

To Make All Men See

[Day 2: The Goals and the Methods]

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Day one focused our attention on the man and the message. Probably nothing epitomizes the man more than does Paul's own assessment of himself in 1 Corinthians 9, particularly that verse in which Paul says that he strives to let God make him all things to all men. Not only does that suggest something insightful about the man, it also suggests something important about the method he employed in his mission to make all men see.

Paul is also patently clear about his objective. "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some." Six times in four verses Paul repeats that same thought. One might say respectfully that Paul was obsessed with that idea. He had one unchanging objective, one consuming interest, one burning passion in life. He states it simply with a minimum of monosyllabic words, "that I might by all means save some." Today's session will concentrate our attention on St. Luke's amplification in the book of Acts of the goals and methods Paul employed in his passion to make all men see.

Because the practical value of today's sessions depends more upon what we say about methods than about goals, we will keep what we say about goals to a minimum. Paul's goals were determined by and consistent with his ultimate objective. The theme of Mission Seminar '76 is an apt statement of that objective. The familiar Corinthians passage also offers a variation of the same theme. God called Paul to share the gospel with all men, but especially with the Gentiles. The Lord told Ananias, "Paul is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (9:15). That obviously includes all men, just as the forgiving love of God includes all men.

The goals Paul set for the attainment of his objective are not explicitly stated in Acts as is the objective. However they are no less apparent. First God arranged an appropriate period of preparation for the mission work. Then He directed a call to Paul through the congregation in Antioch to begin the task of evangelizing the Gentile world. The chapters in Acts which record Paul's three journeys present a consistent pattern. His goals are clear from that pattern.

First, and self-evidently, Paul had to gain a hearing for the gospel, usually in the local synagogue, but also in any other appropriate place or way that presented itself. Then he gathered the converts together around Word and Sacraments as a people of God. Subsequent efforts sought to establish the Christians as a congregation. Paul's purpose was to ground them in the Word, to equip them for service, and to perpetuate the ministry of the word after his departure. Whenever Paul moved on to a new community, his one goal was to expand the work. The expansion was to continue until the incredibly good news about God's offer of new life penetrated to the uttermost parts of the earth.

God determined the objective for His church, and in some instances also provided immediate goals, (for example, as with Philip in Gaza and Paul in Troy). He also provided the necessary tools for the task in Word and Sacraments. But for the most part He let Paul decide upon his own methods.

In our consideration of Paul's methods, we shall center our interest on the seven points indicated on your outline. We note in the first place that Paul's mission involved a divine call, He did not decide for himself to become a missionary, nor did he determine for himself that the Gentile world would be an appropriate field of labor. He served only when he was called and only where he was called. Because the significance of that is not always appreciated by people in other Christian denominations, it needs to be under scored here. Paul received an immediate call on the Damascus road. A dozen years later together with Barnabas, he also received a mediate call through the congregation at Antioch. God no longer calls men immediately, but He does call them mediately. No man is to preach without being sent. Thus the call is an essential part of the church's mission method.

Proper preparation is also part of the picture as Luke presents it. After the call came on the Damascus road, Paul did not rush pell mell into mission activity in the manner of some contemporary enthusiasts.

He had received a thorough pre-theological training in Tarsus before the first call came. The equivalent of a seminary training followed, first in Arabia, then another eight years in Cilicia. His vicar's call took him to Antioch for a year (11:36) where he served with Barnabas. Paul's thorough preparation helps us appreciate his directive not to entrust the office of the ministry to a novice (1 Tm 3:6). It also helps us appreciate the importance our church attaches to the thorough preparation you men receive for your ministry.

Manpower is another important matter relative to mission method. The dominant idea in Acts is that of a team ministry. The Holy Spirit specified two men to the Antioch congregation for ordination as missionaries. "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Paul elected to repeat the team system on his second journey choosing Silas as his mission teammate. Barnabas did likewise when he sailed with John to Cyprus. Timothy joined the team as Lystra on the second journey. After Paul's vision at Troy, the "they" of the Lucan narrative changes to "we" indicating that a medical missionary has joined the team for a time. While the team ministry was the usual method, it appears that Paul also operated solo fashion at Athens (17:16) and again at Corinth (18:1) until Silas and Timothy rejoined him from Macedonia. In the meantime "he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks." Thus while the Spirit initially provided Paul with a companion, Paul did not feel compelled to employ that method in every instance in his work.

A study of the strategy Paul employed reveals the same flexibility. Originally the Lord prescribed a general strategy for His church to employ in its mission. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth"-1,2,3,4, in that fashion. In my essay, "Scriptural Imperatives for Home Mission Work" in the Home Mission Handbook I expound upon that strategy directive noting that the words suggest the picture of continually expanding circles around a central starting point.

The early church employed that strategy on three different occasions. After Pentecost, the apostles began the work in Jerusalem (2-7) then around Jerusalem (8-12). Then Philip went north to Samaria, south to Gaza; then the work expanded north again to Damascus, west to Caesarea, northwest to Antioch. In chapter 13 the cycle repeats itself again. Paul is the central figure, Antioch the new starting point and administrative center. First Cyprus, then Asia Minor, consolidation, then expansion again establishing new outposts, not in Mysia and Bithynia as Paul intended, but in the trade, cultural and population centers to the west. In chapter 19 the cycle repeats itself once more with influential Ephesus as the new center. The daughter churches which sprang up around Ephesus underscore the soundness of the divine strategy. It is our task to apply the wisdom of the first century missionaries and their strategy to contemporary policies and situations. One of the discussion group guide questions you will be considering later takes off on this particular aspect of Paul's method.

