

Equipping for biblical evangelism

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Preface

The purpose of this script is to equip Christians for the ministry of preaching the gospel by providing a biblical foundation. In doing so, I would like to address my experience as a missionary and evangelist, showing where I have made mistakes, learned things, and ultimately returned to the foundation: the Word of God. Why mistakes? Because I, like many others, also had a heart for the lost, but was not sufficiently equipped. Thus, I learned a lot from others and looked for role models but understood at some point that my ultimate role model must be the Word of God itself with Jesus at the center and the early church in Acts. How did these evangelize? What did they preach? What did they do? What fruit did they experience? How should we evangelize today? All of these things will be covered in this script, thus equipping the reader for this ministry and avoiding mistakes that I have done. Then, through a comprehensive study of the Bible - with more than 350 biblical passages quoted - the subject of how we can evangelize biblically today to follow in the footsteps of the apostles and the early church again, seeing the same results and fruit as they saw then, will be covered. The Elberfelder and Schlachter translations (equivalent to the King James Version in English) will be used to stay as close as possible to the original text for theologically important issues.

Introduction

After my salvation in a Baptist church at the age of 17, my heart began to burn for those who did not yet know Jesus. Unfortunately, there was no one who could have taken me by the hand. To my amazement, there were only a handful of people in my town who evangelized regularly at all and shared the gospel with others. According to surveys in Western countries, less than about 2% of Christians evangelize at all! Sad but true: my experience can confirm this. So, it becomes all the more exciting for you as a reader, because if you are even reading this script at all, it means that you are probably one of those 2%. And therefore, you should be prepared to learn not only how to evangelize yourself, but also how to teach it to others in order to equip them as well.

"Though the harvest is great, the laborers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out laborers into his harvest." - Matthew 9:37

How urgent this statement of Jesus is also today, I would like to describe by means of an experience. After an evangelistic outreach, in personal prayer, I had an inner vision in my mind's eye. I saw a beach by the sea, and I was standing some distance away. The beach looked as if it was covered with black dots. In my amazement, I went closer and saw that these black dots were countless fish on the shore! And most of them had already died and were decomposing on the beach. I saw individual workers trying to collect the fish, but it looked pitiful because they were far too few. In this vision, I ran to the village and shouted loudly that we should all go to the beach to collect the fish, which washed up on the beach as if by themselves. They could not be lost.

I believe that God draws many people all over the world to Himself to be saved, but His body - the body of Christ, does not preach the gospel and people are not harvested for the kingdom of God. And if they do, they lack the training to do so.

Meanwhile, those seeking truth get lost in all sorts of false religions or spiritual dead ends.

"Now how will they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? But how will they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? But how will they hear without a preacher? But how will they preach if they are not sent?" - Romans 10:14f

Today in the Body of Christ we have a widespread understanding that only the called evangelist or missionary has the task of bringing in the harvest. "I am not an evangelist" is often heard when talking about the lack of preaching the gospel. But what actually is an evangelist? Some who read this script will see themselves called to be an evangelist. But pay attention, here is the biblical definition of an evangelist:

"And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ [...]" - Ephesians 4:11-12

Paul tells us that the task of an evangelist is far more than just preaching the gospel, otherwise every Christian would be an evangelist because we have all been called by Jesus to be one.

And Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." [...]
- Mark 16:15

We see that the evangelist's task is to equip all Christians for this ministry! So, the problem is not with God, but with us. God is drawing people to Christ, but we are not preaching His gospel. But what is the reason for our disobedience?

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments." - John 14:15

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; [...]" - John 14:21

"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word [...]" - John 14:23.

The profound problem is that we have lost our love for Jesus because true love for Jesus is automatically expressed in our obedience to His Word. I don't think Jesus is calling out here and saying, "If you love me, prove it." but rather making an irrefutable statement, "If you love me, *you will* [...]. So, Jesus gives us a mirror to hold up, not a mirror of condemnation, but a mirror of the truth of our spiritual condition. If you are reading these lines right now and notice that you are not sharing the Gospel regularly, you know that you lack love for Jesus. But if that's the case, I encourage you to first put this script out of your hand and bring this lack before God with an honest heart in humility and repentance. He wants to fill you with His love so that this love will flow effusively to your neighbor who does not yet know or accept the Gospel, so that you can say like Paul:

"For the love of Christ compels us [...]" - 2 Corinthians 5:14

The love of Christ urges us to what? That we ask people for Christ: be reconciled to God! It is in this context that Paul writes this sentence and explains once again what ministry we have received as Christians:

"But all things from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and putting in us the word of reconciliation. So then we are ambassadors in Christ's stead, God exhorting as it were through us; we pray for Christ, Be ye reconciled to God." - 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

If you come to God with an honest heart, He will fill you with His love because no one loved God first (1 John 4:19). Only then will you be enabled by his love to love him in turn. From this love then springs love for your neighbor. This is the order.

"Zeal without knowledge"

*"For I bear them witness that they have zeal for God, but not with right knowledge."
- Romans 10:2*

*"Without knowledge even zeal is not good; and he that is hasty with his feet missteps."
- Proverbs 19:2*

This is how I would have described myself shortly after I was converted. My heart burned with zeal for the lost, but there was no one in my area who could have equipped me further to do so. Bit by bit, I had to learn from God Himself. One day he gave me a mission: I was to go out into my city and seek out the homeless. I was to share with them the love he had shown me, preach the gospel to them, pray for their sicknesses, and he would heal them. The problem: I had never done or seen anything like this before, so I had very little faith at first, and I was afraid to boot. But wanting to be obedient to him out of love, I went off alone at that time. I met a beggar with back pain, who was then healed of the pain, and I could tell him about Jesus. A love and an urge for evangelism burned within me more and more and shortly after I went on my first mission trip to South Africa with OM (Operation Mobilization). There I experienced God's power as I had never experienced it before in my life through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I received words of knowledge from God for other people, saw healings and deliverances while preaching the Gospel. I continued in Germany and saw the supernatural gifts of the Spirit there as well - outwardly it looked like good fruit to me. I was able to lead hundreds in the well-known "sinners' prayer" and thought I saw many people saved. God kept opening doors to Africa until He revealed to me that that was where my future ministry as a missionary would be. In the meantime (2022), I have been on 24 mission trips abroad and to Africa a total of 14 times. There I experienced how blind eyes and deaf ears opened, tumors disappeared into thin air and bones that had grown together incorrectly straightened with an audible cracking sound. Weekly evangelism in my city has become a daily routine for several years. So, I had already chewed through a lot of things, tried them and got to know them. But at about 21 years old, I noticed that something was missing. What had looked very powerful and fruitful from the outside, revealed itself to me more and more as fruit without a longer life.

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and have set you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." - John 15:16

I can't say that everything during those years was in vain - it wasn't at all - but I noticed that only a very small portion had really ended up being made true disciples of Jesus. Repentance from sins, the coming judgment, baptism and discipleship were very meagerly present in my preaching. But God was gracious and revealed to me bit by bit how my approach and preaching in evangelism had deviated more and more from the biblical model. I made the mistake of patterning myself after other people and evangelists in the kingdom of God, learning good things but not fully aligning myself with the biblical model of preaching the gospel. I looked off what the majority of Christians were doing and led people to invite Jesus into their hearts and not give them offense, often mentioning repentance from sin, baptism, and even discipleship only in passing. But it began a time when God led me back to His Word, which must be our real model and foundation in preaching.

Nowadays I notice two great weaknesses in the preaching in the church of Jesus: Either the power of the Holy Spirit, which is available as a witness of the gospel, is denied or the gospel is adapted in such a way that it seems more pleasant to people and thus more "decisions" are obtained. The gospel, it seems to me, has become more and more of a "prosperity gospel" with the message, "If you come to

Jesus, your life will be better." It is compromised more and more so that more 'decisions' can be obtained.

I remember very clearly an inter-congregational city evangelism campaign once organized by several churches in our city. On the evening of the evangelism, there was an opportunity from the audience to write an SMS to the moderator and the preacher would then answer it in front of everyone. In one SMS, the question came up, "Why do I need Jesus? My life is going well as it is now.". Actually, a perfect question to preach the gospel. But the preacher answered and explained that faith was like depositing money in a bank. If you did, you would get interest, and so it was with faith. It would pay off in life because now you were no longer doing life alone, but with God. So why not bring God into your life? Although I did not know there completely what I know today, it was already clear to me then that this was not the gospel that Jesus and the apostles had proclaimed. Such a gospel would not have led the apostles to be persecuted everywhere for it and ultimately to be cruelly killed. Such encounters and others led me to question everything we call "evangelism" today. This study of the Bible is intended to answer the question, "What does biblical evangelism look like?" for this very reason.

Biblical Evangelism

I ask the reader to join me on a journey through the New Testament, forgetting for this time all that has been learned and appropriated about evangelism. I know that sometimes this is not easy, because we are already shaped in some things and approaches. But our goal is to answer the following question:

How would you evangelize today if the Bible was the only thing, you ever heard or read on the subject?

I am not suggesting that everything we have ever heard on the subject is wrong or of no use - quite the opposite. There is much to be learned from brothers and sisters, just as this script is intended to contribute. But the focus must always be on the Word of God itself, as well as the basis on which we find and develop creative ways to proclaim it.

Therefore, let's take an unbiased look at the Bible and see what our evangelistic ministry would look like if the only input we had on it was the Bible. Again, I'm not saying that everything that is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible has to be immediately unbiblical, but I am saying that if an approach to leading people to Christ is not built on the basic framework of the Word of God, it is flawed and incomplete. There are basic pillars in preaching that are universal and must be there no matter what culture or country the gospel is preached in. Let us remember that we are merely servants in the kingdom of God, and as sons and daughters we obey our Father in heaven out of love for Him.

"But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending, will say to him when he comes in from the field, Come and lie down at once at table? Will he not rather say to him, Prepare what I shall eat to-night, and gird thyself, and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and after that thou shalt eat and drink? Does he thank the slave for doing what he was commanded? I mean not. So say ye also, when ye have done all that is commanded you, We are useless slaves; we have done that which we were bound to do." - Luke 17:7-10

The Word - What is preached?

The center of preaching is, of course, the good news - the Gospel. But what is preached when the gospel is proclaimed? Paul said:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, since it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, both to the Jew first and to the Greek." - Romans 1:16

If the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, then our first priority is to proclaim this gospel completely and without gaps. If we leave out or forget anything important in the process, we run the risk of this gospel losing its power to save!

I will look at two different sections of the New Testament and analyze what is preached there. The first section is before and the second after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Relevant for us today is logically the preaching after Jesus' death and resurrection. Nevertheless, it is interesting to have a look at how the proclamation of the kingdom of God looks like in the gospels.

Before Jesus' death

John the Baptist

The first preacher known to us is John the Baptist. He is the forerunner of Jesus and initiates the coming of the Messiah. Here are the main points of his preaching and preaching:

Matthew 3:1ff:

"Now in those days John the Baptist comes preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' [...]

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, Brood of vipers! Who has directed you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance; and think not to say with yourselves, We have Abraham for our father. For I say unto you, that God is able to raise up children unto Abraham out of these stones. But the axe is already laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Though I baptize you with water unto repentance, yet he that cometh after me is stronger than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with Holy Ghost and fire: his word-shovel is in his hand, and he shall thoroughly cleanse his threshingfloor, and gather his wheat into the barn: but the chaff shall he burn with unquenchable fire."

Mark 1:4ff:

"So John arose and baptized in the wilderness, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. [...] And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is stronger than I; I am not worthy stooping down to untie the thong of his sandals. [...]"

Luke 3:3ff:

"And he came into all the countryside near the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.[...] Prepare ye the way of the Lord." [...]

"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance [...]. But there came also publicans to be baptized, and they said unto him, Teacher, what shall we do? And he said to them: Do violence to no man, and extort no man, and be content with your wages."

