.

⁶¹ Add onto this that the field of textual criticism is interested in determining what exactly were the original words in the original languages. Respectable scholars within that field would never say that, though there is micro-fluidity in the original text of the Scripture, that the gospel message can not be known in pure form! Rather the core message is the same despite the corruption of the text through the ages.

⁶² Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work. Vol. 6 of The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927–32. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 241.

for salvation.”⁶³ If such translation suffices in the realm of the written word, why would we restrict other “translations” of the gospel message which are proclaimed orally in *accordance* with the written word?

Methodologies for how to evangelize according to the written word of God ought not be restricted. Creativity ought to be celebrated in evangelism so long as it is in accordance with the Scriptures and done with an intent to nurture the hearer toward increasing Scripture-based maturity. Perhaps this is why DiscipleMakers has distinct core values of Gospel and Scripture. Even in our Gospel core value the Scriptures are not directly cited or mentioned, but rather proof texted in order to show that, while this core value does not need to explicate the Scripture, it is still in *accordance* with the Scripture.

⁶³ Warfield, *Westminster*, 241.

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