The book of Acts presents yet another strategy item related to Paul's method. Though he was God's chosen vessel to share the gospel with the Gentiles, yet in place after place Paul's initial point of contact was the local synagogue and the Jews there. Even though that tactic often led to trouble for Paul, he was determined to reach out to the Jews in the community first, then to the Gentiles. Paul did not always employ that strategy, but he did it often enough for that method to become his *modus operandi*. We still employ that strategy when we begin a home mission in an outpost with a WELS nucleus, or when we enter a world field in response to a Cameroon or an Antigua request.

Means are also an important part of Paul's method. We know that the Antioch Christians commissioned and ordained Paul and Barnabas. But nowhere does Acts suggest that those Christians sent out a monthly subsidy check to support them in their work. In fact, Luke's account of the first journey says absolutely nothing about where Paul and Barnabas stayed in the different places they visited or where their support came from. On the journey Lydia opened her home at Philippi to Paul. Aquila and Priscilla did likewise at Corinth, and in addition they gave Paul the opportunity to support himself in a tent making partnership with them. Thus the meager records suggest that at times Paul supported himself as a self-employed missionary, at other times he received support from those to whom he ministered the Word. Years later Paul told the Corinthians that it was a

general principle with him “that when I preach the gospel, that I may make the gospel of Christ without charge.” This is another point to which you will be giving special consideration in the group discussions.

The manner in which Paul functioned as a missionary also reveals some thing about his method. His first convert of record was a government official at Paphos, Sergius Paulus. Paul’s encounter with him was a one on one proposition. In fact he summoned Paul to his office because he “desired to hear the word of God.” Numerous others were also won for God’s family through that kind of personal witness. Most converts however were won through Paul’s public testimony, particularly in the synagogues. Here too the pattern suggests variation and flexibility.

Last but not least is the matter of location. The list in your outline is representative, but not exhaustive. Your familiarity with the book of Acts will enable you to associate specific incidents with each of the places on the list. The synagogues include almost every place on Paul’s mission itinerary. Homes which became little churches include those of Lydia, Jason and Aquila. The river bank at Philippi became church for the women who “resorted thither for prayer.” The Areopagus provided a pulpit in Athens, jails at Philippi and Rome and at intermediate places. Kings’ courts include those of Festus and Herod Agrippa. And after Paul’s ship left Crete on its way to Rome Paul also testified to his shipmates. He bent any ear he could find in the interest of the gospel, anytime, anywhere there was occasion to do so.

This brief overview of the methods Paul employed for the sake of the gospel suggests a number of pertinent observations for students of missions today. First of all the diversity of Paul’s methods is almost incredible. And it is all recorded for us in just seven chapters (13-19) of the book of Acts. Paul was a man with a unique capability for distinguishing between the form and the substance of things, and then employing whatever strategy, means or manner suited the particular occasion best. Paul was certainly no traditionalist. He understood as few men have ever understood the freedom God gives His people in Christ, and Paul knew what that meant for the life and work of the Lord’s church.

The remarkable diversity he demonstrated suggests another Pauline attribute, that of adaptability. He was as adept at witnessing to kings as he was to a jailer; to affluent Corinthians, as to economically depressed Macedonians, to sophisticated Ephesians and to antagonistic Jews; with or without a companion, with or without visible means of support.

Paul’s method also suggests the need for organization. There are numerous evidences of an administrative program functioning in the early church. Administration is impossible without organization. There is no way to do things “decently and in order” without recourse to organization. The selection of the seven deacons by the mother church suggests a beginning of the formation of an organized program. Both the Jerusalem and the Antioch congregations called and sent out missionaries. Paul’s mission journeys were followed by reports to the Church at Antioch and later to a conference at Jerusalem, not at all unsimilar to the way we still do things today on the parish level and on the conference, district and synodical levels. The mother church also exercised supervision in matters of doctrine and practice in the early church. All these things are indications of organization in the early church.

The ordination of elders and bishops also points to organization. So does the decision to divide the responsibility for work in the mission fields. Acts 16 reports that Silas and Paul delivered to the Galatian churches “the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.” It appears that as the burden of the work increased, so did the need for organization.

While Paul appreciated the need for and the importance of organization, he was by no means an organization man. He was organism conscious rather than organization conscious. That means that he was not primarily concerned about missions and churches, but about mission and about the Body of Christ. Or as we express it on the outline, his method was person-centered, not establishment-oriented. His approach was not, “Sir, would (or wouldn’t) you like to join our church?” but rather, “May I introduce you to Jesus, He’s your friend.” It is important for us to remember this in an age in which the church is no longer the popular and respected institution that it once was. Paul was certainly intent on the establishment of churches as we have

noted previously, but that was not a primary concern of his. Nor should it be for us. His concern was for souls. So should ours be.

The record reveals also that Paul was successful in his mission activity. The followup visit in Galatia revealed that the church was flourishing there to such an extent that more ordinations were in order. Luke frequently records that “many believed” in response to Paul’s preaching and teaching. The meeting at Miletus between Paul and the elders from Ephesus suggests success there also.

We conclude our observations with the notation that Paul’s ministry was, above all else, evangelical. His person-centered approach, the diversity of his methods, and the adaptability he demonstrated are all evidences of that. So are the epistles he addressed to his mission congregations.

Conclusions

We sum up our conclusions with the statement of the outline: The freedom of the gospel leaves us free to use our sanctified Christian common sense, to plan, to try, to improvise and to prove our own methods in home and world missions to fit the time, the place and the culture in which we labor in the service of our Lord. Our objective is always **To Make All Men See.**