John 1:29ff:

"The next day he sees Jesus coming to him, saying, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man that is before me, because he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he might be made manifest unto Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John testified, saying: I saw the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and he abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining upon him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The major emphases of John's sermon were **repentance from sins, the baptism of repentance, and the testimony of Jesus as the Messiah.**

Jesus

Matthew 4:17:

"From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.""

Matthew 7:19-23:

"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruit you will know them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in the heavens. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord! Have we not prophesied by your name, and cast out demons by your name, and done many wondrous works by your name? And then I will confess to them: I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers!"

Matthew 10:5ff/ (Luke 9:1ff; Luke 10:1-13)

"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into any way of the Gentiles, neither enter ye into any city of the Samaritans: but rather go ye to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But when ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 11:20-24/ (Luke 10:13ff)

"Then he began to rebuke the cities where most of his miraculous works had been done, because they had not repented: Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Betsaida! For if in Tyre and Sidon the miraculous works had been done that were done among you, long ago they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, do you think you will be exalted to heaven? Even unto Hades shalt thou be cast down: for if the wondrous works had been wrought in Sodom, which were wrought in thee, it would have remained unto this day."

Matthew 12:41-42:

"Men of Nineveh shall stand up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah: and, behold, more than Jonah is here. A queen of the south shall stand up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, more than Solomon is here."

Matthew 16:24-27/(Mark 8:34-37; Luke 9:23-25)

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his life? Or what will

a man give as a ransom for his life? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each one according to his deeds."

Mark 1:14:

"And after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel."

Mark 10:17-27:

"And as he went out into the way, one ran and fell on his knees before him, and said to him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said unto him, What callest thou me good? No one is good but one, God. The commandments thou knowest: "Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not withhold anything; honor thy father and thy mother!" But he said to him, "Teacher, these things I have obeyed from my youth. Jesus looked at him and loved him and said to him, "You lack one thing. Go, sell all that you have, and give the proceeds to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me! But he, horrified at the word, went away sorrowful, for he had many goods. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have goods enter into the kingdom of God! But the disciples were terrified at his words. But Jesus answered again, and saith unto them: Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. But they were beside themselves, and said one to another, And who then can be saved? But Jesus looked at them and said, With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

Luke 4:14-22:

"And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and the news of him went out through all the surrounding countryside. And he taught in their synagogues, honored by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went into the synagogue according to his custom on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him; and when he had rolled up the book, he found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to poor men; he hath sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to send forth the brokenhearted to liberty, to proclaim a pleasant year of the Lord." And when he had rolled up the book, he gave it back to the servant, and sat down; and all eyes in the synagogue were upon him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 13:3-9:

"No, I say to you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower fell in Shiloh and killed them; do you think that they were debtors before all the people who dwell in Jerusalem? No, I say to you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. But he said this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit in it, and found none. And he said to the husbandman, Behold, three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none. Cut it down! To what end does he also make the land useless? But he answered and said unto him, Lord, let it remain this year, until I shall dig about it, and lay manure. And if it will bear fruit in the future, good; but if not, you may cut it down."

Luke 13:22-30/ (Matthew 7:13f):

"And teaching, he passed through cities and villages one after another, and journeyed to Jerusalem. And some said unto him, Lord, are there few that are saved? But he said to them: Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able. As soon as the master

of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, open to us, he will answer and say to you, I do not know you and do not know where you are from. Then you will begin to say, We have eaten and drunk before you, and in our streets you have taught. And he will say, I tell you, I do not know you and do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity! There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you thrown out. And they shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall lie at meat in the kingdom of God. And behold, they are last who will be first, and they are first who will be last."

Luke 15:7:

"I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous who have no need of repentance."

John 3:3-21:

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter his mother's womb for the second time and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [...] And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not judged; but he who does not believe is already judged, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Now this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works be exposed; but he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be made manifest that they were wrought in God."

John 4:10-14:

"Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. [...] Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will not thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up into eternal life."

John 5:23-29:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you: He who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that have heard shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, even so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and he hath given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and have committed evil unto the resurrection of judgment."

John 6:29:

"Jesus answered and said to them: This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

John 6:35-38

"Jesus said to them: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. But I have told you that you also have seen me and do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will not cast out."

John 6:47-54:

"Truly, truly, I say to you: He who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and died. But this is the bread that comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. But the bread which I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. The Jews therefore disputed among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said to them: Verily, verily, I say unto you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

John 7:37-39:

"Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his body shall flow rivers of living water. Now this he said of the Spirit, which they that believed on him should receive: for as yet the Spirit was not, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

John 8:12:

"Jesus therefore spake unto them again, saying: I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

John 8:24:

"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins."

John 8:51:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you: If any man keep my word, he shall not see death for ever."

John 10:9:

"I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."

John 11:25:

"Jesus said to her: I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

John 12:46-48:

"I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness; and if anyone hears my words and does not obey them, I will not judge him, for I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath him that judgeth him: The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day."

John 14:5-7:

"Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. And how can we know the way?' Jesus says to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through

me. If you have known me, you will also know my Father; and from now on you know him and have seen him."

John 15:6

"If any man abide not in me, he is cast out as the vine, and is withered: and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

John 18:37:

"For this purpose was I born, and for this purpose came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."

Similar to John the Baptist, Jesus preaches about **faith in his person, repentance from sins, and discipleship.**

Just like John, Jesus baptized people and he baptized even more than John! (John 3:22; John 4:1). It must be mentioned that Jesus and His life are the Gospel itself. He is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-5). It is not merely his words - but he himself is the gospel, which is why the four eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life and ministry are called "gospels" as a whole. The climax takes place at the cross of Golgotha and in his resurrection. There his mission is completed as he cried out, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Only now does it get exciting, because after his completed work, he gives each follower a commission that would apply from there until his return. We find this at the end of the Gospels. This is the commission that Jesus, the Lord, has given to each one of us personally:

Matthew 28:18-20:

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the consummation of the age."

Mark 16:15-18:

"And he said to them: Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who has believed and been baptized will be saved, but he who has disbelieved will be condemned. But these signs will follow those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink anything deadly, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the weak, and they will be well."

Luke 24:45ff:

"Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance for the remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Ye are witnesses of this; and, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you. But ye, abide in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high!"

John 20:21:

"As the Father has sent me, I also send you."

I want to summarize what Jesus asks of us in His final commission:

We are to walk, preach, baptize, disciple and teach.

Go

Go where? Jesus says, "*[...] all nations [...]*" and "*[...] all creation.*".

We have the mission to preach the gospel to everyone. No matter where you go, as long as someone has not fully heard the gospel, you are right.

Our problem today: we turn Jesus' words around and claim that only those who have been called as evangelists and missionaries need to preach the gospel. Yet each one of us, whether to Africa or in our own environment, has been called to preach the Gospel! The evangelists are the ones who equip the Body of Christ to do this.

Preaching

What are we to preach? We are to "*[...] preach repentance in his name for the forgiveness of sins [...]*". We will look more closely at what this means exactly, using the book of Acts, and elaborate on how the apostles and the early church carried out this commission.

But what is the condition today? Besides the evangelist, in many churches only the pastor is given the responsibility to preach. Then, when a church plans an evangelistic crusade, the church members usually go out to invite so that the pastor can then preach the gospel. Is this wrong? No, but if only evangelists and pastors preach the gospel, then it absolutely is. If any Christian does not preach the gospel himself, then he is disobeying Jesus' command. There is nothing wrong with planning evangelistic events where one then preaches. However, this does not mean that each individual Christian is relieved of the responsibility to preach the gospel regularly.

Baptisms

I think this part of the Great Commission is the most lost in our time. We have adapted to a system where for the most part only the pastor baptizes people. Is it wrong for the pastor to baptize people? Certainly not, but where is it written that the pastor would be solely responsible for this? Ask yourself this question: how many people have you baptized in your life? Most Christians, whether they have been a Christian for 4 or 40 years, have never baptized anyone in their lives. But biblically, we are all called to baptize people.

Because this may still sound very foreign to some, let's remember that we want to read these Bible passages as if we had never known our church system - as if, like isolated African peoples, we had grown up outside of civilization. Be honest with yourself: after Jesus' command, would you have immediately concluded that this was a pastor's job alone? I believe that most disciples at that time did not even have an understanding of a "pastor" as we have today. So how could they have concluded that this commission was for them alone? If we look in the book of Acts, we notice that the first disciples all understood the commission as if Jesus had spoken directly to each one of them when he said, "*Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them [...]*".

Make disciples

Jesus is not telling us to make people professing Christians, but to make disciples.

But what is a disciple? A disciple is a follower. Many profess to be Christians, but they do not follow Christ in their lives. It brings to mind the words of Jesus:

"Why do you call me Lord, Lord! but do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

Just like many others, I made mistakes there. When someone had come to the point of believing in Jesus and had spoken a sinner's prayer' with me, I stopped with him, said to myself "Hallelujah!" and moved on to the next person! If possible, I have tried to send him to a church, that he be disciplined

there by the pastor on Sunday. But where is it written that discipleship is the pastor's job? Jesus is not speaking to pastors, but to all his followers, "*Make disciples!*" So, we have the task of making disciples of people, not just professing Christians. If a new convert does not become a true follower of Jesus, the Great Commission has not yet been fully carried out.

And secondly, how is a sermon once a week on Sunday going to make someone a disciple? Does the pastor have time to personally take each new convert by the hand? Absolutely not. Does everyone who has led someone to faith have to disciple them themselves? Biblically, not necessarily, as we will see in the Book of Acts. However, if we never disciple others "because we are evangelists," we are still not fully obeying the Great Commission.

Often, bringing new converts into a church and discipling them there has not worked. Many of those have therefore never been discipled, the contact was not maintained, because I thought I did not have to care anymore, because my "job" was already done. And therefore, I assume with high probability that the devil has torn the seed out of the hearts of many by then. In the end, it was my fault because I addressed myself more to the existing system than to the words of Jesus that say to me and to us still today, "*Make disciples!*"

Peter Wagner, professor of church growth at the School of World Mission in California, made the issue clear with a paper he published in America at the end of the 20th century. He collected statistical material from evangelism programs of 178 churches in 6 cities. His results were sobering:

26,535 gospels were distributed
4,106 decisions for Christ were made
526 came to a Bible course
125 became members of a church

I think that such statistics are not exceptions when we look at the situation today. Often, we hear through Christian media only the numbers of decisions for Christ. 4,106 decisions sound very impressive. But how many of those became disciples? No more than 3%! This is a subject we will come to later, how to make disciples well and effectively today to carry out the Great Commission.

Again, I want to ask you the question, especially if you may have already been evangelistic: How many have you already made disciples?

Teaching

Teaching is understandably also a part of discipleship, but it does not have to apply only to new converts. Teaching others is again a task of all of us who have already been made true disciples.

"For while ye ought to be teachers according to the time, ye have need again to be taught the beginning of the sayings of God: and ye are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid meat."
- Hebrews 5:12

And again, we see that we have all been called to teach others. The author of Hebrews is not speaking to any one shepherd here but is speaking to all: meanwhile you should be teachers! But here, too, the reference is immediately made to the pastor. Our whole church system has changed in such a way that the pastor has become responsible for almost all the tasks Jesus has given us. It was no different for me, and it was not easy for me to acknowledge how flawed my own approach to evangelism was. I want to make one thing clear to the reader, which became very clear to myself: We will one day have to answer at the end of our lives not to an ecclesiastical system, but to the Lord Himself. So how important is it to obey His Word than to conform to the current system? This is not to say that we should leave or boycott our church right now. But it is to show us who our real authority is before

whom we must justify ourselves for once. I don't know about you, but I want to be able to hear from Jesus one day, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

The Book of Acts

Imagine having the chance to ask Peter or Paul personally how best to carry out the Great Commission - what matters, exactly what to say, and how they carried it out in a very practical way. Imagine if Peter came to your church and held a weekend workshop on the subject of "evangelism". I don't think any true and sincere church would not want that. Thank God we have the book of Acts! With thankful hearts we can approach God because not only did He give us the commission, but He also put in writing for us how His early church carried out that commission! But do we actually realize that through the book of Acts we have the opportunity to learn from these people? To learn from those who themselves had walked with Jesus, seen him ascend and changed the history of the times forever? How much more should we take them as a model in our evangelism! For us it is now becoming exciting because this is the preaching after Jesus' death and resurrection.

The first and perhaps best sermon for us to use as a model is Peter's sermon on Pentecost. Here Peter stands up on Pentecost and explains what had just happened through the Holy Spirit. He explains to the Jews, using the Old Testament, why the Scriptures were now fulfilled in Jesus Christ, in that God raised Him from the dead. He explains that Jesus, crucified by them, was the Savior promised by God.

Acts 2:37-43:

*"But when they heard this, it pierced their hearts, and they said to Peter and the other apostles: What shall we do, brethren? But Peter said to them: **Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, Be ye saved out of this perverse generation. Those who received his word were baptized, and about three thousand souls were added that day. **They continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers.** But fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles."*

Why I find this passage to be especially good is because everything from the Great Commission is present.

First Peter explains from Scripture why Jesus is the Messiah, and something crucial happens to the listeners: they believe. They begin to believe that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah. Peter does not say, "All right, now you believe. Ask God for forgiveness, invite him into your hearts, and you are now Christians and can come into our assembly." No, he says they should *repent*, and each *be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins*. Then Peter says they will receive the Holy Spirit. But after that, "*[they] persevered in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers [...]*." In other words, they became true disciples by being taught to keep everything Jesus had commanded them! It makes very clear how they became disciples.

*"But God hath thus fulfilled that which he declared beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer. **Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out [...]**" - Acts 3:18-19*

Nowadays, unfortunately, we often only focus on "believing in Jesus" and Martin Luther's "Sola Gratia" ("By grace alone") and salvation by faith alone has been so perverted in our modern times that repentance is no longer even a concrete part of the Gospel, and a "cheap grace" is preached. But this

certainly could not have been Luther's intention. Just as it had not been Paul's intention to implement that with his words, whom Luther actually quotes.

Romans 6:15-18:

"What then, shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that to whom you make yourselves available as slaves to obey, you are slaves to whom you obey? Either slaves of sin to death or slaves of obedience to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you were slaves of sin, but became obedient from the heart to the image of the teaching to which you were given! But being made free from sin, you have become slaves to righteousness."

James 2:14-20:

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but has no works? Can, for instance, faith save him? But if a brother or sister is scantily clad and lacks daily food, but someone among you says to them: Go in peace, warm yourselves and be satisfied! but you do not give them what is necessary for the body, what good is it? So also faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith from my works! You believe that only one is God? You are right; even the demons believe and tremble. But will you recognize, you vain man, that faith without the works is useless?"

In the context of Jesus' words, it becomes clear that genuine faith bears good fruit, and fruit of repentance at that. If you read Matthew 25:31-46 about the final judgment, you notice how both groups refer to Him as "Lord." So, these are most likely people who would call themselves pious, but were without good fruit. "By their fruits you will know them." (Matthew 7:16)

And further, Matthew 7:19-23 states:

"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruit you will know them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in the heavens. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord! Have we not prophesied by your name, and cast out demons by your name, and done many wondrous works by your name? And then I will confess to them: I never knew you. Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity!"

There are even relatively many parables of Jesus where He speaks of people who will confess Him, even address Him as "Lord," but will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven because their faith is dead, praising God with their lips but their heart is far from God (Matthew 15:8). Again and again, Jesus speaks of being "ready" for His return and what will happen to those who are not. He is speaking here to His followers and thus to us today (Matthew 24:32- 51; Matthew 25:1-30; Matthew 22:11-14; Matthew 10:16-39; Matthew 18:6-11; Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 12:35-48; Luke 14:25-35; Luke 16:1-13; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 17:1-10; Luke 21:29-36; Revelation 2-3, etc.).

Paul also makes it clear to us in his letters from what must be reversed:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10:

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be mistaken. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor lechers, nor profaners, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor blasphemers, nor robbers, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

Galatians 5:19-21:

"But manifest are the works of the flesh; they are: Fornication, uncleanness, dissoluteness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of wrath, selfishness, dissensions, factions, envying, drinking, gluttony, and the like. Of these I tell you in advance, just as I said before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

It is also clear in John's epistles that someone who testifies to genuine love for God and calls himself a follower should show it by his life.

1 John 3:14-15:

"We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren; he who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer of men, and you know that no murderer of men has eternal life abiding in him."

1 John 2:4:

"He that saith, I have known him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and in him is not the truth."

1 John 2:9:

"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness until now."

Philippians 3:17-19:

"Be imitators of me one of another, brethren, and look to them which walk as ye have us for an example. For many walk, of whom I have often told you, but now also say with weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is the belly, and whose glory is in their dishonor, who are bent on earthly things."

2 Timothy 3:1-5:

"But this know, that in the last days grievous times shall come: for men shall be selfish, lovers of money, boasters, haughty, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, backbiters, incontinent, cruel, lovers not of good, traitors, rash, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. And from these turn away!"

I would never have enough space in this script to cite all the scriptures that speak of godliness without repentance as a cautionary example. There would simply be far too many.

But I want to make it very clear: A gospel without repentance is not the gospel as it is written in the Bible. I write this with such emphasis because I believe that this part is the one that is least emphasized these days because it is the most uncomfortable to preach. And what this does is that we have people sitting in churches who call themselves Christians but are on the broad road. So, a gospel without active conversion cannot save. And this does not mean perfection or works, but a change of direction and mind. Your life changes direction and path from a willful sinful lifestyle, to following God.

Hebrews 10:26-31:

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and the fervor of a fire that will consume the adversaries. If someone has rejected the Law of Moses, he dies without mercy on two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified common, and has reviled the Spirit of

grace? For we know him who said, "Mine is vengeance, I will repay"; and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is fearful to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Matthew 7:13-14:

"Enter through the narrow gate! For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in by it. For strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Through and through the Gospels, repentance is described as a sign of real salvation through faith. When Zacchaeus leaps from the tree and declares that he will repay fourfold to all those from whom he has taken too much money, Jesus then says, "Today salvation has come to this house." (Luke 19). Jesus also speaks of this four chapters earlier in the Parable of the Lost Sheep:

Luke 15:7

*"I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven **over one sinner who repents** than over ninety-nine righteous who have no need of repentance."*

Jesus equates the recovery and salvation of the lost sheep with the repentance and *repentance of that sheep!* He does not say, "So there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who believes again [...]" but over one *who repents*. Faith is the prerequisite to repentance. That is why Peter does not even mention faith in his sermon on Pentecost, because the question alone, "What shall we do now?" reveals that they now believe and are convinced that the Jesus they crucified was indeed the Son of God. I myself made perhaps the greatest mistake there in my preaching. The gospel I preached largely wrapped itself around the uncomfortable part of having to give up your life of sin, deny yourself, and take up your cross in order to follow Jesus and become his disciple. Just to understand again, it is not about living a perfect life in order to experience salvation. It is about a giving up of a willful lifestyle of sin and entering the path of sanctification where we become more and more like Christ – a real conversion to God. A saving faith always results sooner or later in good fruits, by which we can also recognize true Christians according to Jesus' words in Matthew 7. Otherwise, it is a hypocritical faith.

*"By their fruits you will know them. Do you read grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? So every good tree brings forth good fruit, but the rotten tree brings forth bad fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, nor (can) a rotten tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruit you will know them. **Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in the heavens.**"*

*"Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. **Repent and believe in the gospel!**" - Mark 1:15*

I thought it might make more sense to reveal this bit by bit and slowly, after they had already infiltrated a church, rather than from the beginning. In our churches today, we almost try to "lure" people in with what they can get from God or how their lives would be better because of it. We want to change the gospel until people like it. Believe me, I think everyone would love to get God's grace without having to leave their beloved sinful lifestyle. Many times, I would come proudly with testimonies from the street outreaches where people had 'given their lives to Jesus' by saying a sinner's prayer with me. I won't deny that some of them had really come to salvation, but many of these 'decisions' were not true conversions because the willingness to repent and turn from a sinful lifestyle was not there.

It is painful to find out in the end that the supposed great fruit, for the most part, probably did not last. The temptation to do as everyone else did was very strong.

Recently, on a mission trip, I met a brother who, just like me, had made the same mistake. We exchanged ideas about it, and he told me quite frankly and honestly, "I still can't quite believe that I left out repentance from sins for over 10 years while evangelizing!" But this very script is meant to avoid such mistakes, that we don't realize after 10 years that we are forgetting or omitting main points of the Gospel - simply because they are inconvenient. We don't want those we have supposedly led to Christ to end up like the man at the royal wedding in Matthew 22, who was invited but did not dress appropriately:

*"Then he said to his servants: The wedding is ready, but the guests were not worthy. Therefore go out into the streets and invite to the wedding whomever you find. So the servants went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was full of guests. Then the king went in to the banquet to look at the guests, and there he saw a man who had no wedding garment on, and he said to him, **"Friend, how did you come in here and yet have no wedding garment on? But he fell silent. Then the king said to his servants, "Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness. There will be his weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen."** - Matthew 22:8-14*

For what reason does Jesus tell this story? I ask the reader to consider that Jesus is making a crucial point here. The man had been invited and had accepted! He had come and accepted the invitation. However, he had not dressed accordingly! These are people who address Jesus as "Lord," but their faith is hypocritical, and their actions show it.

"They profess to know God, but with works they deny Him; an abomination are they, and disobedient, and unfit for every good work." - Titus 1:16

*"Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given unto her to be clothed in silk, bright and clean. - And the silk is the righteous doings of the saints. And he said unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, These are true words of God."
- Revelation 19:7-9*

*"Behold, I come like a thief. **Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and his nakedness be seen.**" - Revelation 16:15*

*"Let your loins be girded, and your lights be burning, and be ye like unto men that wait for their lord, when he shall depart from the marriage: that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him straightway. Blessed are the servants whom the Lord, when he comes, finds watching. [...]
And the Lord said, Who then is the faithful and prudent steward, whom the Lord sets over his servants, to give them in due season what is their due in grain? Blessed is the servant whom his lord, when he comes, sees doing such things. Verily I say unto you, He shall set him over all his goods. **But if that servant says in his heart, My lord is taking his time to come, and begins to beat the menservants and maidservants, and also to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant's lord will come on a day when he does not expect it, and at an hour which he does not know, and will have him cut in pieces, and will give him his portion with the unbelievers.**" - Luke 12:35-46*

Why does Jesus tell such cautionary parables over and over again if they meant nothing? Why does he tell story after story of this happening, like with the 10 virgins, where the oil runs out and that we should watch and stay sober?

Even in Revelation, it couldn't get any clearer or more explicit when he speaks to the church in Sardis:

*"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold it fast, and repent. If thou wilt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come upon thee. But thou hast some in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; they shall walk with me in white garments, for they are worthy. **He that overcometh shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.**" - Revelation 3:3-5*

*"But I have it against thee, that thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from what height thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works. **But if not, I will come upon you and cast away your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.**"*

- Revelation 2:4-5

I would not have time in this script to list all such scriptures of Jesus' warnings to His church. But here he is not speaking to unbelievers, but to those who profess his name. Also, in the parable of the Unjust Servant, it says that *he will have his part with the unbelievers and hypocrites* (Luke 12, Matthew 24). The wrongly dressed man at the wedding will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. I don't know how it sounds to you, but to me that doesn't sound like a heavenly place at all. Jesus talks about how many will call him "Lord, Lord!" but will not be allowed into the kingdom of heaven because they denied him with their deeds and their faith was hypocritical.

I have already quoted dozens of scriptures that give a warning to a faith that is hypocritical, and I could go on quoting dozens. But I took this time for a reason. Nowadays there is a very great fear of legalism and self-righteousness. This has driven many so much to leave the healthy path of salvation teaching and fall down from one side of the horse. We have taken the other extreme out of fear of self-righteousness and taken Ephesians 2:8-9 : "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*" so far out of context that it is forgotten that in the next verse it says what we have been saved for and to do: "*For we are his created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*"(Verse 10)

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not a purely philosophical faith that accepts something as "true," but a profound surrender and conversion to God. That is why in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles there was even more talk about repentance than about faith!

So, I want to ask you readers: is repentance a central theme in your preaching? And if not, why? Because it was central theme in John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles, and the early church.

Once, while reading the 6th chapter of John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit gave me clear conviction about how and with what attitude we evangelize today. I advise you to take a look at this chapter. In this story, a day before, the mighty multiplication of loaves and fishes had happened at the Sea of Galilee, where five thousand people were filled with five loaves and two fishes. All had experienced this mighty sign and now sought Jesus out. Then Jesus starts talking about how He is the true bread from heaven and whoever does not eat His body and drink His blood has no life in himself. The crowd misunderstands His words and thinks He is literally talking about cannibalism. Now put yourself in Jesus' shoes. I know that I would have tried to tell the crowd that I didn't mean it literally, so as not to

offend people and lose them. And what does Jesus do? He doesn't even bother to explain it and many disciples now don't follow him. Then, instead of begging the disciples in horror not to go too, Jesus does just the opposite and says something like, "If you also want to go, then go."

I'll be honest, I couldn't comprehend Jesus' behavior for a long time at first. Or in Luke 4, where Jesus gives his first sermon in Nazareth and then an angry mob tries to throw him off a cliff. Imagine giving your first sermon and people trying to throw you off a cliff afterwards! I probably would have rethought my preaching style for weeks, evaluated, had conversations with my pastor and eldership, and probably never dared to preach once again with the same style. But as I mulled over these two passages of Scripture again and again, I had to face the hard truth that I, like probably most Christians, would rather please the audience than preach a truth that might upset them. I realized that we measure our preaching success largely by what the response of the listeners is, not whether we have been obedient to Jesus. Success in evangelizing was suddenly redefined for me.

Success in evangelizing can be measured not by whether people like it, but that it pleases God.

And for this reason, I often left out repentance from sins. Successful evangelizing means obeying Jesus' words and proclaiming his gospel without any gaps. It is then the job of the Holy Spirit to convince and convict people of these words - but it is our job to *speak* them.

John 16:8:

"And when he is come, he shall convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

How can the Holy Spirit convict people of sin, righteousness and judgment if we leave them out when we preach? How can the Holy Spirit confirm words that we have not spoken? Some people claim we don't need to preach this because it is the Holy Spirit's job. However, I wonder if these people have ever analyzed the book of Acts, because there these three things are preached non-stop. We preach repentance to God and the Holy Spirit convicts of sin. The Holy Spirit confirms the gospel that we preach, but He does not do the preaching for us, which He told us to do!

Acts 24:24-25:

*"Now after some days Felix came near with Drusilla his wife, who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him **concerning faith in Christ**. But when he spoke about **righteousness and abstinence and the coming judgment**, Felix was filled with fear [...]."*

It is interesting to note here that proclaiming "faith in Christ" here means talking about **righteousness, abstinence** (repentance from sin), and the **coming judgment**. So much for understanding what Paul and the apostles associated with "faith in Christ" at that time. Here, Felix was interested in what Paul had to say about faith in Christ. But when Paul started talking about repentance and a coming judgement, he obviously was not so excited anymore and *"was filled with fear"* and sent him away.

Acts 17:30-34:

*"God therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, **now commands men everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness** by a man whom he has ordained, and he has given proof to all by this, that he has raised him from the dead. But when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, but others said: We also want to hear you about this again. So Paul went away from among them. But some men joined him and believed, among whom was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."*

When Paul preached to Gentiles here in Athens, all of these points are represented: **Repentance**, **Judgment**, and **Righteousness**. As a result, some believed and joined Paul. It can be seen from the context that 'believe' here carries a far greater meaning than just assuming it to be true but represents a *life-changing decision*. This is exactly what we can also read in Acts 16:25-34:

"Now at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and praising God; and the prisoners were listening to them. But suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and all the fetters were loosed. But when the jailer awoke from his sleep and saw the doors of the prison opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, thinking that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself! For we are all here. And he called for light, and leaped in: and trembling he fell down before Paul and Silas. And he brought them forth, and said: Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved? And they said: Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. And they spake the word of the Lord unto him with all that were in his house. And he took them unto him in that hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and he was baptized, and all his own immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and had the table set for them, and rejoiced, believing in God, with all his household."

I find this passage very interesting because the jailer is asking the question: what must I do to be saved? Who could ask for a better response to the gospel than that? And Paul says that he and his household should believe in the Lord Jesus to find salvation. But obviously this was not all that Paul had preached there. For the very next verse says that "he then preached the word of the Lord to all". What was the result? All who received the word he heard were baptized! That means Paul must have told much more after the sentence "believe in the Lord Jesus" that is not explicitly mentioned here. But the fact that they were all baptized means that Paul must have talked about baptism again. If you read the letter to the Romans, you can imagine what Paul must have preached. Later we will look at the Epistle to the Romans in more detail.

Philip in Samaria: (Acts 8:4-5; 12).

*"The dispersed therefore went about preaching the word. But Philip went down into a city of Samaria, and **preached the Christ unto them**. [...] And when they believed Philip, who preached the gospel of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **they were baptized**, both men and women."*

Again, we are not given a detailed account of what Philip preached to the crowd, but again, the implication is that they believed and were baptized. Subsequently Peter and John came to Samaria and laid hands on the converts and they were filled with the Holy Spirit:

"When the apostles in Jerusalem had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When these had come down, they prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for He had not yet fallen on any of them, but they alone were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit!" (verse 14-17)

It is interesting to note here that the apostles placed great emphasis on the fact that the new converts were also filled with the Holy Spirit, otherwise they would not have gone on such a long journey just to lay hands on them. One can also conclude that those on whom hands were laid showed an outward manifestation of the Spirit immediately afterwards, otherwise Simon the Magician would not have been obsessed with trying to buy the same "power" with money.

The eunuch from Ethiopia:

"And an angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go southward by the way that leadeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza. It is desolate. So he got up and went. And, behold, an Ethiopian, an eunuch, a mighty man of Candake queen of the Ethiopians, which was set over all her treasure, was come to worship at Jerusalem: and he was returning, and sitting in his chariot, and reading Isaiah the prophet. And the Spirit said unto Philip, Go thy way, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, Dost thou understand what thou readest? And he said, How could I, except someone guide me? And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. But the passage of Scripture which he read was this, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is dumb before its shearer, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away. But who shall describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." But the eunuch answered Philip, saying: I pray thee, of whom saith the prophet this? Of himself or of another? And Philip opened his mouth, and began with this writing, and preached unto him the gospel of Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came to a water. And the eunuch said, Behold, there is water! What hinders me from being baptized? And he commanded the chariot to be stopped. And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him."

Again, we can only indirectly infer what Philip preached to the eunuch here. It says here only, "[...] and he preached the gospel of Jesus." It is astonishing here that immediately when they saw water the eunuch speaks of baptism. So, in Philip's preaching, baptism must also have played a central role. Also, when Saul was converted and became Paul in the next chapter, verse 18 states:

"And immediately the scales fell from his eyes, and he received sight, and arose, and was baptized."

Again, the immediate response to his conversion is baptism. Then it continues with Peter and Cornelius:

Acts 10:39ff

*"[...] And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom also they slew by hanging him on a tree. This one God raised up on the third day and made him visible, not to all the people, but to the witnesses God had chosen beforehand, to us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. **And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify forcefully that he is the God-ordained judge of the living and the dead. To this all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**"*

First Peter preached about what had happened to Jesus on the basis of his death on the cross and resurrection. Then he speaks of judgment and salvation through faith. In the lines before, it is clear that Cornelius was already God-fearing and trying to work righteousness.

Verse 34-35

*"But Peter opened his mouth and said: In truth I understand that God does not look at the person, but in every nation **whoever fears him and works righteousness is pleasing to him.**"*

So, repentance was already present with him. However, repentance is incomplete without faith in Jesus' work. Moreover, this is confirmed since Peter mentions that Cornelius already knew John's baptism (the baptism of repentance). This would also explain why those present still received the Holy Spirit during the sermon and began to speak in tongues and prophesy (verse 44-46). Afterwards, they are still baptized (verse 47-48) and when Peter returns to Jerusalem, Peter defended his action of going

to Gentiles and "they calmed down and glorified God, saying, 'Then God also has given **repentance** to the nations for life.'" (Acts 11:18)

*"Ye know how that from the first day that I came into Asia I was with you all the time, ministering unto the Lord with all humility, and with tears, and with temptations which came upon me through the persecutions of the Jews; how that I kept back nothing of that which was profitable, that I preached it not unto you, and taught it you, both publicly and in the houses, witnessing both to Jews and Greeks **repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.**" (Acts 20:18-21)*

Acts 19:1-6: Paul and the disciples of John in Ephesus:

"Now it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the higher regions, came to Ephesus. And he found some disciples and said to them: Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not even heard whether the Holy Ghost is at all. And he said, Upon what then were ye baptized? And they said, To the baptism of John. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe on him who was coming after him, that is, on Jesus. And when they had heard it, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus: and when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

Paul must have first mistaken the disciples of John as disciples of Jesus. These had already undergone the baptism of repentance. He referred to faith in Jesus and they had them baptized again and now in the name of the Lord Jesus. I find it interesting that Paul, believing he had met disciples of Jesus, asks them if they had also received the Holy Spirit when they became believers. What does this tell us about Paul's theology at this point?

He apparently was not fully convinced that someone who became a believer would automatically be filled with the Holy Spirit. Likewise, it shows us that he determined receiving the Holy Spirit based on accompanying, outward manifestations of the Spirit. Personally, I grew up with a teaching that if you become a believer, you automatically receive the Holy Spirit. Whether the actual *receiving* of the Holy Spirit and the *filling* of the Holy Spirit are two different things or one and the same, is out of question - but apparently Paul, anyway also Peter and John in Samaria assumed that the people still lacked *something*, although they had become believers and were baptized or they wouldn't have come all the way to lay hands on them. When they laid their hands on the converts the Holy Spirit came upon them with power. So, everything that should have happened had not happened automatically. What does this mean? It means that we too have the responsibility to lay hands on the converts so that they may be filled with the Spirit, whether we believe they have already received it or not. The laying on of hands is not a necessity for someone to be filled with the Spirit but it still was a common practice of the early church that we should imitate as well. The Letter to the Hebrews even states that the laying on of hands is among the foundation stones and word of the beginning of Christ.

*"Therefore let us leave the word of the beginning of the Christ, and let us turn to full maturity, and not lay a foundation again with **repentance from dead works, and faith toward God, the doctrine of washings, and the laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.**" - Hebrews 6:1-2*

When we compare the book of Acts and its proclamation of the gospel with this statement by the author of Hebrews, it is striking that all of these listed things played a central role. But more on this later.

Towards the end of Acts, we read how Paul testifies about Jesus to other crowds, such as the people in Jerusalem, to King Agrippa and others (Acts 22-26). There we read how Paul recounts his testimony several times of how he met Jesus. So, strictly speaking, it is not unbiblical to tell his own testimony when preaching. I also find it interesting that in Acts 26 Paul summarizes his entire ministry before Festus and Agrippa as follows:

Verse 19-23

*"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly appearance, but preached to those in Damascus first, and in Jerusalem, and in all the countryside of Judea and the nations, **to repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance**. Therefore the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to murder me. Therefore, since I obtained succor from God, I stand to this day testifying to small and great - saying nothing except what was also spoken by the prophets and Moses that it would come to pass - that the Christ should suffer, that he should be the first to proclaim light through resurrection of the dead, both to the people and to the nations."*

Paul summarizes his sermons in his missionary activity with the exhortation **to repent and turn to God, performing works worthy of repentance**. Likewise, Jesus' death and resurrection are mentioned. So, we can assume that wherever Paul preached the gospel earlier in Acts, repentance or conversion also had a central role. I think by now it should be crystal clear that repentance is a part of the gospel of Christ that we are also obligated to preach as well as Paul was called to. If we look at the themes of the preaching of the Gospel of Acts (and thus for us today), they can be summarized as follows:

- Jesus' death on the cross, his resurrection and testimony of his divine sonship to God.
- Repentance/conversion from sin and the coming judgment
- Faith in Jesus Christ, in his finished work and forgiveness of sins
- Baptism in water
- Receiving the Holy Spirit

It can also be noted that the Gospel was introduced in different ways. When preaching to Jews, much has been quoted from Scripture. When Gentiles were preached to, social or cultural things were often referred to in order to build a bridge to the Gospel. However, the book of Acts often gives us only summary words when the gospel is preached. Very often it says that they continued to share the word of God afterwards. The study of Acts can help us to give a summary of the Gospel when evangelizing, as we often experience on the street. But when people are more interested, what do you say? For this reason, we will now look specifically at the Epistle to the Romans, which gives us a fuller picture of the gospel. Perhaps it is known to some in preaching as the "Romans Road" because it goes into salvation through Jesus step by step, in a coherent way. Thank God for the Epistle to the Romans!

The Roman Road

Romans 1-3:

In the first chapter, Paul begins after his opening words, describing the fatal situation in which man finds himself in separation from God:

Verse 18-21:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth through unrighteousness, because that which is known of God is manifest

among them, for God has revealed it to them. For his invisible nature, both his eternal power and his divinity, has been perceived and seen in the made since the creation of the world, that they might be without excuse; because they knew God, but neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but fell into folly in their reasonings, and their hearts, which had no understanding, were darkened."

Paul describes how God relates to man's sin and unrighteousness. He gives God's creation as evidence of the Creator and says that nevertheless - instead of giving glory to God - we have given ourselves over to our own imaginations. Therefore, God has given us over to our waywardness (allowing our "free will to run wild") and the earth becomes full of sin, selfishness, impurity and wickedness. Then in Romans 2 he explains (here specifically to the Jews) that anyone who thinks he is more righteous or better than others and judges them because of this, is in effect judging himself because he is equally guilty.

Verse 1-3:

"Therefore you are not to be excused, man, everyone who judges; for in judging another you condemn yourself; for you who judge do the same. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth on those who do such things. But thinkest thou this, man, who judgest them that do such things, and doest the same, that thou wilt escape the judgment of God?"

Paul is talking about the inevitable that every person will face: God's righteous judgment on people's sins and evil deeds.

Verse 5-6:

"But according to your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself for the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will repay each one according to his works [...]."

God will bring judgment on everyone, whether Jew or Gentile. Whether they know the law or not. He justifies it by citing the conscience of each person that God has given us.

Verse 14-16:

"For if nations that have no law act according to the law by nature, these that have no law are a law unto themselves. They prove that the work of the law is written in their hearts, their consciences bearing witness, and their minds accusing or even excusing one another - in the day when God judges the hidden things of men according to my gospel by Christ Jesus."

Paul then explains why Jews are no better off with the Law because they too have sinned. In Romans 3 he refers to the statement he introduced in the chapters before: Everyone is a sinner.

Verse 4:

"[...] Rather be it so, God is true, but every man a liar [...]"

Verse 10-12:

*"[...] as it is written, **"There is none righteous, not even one; there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God. All have gone astray, they have all become unfit; there is none that doeth good, there is not one."***

Verse 18-20:

*"But we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped up and the whole world may become a slave to the judgment of God. Therefore, by works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: **for by the law cometh knowledge of sin.**"*

Here the first key in the preaching of the gospel is pointed out: *through the law comes knowledge of sin!* And the conscience of every man confirms the law and us as guilty. Before we introduce to a sinner the Savior who forgives and washes away sins, we must first make him realize that he is a sinner and needs a Savior! Imagine you go to someone and say, "I have a cure for cancer for you." And he replies, "That's nice of you, but I don't have cancer." But if you point out to him and tell him the symptoms, all of which you can recognize in him, he won't wait a second to take the cure. The problem nowadays: everybody thinks of himself as a good person. We compare ourselves with each other and always find someone who is a little worse than us. Therefore, we have to show people that they are not good people - at least not by God's standards. In doing so, you can use the 10 Commandments, for example, to show people that they have sinned all their lives in God's eyes.

How many times have you lied in your life? How many times in your life have you taken something that was not really yours? How many times have you disrespected your parents and not honored them? How many times have you taken God's name in a very degrading way? How many times have you committed adultery in your heart with other women or men and coveted? Then you can refer to Jesus' words that relate to these 10 commandments:

Matthew 5:27-29:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. But if your right eye gives you cause to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. For it is better for thee that one of thy members perish, and not that thy whole body be cast into hell."

Verse 21-22

"Ye have heard that it was said unto the ancients, Thou shalt not kill: but whosoever shall kill shall be liable to judgment. But I say unto you, that every one that is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; but he that saith unto his brother, Raka! shall be liable to the high council; but he that saith, Thou fool! shall be liable to the hell of fire."

How many times have you had hatred in your heart against someone? When you start going through this commandment, you quickly notice that we are guilty in God's eyes. The Holy Spirit, through the law and through the conscience, has the ability to convict people of sin. We discover the same thing in the Acts of the Apostles when it says, *"and it came upon them as through the heart."* (Acts 2:37) or *"But when they heard this, their hearts were pierced [...]"* (Acts 7:54). If someone is humble enough to acknowledge that in God's eyes, he is by no means a good person, as he claims, but a sinner - like each of us - it can be explained why a just God must therefore hold judgment to punish the act of sin. People can only be saved if they have the realization of them being unworthy and sinful in God's eyes and worthy of judgement. It is shown in the story of Luke 18, where the tax collector and the pharisee are going into the temple. Only one of them left justified and forgiven. It was the one who acknowledged that they were indeed a sinner and in need of forgiveness. Because God "resists the proud but gives grace to the humble."

It is, of course, the most unpleasant part of all because it is not nice to hear. No one wants to hear that they will be judged and punished by God. Jesus speaks of "being consigned to the hell of fire." Talking about hell, especially in the Western world, is probably one of the hardest things to do. But embellishing or trivializing things can't be the solution either. Jesus talks about hell 46 times in the

Gospels alone! He talked about it constantly. So how can we talk to people about hell, which is a place of eternal torment for those who disobey God? In Germany, this is not an easy task. But I've learned that the idea of hell only becomes a problem for people only when it involves them. For others, that is not necessarily the case. Many people, although they may believe in God, do not believe in a hell. Why would a loving God banish people to hell? You can lead people to this subject in the following way without losing them right away:

If God is a just God, do you think He would let rapists, child molesters or murderers walk away without judging them? Do you think Adolf Hitler deserves hell or not? How can a just and good God not punish such people?

Most would immediately agree from their understanding of justice that people like Adolf Hitler or rapists would deserve to go to hell. Then you can ask further:

What would you call a judge here on earth who does not punish child molesters and murderers? The logical answer you would get would be: an evil, unjust and corrupt judge. Now, it can be made clear that God judges not only murderers or rapists, but also liars and thieves. It can be argued that because God is so infinitely more just and holy, He will judge us for every single sin in our lives according to His standard of morality, and His wrath will be visited upon us at His judgment. Some would then claim, "God is love, therefore He will not punish anyone." But logically, the opposite is true. Because God is so good, this is a problem for us - since we are not. And if He is truly a good God, then He *abhors* evil. God cannot love good and not hate evil at the same time. Would criminals be afraid of a criminal judge? No, they will be afraid of a good and righteous judge. A judge who represents righteousness. It is the same with God. Because He is love, He hates evil. Perhaps the following thought will help: a person who lives completely immorally will not hate evil but love it. A person who lives more morally than the previous one may not hate evil, but he does not love it either. A person who is 'moral' in the standards of the world, on the other hand, will abhor evil. Now imagine a morally perfect, holy and absolutely and perfectly good God. How strong must his hatred of evil be? You see, the more morally perfect God is, the worse evil, and in this case sin, is condemned. And God knows everything we have ever thought or done in secret and will hold us accountable for it. God cannot bring sin into His presence. It is simply not compatible with His nature. Hell is the place where God withdraws His presence and punishes sin. Because all good things come from God Himself (cf. James 1:17), all good and conceivably positive things go with Him. No light, no joy, no peace, no love - nothing good. Jesus describes a place of eternal torment in Matthew 25 and that this cruel place was meant for the devil and his demons, not for people, but our sin has put us on that path.

By that you can bring God's judgment and hell very close to people after all, and it even makes sense. When you have brought people to this point, you can ask them what your plan is so that their sins would not be judged once they stand before this good God.

Most then bring up the following things: After all, God is a forgiving God and if you have done a lot of good in life, God will forgive you. Muslims think the same way. But you can go back to the example of the worldly court. Suppose you were found guilty before the law of the land and you said to the judge, "Judge I know I'm guilty, but I'm a good person and I regularly feed the homeless and often help old ladies cross the street or go shopping." What do you think the good judge would say? "Okay, sorry, I didn't know that. You can go." No, he would say, "That's nice that you do that, but that's not why you're here. You're here because you broke the law, and that's why you're going to be punished. Your good deeds don't undo your bad deeds." As I said, if a judge let you go because of such an excuse, he would be a corrupt and immoral judge. In the same way, we cannot bribe God with our good deeds. Really simple, isn't it? God cannot forgive us just like that either. He would be simply unjust. How could a good God be unjust?

This is exactly where Jesus comes in, who took our punishment as an atoning sacrifice so that we could be justified. It is like someone who has accumulated a huge pile of debt and cannot pay it. And someone comes to court whom the defendant does not even know, and he pays all the debts for that

debtor. Because God is loving and just, He cannot simply not punish sin. Otherwise, he would deny himself, which he cannot do. That is why it is said:

*"Whom sin knew not, he made to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.
- 2 Corinthians 5:21*

So, it goes on in Romans that through Jesus and His atoning sacrifice, He took upon Himself the wrath of God for us, so that through His work on the cross we can now receive grace before God through Jesus Christ our Savior. ***Through Jesus' sacrifice, God can be both gracious and just!***

Romans 3:21-31:

"But now without law God's righteousness has been revealed, witnessed by the law and the prophets: But God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ to everyone who believes. For there is no difference, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God has set Him up as a place of atonement through faith in His blood, to prove His righteousness for the remission of sins previously committed under the forbearance of God; to prove His righteousness in the present time, that He is righteous and justifies him who is of faith in Jesus. Now where is the glory? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we judge that man is justified by faith, without works of law. Or is God the God of the Jews alone? Not also of the nations? Yes, of the nations also. For God is one. He will justify circumcision by faith and uncircumcision by faith. Do we then abolish the law by faith? By no means! But rather we confirm the law."

Romans 4:5-8:

"On the other hand, to him who does not do works but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness, just as David pronounces the beatitude of the man to whom God counts righteousness without works: 'Blessed are those whose lawlessnesses are forgiven and whose sins are covered!' Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin!"

Romans 5 then points out how much God loves us, that He even dies for sinners who neither love nor know Him, to bring them to Himself. Could you imagine a king who would allow himself to be spat upon and crucified so that he could save the people who crucify him from a punishment they actually deserve? I can't. But the one who did that for us was not some king, but the God of the universe. A God who becomes small like a man, allows Himself to be spat upon and crucified so that He doesn't have to be just to us. This is a loving God. If such an act of love doesn't blow you away, then I don't know what could. After all, we're not talking about a human being here, but an eternal, holy God who willingly suffers such a thing for us because He loves us.

Verse 1-2

"Having therefore been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand [...]."

Verse 6-11

"For Christ, while we were yet powerless, died for the ungodly at the appointed time. For scarcely will anyone die for a righteous man; for for the righteous man perhaps someone also would dare to die. But God proves his love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Rather, now that we are justified by his blood, we will be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we

shall be saved through His life. Not only so, but we also boast of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

Then further in Romans 6 Paul speaks of a sanctified life in freedom from sin and baptism in water. He explains what the significance of baptism is and that through Jesus we are not only forgiven but also made free from sin because we are baptized as in Jesus' death and resurrected with Him and because of that we can now *live a completely new life*.

Verse 1-7

"What shall we say now? Should we persist in sin so that grace may increase? By no means! We who have died to sin, how will we still live in it? Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death? So then we have been buried with him through baptism into death, that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also shall walk in newness of life. For if we are united with the likeness of his death, we shall be also with that of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be put away, that we should serve sin no more. For he that died is absolved from sin."

Verse 12- 13:

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that it should obey its lusts; neither put your members at the disposal of sin, as instruments of unrighteousness; but put yourselves at the disposal of God, as living from the dead, and your members at the disposal of God, as instruments of righteousness!"

Verse 17-18:

"But thanks be to God that you were slaves of sin, but became obedient from the heart to the image of doctrine to which you were given! But having been made free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness."

Here, once again, the connection between faith and repentance is clear, as it is in Romans 3, verse 8:

"And (shall we do it) about (as we are blasphemed, and as some say, saying: Let us do evil that good may come? Whose judgment is just."

Even Paul was unjustly slandered because of this, as people used his teaching to justify their refusal to repent of sin, since they were justified by grace through faith. In response, Paul says that their judgment will be just. In other words, "such people rightly deserve God's judgment because they live a hypocritical faith."

Chapters 7 and 8 then continue with how we now live life in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. In doing so, it becomes clear that from now on we are to live in the Spirit and not in the flesh. We now obey and follow the Spirit of God and so by God's grace we live a sanctified life. After the Holy Spirit has entered us, we are sons and daughters of God, are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17) have access to God through His Spirit, a direct relationship with God through Jesus Christ and will share eternal glory with Him because we are reconciled with him. The gospel is not just forgiveness, but a new creation in Christ - the restoration of God's creation plan from the Garden of Eden.

Romans 8:1-4

"So now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For that which was impossible for the law, because it was powerless through the flesh, God did, sending his own Son in the likeness of the flesh of

sin and for sin, and condemning sin in the flesh, that the law's requirement of justice might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

In the chapters that follow, Paul goes into further detail about the Christian life and sanctification, as well as the other epistles. This is the Romans road!

In the 1st chapter of Colossians is seen an abbreviated version of the gospel, as also shown by Romans Road:

Colossians 1:20-23:

"[...] for it pleased [God] through him to reconcile to himself all things - making peace through the blood of his cross - whether they be things on earth or things in the heavens. And you, who were once alienated and enemies according to the mind in evil works, he has now reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and blameless before him, provided you remain grounded and firm in the faith and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard preached in all creation under heaven, of which I, Paul, have become a minister."

Paul deals in detail with what we have already worked out from the book of Acts. Now the question is how to proceed in a very practical way when telling someone about the Gospel. For example, if you are on the street or in everyday life, you may have to summarize the Gospel within a few minutes. Each person must find his or her own style. There is no "one" way to do it. In different cultures, societies, and situations, the way one introduces the Gospel may be different. But the core message is the same. Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 9 that he became as a Jew to the Jews, that he might win the Jews, and as one without law to those who are without law - though in doing so he does not disobey the law of Christ.

"For though I am free to all, I have made myself a slave to all, that I may win as many as I can. And I have become as a Jew to the Jews, that I may win the Jews; to those who are under law, as one under law-though I myself am not under law-that I may win those who are under law; to those who are without law, as one without law-though I am not without law before God, but under the law of Christ-that I may win those who are without law. To the weak I became a weak one, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all, that in all ways I might save some."

- Verse 19-22

In Acts, for example, we see Paul using the existing altars for himself in Athens to build a bridge to the true God and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is trying to establish a common ground so that he can gain an audience. The way to engage in conversation with people in order to bring them the gospel is a whole topic in itself. However, this script is first to lay the groundwork for what we should preach in the first place - regardless of what method we can use to get into conversation with people in the situation. There is also not "the" one way to do this, but also depends on the individual guidance of the Holy Spirit (see e.g. Philip and the eunuch). We see that even Jesus engaged in conversation with people about the good news in different ways. He often used the situations or environments he was in to transition to spiritual things. When Jesus sat with the Samaritan woman at the well, he took the physical thirst and water in the well as an analogy to the spiritual thirst and living water that he offers her (John 4). When he had satisfied the five thousand, he took this situation and talked to the people about how he himself is the true food and bread that came from heaven (John 6). When he raised Lazarus from the dead, he told Martha that he himself is the resurrection and the life (John 11). When Jesus and the disciples were at the Mount of Olives, he spoke about himself as the true vine and about the Father as the vine dresser (John 15). When Jesus was in the temple, he spoke about himself as the cornerstone (Matthew 21). So, we see that Jesus himself proclaimed the gospel in different, situational

ways and made it vivid. But in essence, He spoke of one and the same thing. In Appendix A, "Evangelism and Discipleship Tools," there are some references to good ministries that go into more detail about how to practically share the gospel with others-whether through your own testimony, a brief interview, or the leading of the Holy Spirit. The most important thing that should be clear to you after this Bible study is what the gospel is all about, so that you don't preach an incomplete gospel that might lose its power to save! I would like to give an example of how the Gospel can be presented in a nutshell, for example on the street in just a few minutes, and how I often share it with people on the street.

"We humans were created by God in His image and in a true relationship with Him. However, we humans have turned away from God and now live in separation to God through sin. The relationship with God is broken and we human beings have become sinners who no longer know Him. If you take a look at the world, you can see this: Wars, wickedness, corruption and all the vile things that have already come out of humanity. We have all sinned, no matter how good we think we are. None of us can show off a perfect life. We often justify ourselves by comparing ourselves to someone worse. And you will always find someone who you can say lives worse than you. However, God will one day hold us accountable for what we have done, because He is a righteous God, and His standard will be authoritative, not the standard of this world, which is very low. And we know what we have done right and wrong because God has given us a conscience. We therefore have no excuse. So, what are we going to say to God when we stand before Him and He judges us righteously for breaking His commandments? We must keep in mind that he also knows all the thoughts and motives we have ever had. When we are judged by Him, we deserve hell, which is nothing but God's prison and punishment for our sin. He cannot forgive us just like that, otherwise He would be an unjust judge and not a good God. Our good deeds do not undo our bad deeds. Just as it does not work here on earth before a worldly judge, it does not work with God either. So, we all have a serious problem. But God has loved us so much that He does not want to judge us righteously. He does not want to pour out His wrath on us for man's wickedness, so He came to earth Himself through His Son Jesus. God became man in Jesus Christ and met us. He modeled for us a life as we should live it and, in the end, died on the cross of Calvary for our sins. Jesus voluntarily took our sins on the cross as a perfect sacrifice and atonement because he was the only one who never sinned and so paid for our sins with his suffering and death. He took all punishment upon Himself voluntarily, and when He died, He cried out, "It is finished!" He paid for all our debts in full. Three days later he rose from the dead and showed the world that he is truly the Savior of the world and has power over death. And this offer of his love he made to us while we were still sinners. He says to us that if we come to Him, believe in His Son Jesus, repent of our sins and ungodly lifestyle and ask Him for forgiveness, God will forgive us, and we will receive eternal life through the finished work on the cross and death now has no power over us. We are saved from judgment. Our relationship with God is completely restored. But not only that; he also promises to give us a new heart, a new spirit and to make us his sons and daughters, a completely new creation, so that we can live again as Jesus modeled for us. For this he also gives us his Spirit, through which he then wants to live in us and help us to live this life. And God cannot lie, what he has promised, he keeps. We are then to be baptized in his name, which means that we accept his substitutionary work for us and die with him now to our old life and bury it in baptism and begin a new one with him - reconciled to God and eternal life with him as an undeserved gift."

For practical understanding: I do not speak these lines like a robot once up and down, but this text gives an example and framework, as I often tell it in conversations. In doing so, I often shape it dynamically with questions or testimonies and with different approaches to this topic and sometimes different emphases, depending on how I am led by the Holy Spirit in the process.

Wait until you receive power!

*"Ye are witnesses of this: and, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you. **But you, stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high!**" - Luke 24:48-49*

*"And when he was gathered together with them, **he commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father**-which, he said, you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, **but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit after these few days**. They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them: It is not for you to know times or dates which the Father has set by his own authority. **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**"*

- Acts 1:4-8

Jesus tells His disciples not to go out until they are clothed with power from on high for this ministry. So, he gives his disciples the necessary equipment to be witnesses. Why? Because God wants to confirm his words by his supernatural power.

"For the kingdom of God does not consist in word, but in power." - 1 Corinthians 4:20

In the Western world, a proclamation with God's power by means of signs and wonders has been lost bit by bit. With the passage of time, Christian thinking has come closer and closer to the Western worldview, throwing much of the supernatural overboard. Since the Enlightenment epoch (in German "Aufklärung") in the 18th century, more and more a humanistic worldview has emerged, in which secularism and materialism have strongly influenced the thinking of most people and also of Western Christians since then. Reports of the supernatural work of God are viewed rather critically by most Western Christians. The consequence of this was a gospel that was no longer proclaimed with power but was supposed to convince in an apologetic way with rational arguments. As the word apologetics itself expresses, Christianity since then has been more concerned with defending the faith rather than boldly proclaiming it. The Church of Jesus Christ has since moved more and more on the defensive instead of remaining on the offensive.

"But I also say to you, You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." - Matthew 16:18

Have you ever noticed that this phrase actually describes a church on the offensive? Have you ever heard of a battle where the enemy army brought his gates with them to the battlefield? It is evident here that the church of Christ is to conquer and destroy demonic territories and be on the offensive against the powers of darkness and their strongholds here on earth.

*"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."
- 1 John 3:8*

And:

"As the Father has sent me, I also send you." - John 20:21

When we look into the life and preaching of Jesus, we notice that He not only taught and preached, but was also empowered by the works of the Father.

"And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. And the news of him went out into all Syria; and they brought to him all the afflicted with divers diseases and torments, and possessed with devils, and moonstruck, and paralytic; and he healed them."

- Matthew 4:23-25

"And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, that the multitudes were greatly astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."

- Matthew 7:28-29

Jesus says that the works He does from the Father testify to His words:

"But I have the testimony greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works which I do, bear witness of me that the Father has sent me." - John 5:36

"Jesus answered them: I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness of me; [...]" - John 10:25

Jesus even goes so far as to say that if He had not done the works from the Father, the people would not have had to believe Him! He even says that if he had not done the works among them that no one else could have done, they would not even be sinful for not having believed him.

"If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not! But if I do them, believe the works, though you do not believe me, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father!"

- John 10:37-38

"If I had not done the works among them which no one else has done, they would not have sin."

- John 15:24

*"Then He began to rebuke the cities where His most miraculous works had been done, because they had not repented: Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Betsaida! **For if in Tyre and Sidon the miraculous works had been done that were done among you, long ago they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes.** But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, do you think you will be exalted to heaven? Even unto Hades shalt thou be cast down: for if the wondrous works had been done in Sodom, which are done in thee, it would have remained unto this day."*

- Matthew 11:20-23

I don't know about you, but from my perspective, Jesus' statements make perfect sense. Anyone could claim anything. So where do I get credible confirmation of what he says? But when God Himself confirms the words with signs and wonders that not just anyone can do, His words become credible that they come from God. In some Christian circles, reference is made to the question of Jesus' miracles by quoting from Matthew 16, where the Pharisees come to him and ask him for a sign from heaven. Jesus responds that *"only an evil and adulterous generation [asks] for a sign."* (Matthew 16:4) But in context, it is understood that Jesus does not contradict himself with the other statements already quoted. For just before the Pharisees ask for this sign, Jesus had already performed one of the greatest

signs by feeding the crowd of four thousand with seven loaves and a few fish! Moreover, before this sign, he had also done quite a few miracles by healing the lame, the blind, the mute, the crippled and many others in front of a large crowd (Matthew 15:29-39). For people who simply do not want to believe in the first place, no sign is sufficient. Even after Jesus opened the eyes of a man born blind and the parents testified to it, or when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, it was the same. Listen to what the Pharisees advised after they knew about all these signs and wonders that Jesus did:

*"Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council together and said: What do we do? **For this man does many signs.** If we leave him thus, all will believe in him [...]." - John 11:47-48*

The chief Pharisees themselves confirmed that Jesus was doing signs! In a few verses after that they even want to consult how they can even kill Lazarus, because through this miracle so many Jews now believed in him! So, we see that this demand for a sign from heaven in the context of this statement suddenly makes Jesus' words more understandable, when he replies that such a demand can only come from a wicked and adulterous generation, because he permanently did signs and wonders from heaven. The next statement that one often hears on this from Christians who no longer believe in signs and wonders today is that the wonders were only to testify to Jesus' sonship with God uniquely. Accordingly, we no longer need them today and it is enough to refer to the miracles of Jesus in those days. But biblically, one comes to the exact opposite conclusion:

*"Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me; **but if not, believe for the works themselves! Verily, verily, I say unto you: He who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and will do greater works than these, because I go to the Father.**"*
- John 14:11-12

I find it interesting that Jesus' statement here doesn't even sound optional. For he does not say, "He who believes in me can" or "he shall," but "he **will** [...]." Then, when Jesus had gone to the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit to clothe us with power from on high, so that we might become witnesses to the ends of the earth. When he tells the disciples to wait before they go, so that He can equip them with power, this means that he also wants to equip everyone who proclaims his gospel with a credible testimony. This is exactly what had happened before when Jesus sent out the twelve and then the seventy-two:

"And when he had called the twelve together, he gave them power and authority over all demons and to heal diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." - Luke 9:1-2

"Now after these things the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two by two before his face into every city and place whither he himself would come. And he said unto them: The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out laborers into his harvest. Go! [...] and heal the sick therein, and say unto them: The kingdom of God has come near to you." - Luke 10:1-9

Jesus gave to his disciples, who were now to proclaim his word without him, the same witness that he had: the works of the Father in his name. If we then look to the end of Mark's Gospel, we notice that this command is similar to that of the seventy-two:

*"And he said to them: Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. **But these signs will follow those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up***

serpents, and if they drink something deadly, it will not harm them; they will lay hands on the weak, and they will be well. Now the Lord, having spoken with them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. But those went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord cooperated and confirmed the word by the signs that followed."

Jesus says, just as in John 14:12, that these signs will follow the people who believe in Him. The last sentence of the Gospel confirms what we have already worked out, that God continued to confirm His word with signs that followed, just as He did with Jesus. Then in Acts we see how exactly this happened and exactly these signs followed the first disciples. And not only the apostles themselves, but also others (See Stephen Acts 6:8; Philip Acts 8:6-7 or also Hananias Acts 9:12).

Sidenote: [It is amazing how nowadays people try to explain this passage away, since it is so clear and plain. So, in some translations it is added in footnotes that in Mark 16, verses 9-20 are missing in some old manuscripts. Since they are to be found here, it is said that they are nevertheless present in some manuscripts! Besides: do we really want to presume that God cannot preserve his word? If this passage was not intended by God, then he could not preserve his word, because it is in every Bible. Either we believe that his written Word was inspired and instituted by him or not. But what makes the whole thing even more absurd is that if verses 9-20 were not in this chapter, then Mark's Gospel would stop with verse 8:

"And they went out and fled from the tomb. For trembling and dismay had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

If anyone thinks this is how Mark ended his Gospel, it is absolutely absurd. Why? Because it is only in the verses after this that Jesus is reported as appearing to the disciples as the Risen Christ - just as it is in the other Gospels! So, if you want to relativize these verses, you also relativize the verses of the Risen Christ, which is what the Gospel was written for in the first place. Besides, all these verses are a repetition of things that are already written in many other places. Even as much as one would like these verses to be relativized, one must acknowledge that they are not absent from some manuscripts, that is, they have been handed down one-to-one in this way. Whoever rejects these words rejects God's Word, who can and does keep His Word himself.]

I would like to analyze the book of Acts and see how often signs and wonders followed in the preaching of the Word, so that we can paint a picture of what biblical evangelism looked like in the early church.

Signs and wonders in the book of Acts

Proclamation with signs and wonders:

Acts 2:1-13: Peter's Pentecost sermon:

Acts 3:1-26: Second sermon of Peter after healing of the man born lame:

Acts 6:8-15: Stephen before stoning.

Acts 8:4-13: Philip in Samaria

Acts 9:1-18: Paul's conversion with laying on of hands of Hananias

Acts 9:32-35: Peter in Lydda and healing of Aeneas

Acts 9:36-43: Peter in Joppa and raising Tabita from the dead

Acts 10: Peter and Cornelius with angelic encounter

Acts 11:21: And the Lord's hand was with them - preaching to the disciples

Acts 13:4-12: Paul with Barnabas on Cyprus

Acts 14:1-7: Paul and his companions in Iconium - God confirms with signs and wonders.

Acts 14:8-20: Paul in Lystra- healing of a lame man
Acts 15:12: Paul reports the signs and wonders in their preaching among Gentiles
Acts 16:16-18: Paul in Philippi- casting out of demons
Acts 16:25-34: Paul and Silas are supernaturally delivered - conversion of the jailer
Acts 19:11-12: God caused unusual miraculous works to be done by Paul in Ephesus
Acts 20:7-12: Paul raises Eutychus from the dead
Acts 28:1-10: Paul is bitten by a poisonous snake and heals the sick in Malta

Proclamation without explicit mention of signs and wonders:

Acts 5:17-21: (just before this, however, the many signs and wonders are told)
Acts 9:19-25: first testimony of Paul to the Jews
Acts 13:4-5: Paul and Barnabas in the synagogues on Cyprus
Acts 13:13-52: Paul and Barnabas in the synagogues of Antioch
Acts 14:24: Preaching in Perge
Acts 16:11-15: Conversion of Lydia
Acts 17:1-9: Paul and companions in the synagogue at Thessalonica
Acts 17:10-15: Paul and Silas in the synagogue in Berea
Acts 17:16-34: Paul in Athens
Acts 18:1-11: Paul in the synagogues at Corinth
Acts 19:1-7: Paul and the disciples of John
Acts 22-26: Paul defends himself and testifies in court
Acts 28:22-31: Paul in Rome testifies to the Jews in his inn

It becomes difficult in this study because often Paul's missionary sojourn in different areas is merely summarized in one sentence, as for example in Acts 14:24-25: "*And having passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia, and when they had spoken the word at Perge, they went down to Attalia.*" In one sentence, 3 missionary journeys are summarized. So, we don't know exactly what the sojourns there were like.

But even in his sojourns, it is repeatedly mentioned in passing that God confirmed Paul's preaching with signs and wonders. When he taught the Jews in Ephesus for a long time, the signs and wonders Paul did in the name of Jesus became so well known that even Jewish conjurers in the whole area heard about it and tried it themselves "in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches" to cast out demons (Acts 17:13). When this attempt failed miserably, "*this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who dwelt at Ephesus; fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord was lifted up.*" (verse 17). Thereupon, many who had practiced such sorcery turned from their sins and burned their books worth 50,000 silver drachmas, which would be equivalent to about 3.2 million euros in our modern times! And all this only because nobody could imitate Paul's authority in his preaching! Therefore, we want to analyze in more detail what effect signs and wonders had on the audience during the proclamation.

Acts 2:41: Pentecost event - everyone hears the disciples speak of God's deeds in their own native language and Peter's Pentecost sermon: Three thousand souls were added to the church.

Acts 3: healing of the man born lame and Peter's second sermon: "*and they were filled with wonder and amazement [...].*" The result was that five thousand souls believed and "all glorified God because of what had happened"! And it must be said that only the men were counted here. So together with women and children, there were far more! (Acts 4:4)

Acts 4:12-16: *"By the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. [...] But the more became those who believed in the Lord [...]."*

These many healings caused crowds to gather even from the cities around Jerusalem to be healed. So, we can assume that not only thousands, but probably tens of thousands heard the gospel because of this - in the Jerusalem area alone! (cf. Acts 21:20 ELB footnote & Acts 6:7)

Acts 8, Philip in Samaria:

"Now Philip went down to a city of Samaria and preached the Christ to them. The crowds with one accord paid attention to what was spoken by Philip, listening and seeing the signs he did. For of many that had unclean spirits they went out crying with a loud voice; and many that were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city. [...] And when they believed Philip, who preached the gospel of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.[...] When the apostles in Jerusalem had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them."

What is the consequence of this? It seems that almost all of Samaria was saved!

Acts 9:32-35: Healing of Aeneas:

"Now it happened that Peter, passing through everywhere, came down also to the saints who dwelt at Lydda. And he found there a man named Aeneas, who had been laid up in bed for eight years; he was paralyzed. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas! Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your own bed! And immediately he got up. And all they that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him; and they were converted unto the Lord."

Acts 9:36-43: Raising of Tabita:

"Now it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord." (verse 42)

Acts 10: Cornelius, his relatives and friends are converted and baptized.

Acts 11:20-21: Proclamation with the Lord's hand *"and a great number believed and were converted to the Lord."*

Acts 13: Paul and Barnabas in Cyprus. The false magician tries to stop the preaching and becomes blind for a time. *"Then when the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, amazed at the Lord's teaching." (verse 12)*

Acts 14: Sojourn at Iconium.

"They tarried therefore a long time, speaking freely in the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, performing signs and wonders by their hands." And it is said:

"a great multitude, both of Jews and Greeks, believed."

Acts 16:25-34: Conversion of the jailer and his household after God freed them by an earthquake.

In Acts 14:8-20 (healing of a lame man in Lystra); & Acts 28:1-10 (bite of a poisonous snake and healings in Malta), the result was that people first thought the men were gods. But Paul was able to explain that God had done these miracles through them. In Lystra we can only guess what would have happened afterwards if the Jews had not come from Antioch and Iconium and persuaded and stoned the crowd. In Malta nothing specific is mentioned after that, but we can assume that also there, after

Paul had healed many on the island in the name of Jesus, he also preached the gospel to them afterwards for salvation.

In summary, exactly what Jesus told the disciples to do at the end of the Gospels and the signs he promised them came to pass. Often, just as in Jesus' time, the signs and wonders had a great impact on the proclamation of the Gospel. But why is this no longer the case today, especially in Western countries? Quite simple: we no longer believe Jesus' words and therefore no longer obey them. We don't lay hands on the sick anymore - ergo, almost no sick people are healed anymore. For the most part, we no longer cast out demons - so we see very few experience freedom. In my missionary work in Africa, we often see that demons are cast out in front of many people when the gospel is preached and thus the name of Jesus is lifted above all powers of darkness. Healings are the order of the day there, just as in Acts - the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and signs and wonders follow the gospel. But in the West, materialism has so influenced people's thinking that they are beginning to explain away the words of Jesus. Although few Christians would openly say it, most have absolutely no reality for spiritual things anymore. That the cause of illness or mental problems could be demonic in nature is already close to superstition for us Western Christians. When it is said in the gospels that Jesus cast out a spirit of epilepsy, today it is often taught that people of that time attributed certain diseases to "demons" in ignorance. I can only say: poor Jesus - he probably had no medical education, because he permanently cast out demons from people! And when people do believe that demons can be cast out, one often hears: "These things only happen in Africa". But I can testify that it is not so. Yes, it may well be that more people in Africa struggle with demonic problems than in Europe, but the reason is that many more people there play with the supernatural and demonic spirits and invite them - even ask them for help for their services. When people have problems that medicine can't cure, they go to so-called "witch doctors". And often they experience supernatural phenomena there - but those who play more with fire also get burned more often. In the West, much less play with demonic powers, but due to the arrival of Far Eastern religions in our society, there are more and more. It has already happened many times that when I prayed in Germany on the street for people who had to do with Far Eastern rituals or demonic practices, such as with the "Ouija board", demons manifested in the middle of the street. I remember very clearly a young man who had done something like that in his past. He was very esoteric minded and when I took his hands to pray for him, his eyes rolled into his head, his body began to shake, and he almost fell over in the process. One can perhaps imagine how passers-by reacted to this....

But from my experience I see the same miracles, deliverances, and healings in Germany as in Africa. On my last mission trip to Israel, we experienced it right at the first attempt to evangelize. We met a nice elderly lady on the way home and as we were talking about Jesus and the Gospel, she suddenly began to manifest a demon. She started shaking, not speaking English, and acting very confused. The spirit somehow wanted to stop the woman from hearing the gospel. But when we prayed a short prayer, the woman came back to us, and it looked like she didn't know what had happened to her. After further conversation, it turned out that she was equally involved in esoteric practices and Far Eastern religions.

Nothing has changed since the times of Jesus and these signs continue to follow those who believe:

"In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes, and if they drink anything deadly, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the weak, and they will be at ease." - Mark 16:17f

When Jesus, in the Great Commission in Matthew 28, tells the disciples to teach the new believers *"all things, and to keep all things, which he commanded them,"* Jesus' command applies just as much to us when he once commanded the disciples:

"But when ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons! For free you have received, for free you give! Do not put gold, silver, or copper in your belts, or a bag for your journey, or two underclothes, or sandals, or a staff. For the laborer is worthy of his food. But when ye enter into a city or into a village, search who is worthy therein; and there abide till ye depart. But when you enter the house, greet it! And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace turn back to you. And if anyone will not receive you nor hear your words - go out from that house or city and shake the dust from your feet! Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that city."

- Matthew 10:7-15

The book of Acts proves that the early church continued its mission in exactly this style. So, if Peter or Paul came to your church to equip you in evangelism, what do you think they would teach you to keep what they were commanded?

*"And I, when I came to you, brethren, came not to preach unto you with excellency of speech or wisdom the mystery of God. For I took it upon myself to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him as crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and with fear, and in much trembling: **and my speech and my preaching consisted not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in instruction of the Spirit and of power; that your faith might rest, not on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.**"*

- 1 Corinthians 2:1-6

In analyzing Acts on preaching with or without explicit mention of signs and wonders, I placed Paul's stay in Corinth in the latter category.

However, by his letter to the Corinthians, it is clear that he was evangelizing with the power of the Holy Spirit there as well! Since Paul addressed such words to the Corinthians, it suggests that this is what happened during the other stays of his journey to proclaim the Gospel. And this is exactly what we find in Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica:

*"[...] and we know, brethren beloved of God, your election: **for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in great assurance [...].**" - 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5*

Here are other biblical passages that clearly indicate that Paul did not confront the ministry of preaching with words alone.

"For I will not dare to speak anything of that which Christ has not wrought by me for the obedience of the nations by word and work, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and round about even to Illyria I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."

- Romans 15:18-19

and further in the second chapter of Hebrews it states:

*"[...] that it was proclaimed by the Lord, confirmed to us by those who heard it, **God bearing witness at the same time by signs and wonders and various acts of power and dispensation of the Holy Spirit according to His will.**" - Hebrews 2:3-4*

Just as Jesus did not send out His disciples then without equipping them with His power, neither does He send us out today without His power.

"I have no gift of healing"

Now we need to address an issue that I encounter just about everywhere when I try to equip people with power in evangelism. A certain mindset seems to hold back quite a few people from freely obeying Jesus' words and healing the sick and casting out demons and proclaiming God's Word with His power: *"But I have no gift of healing"*. Nowadays - I am speaking again of the Western world - a teaching has crept in that could not be worse for this mission. Namely, that if you don't experience healings or other manifestations of the Spirit, you don't have that "gift." So how are you supposed to go out and cast out demons and heal the sick if God in His sovereignty has not given me that gift?

If you don't have this chapter in 1 Corinthians 12 fresh in your mind, I encourage you to read through this chapter first before reading any further. So that we don't get into trouble with different translations, I advise you to read with me in the Elberfelder or Schlachter translation (German equivalent to the King James Version). This is because this translation is strongly based on the original text and is therefore the most suitable for theological questions. As we begin this topic, we must keep in mind that the First Epistle to the Corinthians is the only letter we know of in which Paul names and explains the gifts of the Spirit and was written around 54-56 AD while he was in Ephesus. That is, we can assume that the terminology about "gifts of the Spirit" was not known to the early church to the extent that it is today. Moreover, Paul is addressing the assembly in this letter and in the context of their meetings. He is talking about how the manifestations of the Spirit are to be handled in an assembly (today we might call it 'services'). He is not talking about evangelism, but in the context within the Body of Christ. Now when the church comes together, it is obviously not God's intention that only one or a few be an instrument through which the Spirit edifies the church. God does not need superstars, and the Body is not made up of only one member (verses 14-27). Thus, in church, the Holy Spirit wants to give different gifts to different people for the benefit and edification of the whole church. Caution: when we speak here of "gifts" (charismen - "gifts of grace"), we are not talking about "talents" but gifts in the sense of gifts/present. The mistake that most make is that they see gifts as a temporally unlimited endowment, like natural, innate gifts. But that is not what we are talking about here. One can recognize this by paying attention to the following phrases, which are found only in very accurate translations:

*"For to one is given by the Spirit the **word** of wisdom; but to another the **word** of knowledge according to the same Spirit; and to another faith in the same Spirit; and to another **gifts of healings** in the one Spirit; [...]" - Verse 8-9*

Do you notice anything? Healings are originally in the plural, not the singular. In the same way, it says "word of wisdom" or "word of knowledge" here. According to this, it is much more understandable to think that a word of knowledge or a gift of healing is meant for a temporary situation. Means: The Holy Spirit gives a gift of healing = one healing; the Holy Spirit gives gifts of healings = several healings; the Holy Spirit gives a word of knowledge = a word of knowledge is given by the Holy Spirit to all at a gathering. The word "gift of grace" describes an effect or manifestation of the Spirit at a particular moment.

*"[...] and there are diversities of effects, but it is the same God who works all things in all. But to each one the **manifestation of the Spirit** is given for his benefit." - Verse 6-7*

So, when we are in a church meeting, the Holy Spirit reveals Himself for the benefit of the church by seeking out people in the meeting through whom He wants to give a particular gift of grace to the church. Thus, someone may suddenly receive a prophetic word for the assembly and share it.

"What then, brethren? When ye come together, every man hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation; let all things be done for edification."

- 1 Corinthians 14:26

"But if a revelation is given to another who is sitting there, let the first be silent. For you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted."- 1 Corinthians 14:30-31

An example of this would be an experience I once had in a church. In this congregation there were some who were seriously ill and suddenly a power came into my hands. Then I looked at someone in the congregation and the Holy Spirit immediately gave me a word of knowledge, revealing to me that this person had some kind of tumor or cancer in the abdominal area. I asked if that was the case and the person, amazed, agreed. Then when I put my hands on them, that power shot through my hands into that person. The person felt this power just as I felt it. When I saw the person again in a few days, she told me with joy and amazement that the tumor was gone, and she was completely healed! At that meeting I received more words of knowledge and gifts of healings for people who were also healed immediately. When the meeting was over, the power disappeared from my hands again. The mistake most people make is that they only start praying for the sick again when they feel such power in their hands again. But that happens very rarely with me personally. In another incident, I was sitting in a church and suddenly the Holy Spirit - without my willing - gave me a word of knowledge and a word of wisdom for a person next to me. This word had to do with sexual sins in his life, problems with anger, and other very personal information in his marriage. God wanted to help him and encourage him to become free from this and repent of his sins. I write with emphasis: without my wanting to, because I was very uncomfortable with that. I was only 19 years old at the time and the man was around 60 years old. When I shared the words with him, he sheepishly admitted that it was true and that he needed freedom there. The other information had all been true as well. It was impressive for me to hear that immediately before I had received these words for him from the Spirit, he had prayed in the silence of his heart, "Lord I want to be free from these things, but I don't know how. Please help me." So, the Holy Spirit had given me a word of knowledge and wisdom for his specific situation for his benefit. Now it is noticeable that once the Holy Spirit has given a gift of grace through someone, the same gift of grace is given through him again more often. I think for this reason, we have begun to speak of gifts in terms of "endowments". Is this always unbiblical? From my point of view, not necessarily. Because if the Holy Spirit reveals Himself more often through a person with a specific effect, this can possibly indicate a task or office to which the person is called, because from gifts often also tasks arise. However, this does not mean that if one receives a prophetic word, he has the office of a prophet or is called to it. But it means that a prophet also speaks prophetically. A common mistake is to believe that only certain called "anointed" people can minister in certain gifts of the Spirit in the church. Suppose in a congregation there are such prophets, and they would now be absent from a meeting. Could the Spirit no longer speak? No, he would simply pick out anyone in the congregation and give him a prophetic word, even if that person had never received one before. If there is a need in the congregation for something, the Holy Spirit will fill that need through a special gift of grace. So, we may expect that the Spirit can give us whatever is needed at the moment and work through us according to His will in each of the 9 gifts. For example, in some situations it happens that God gives me situational discernment of spirits and I perceive either light or darkness in people's eyes. However, this has never happened so far without me also having a specific task out of it - be it casting out a demon or recognizing and addressing a believer among people. In fact, it doesn't happen all the time, but only when God wants to do something specific through me, and no one else is available to do it. One thing is that the Holy Spirit dispenses revelations as He wills, the other is that we emulate them.

"So also ye, being zealous for spiritual gifts, strive that ye may abound for the edification of the church."

Thus, when one recognizes a need in the Body of Christ, he himself can strive to make himself available for that need.

*"[...] **But be zealous for spiritual gifts, especially that ye prophesy!** For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth, but in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men for edification and exhortation and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. But I would have you all speak in tongues, but more than that, prophesy."*

Paul makes it clear to us that we can control how the Spirit works through us. It was the same with me. I have been very eager for the Holy Spirit to give me words of knowledge so that I can use them in preaching. After all, if someone comes to you and can say things about you that only God knows about you, then you are more likely to be able to believe that the message of the gospel is actually from God Himself, which you then proclaim to them. Because I saw this as a powerful tool, I asked for it for a long time and then also tried to get such words for others while evangelizing myself. And bit by bit I learned to grow there. And that can only be done by taking steps in faith.

*"But since we have various gifts of grace according to the grace given us, let us use them: Let it be prophecy, **in correspondence to faith** [...]." - Romans 12:6*

*"**And all things whatsoever ye shall desire in prayer believing, ye shall receive.**" - Matthew 21:22*

On this basis, I can say from experience that one can act in all gifts by taking active steps in faith. One can actively choose to be used by God in this regard and one can train to do so. For example, in faith when speaking prophetically, I learned to just open my mouth and trust the Holy Spirit to fill it with His words. Once on a street outreach, I had the impression the Holy Spirit wanted to speak through me to two girls, but I had not yet received anything! However, I felt the Spirit telling me, "If you open your mouth in faith, I will fill it." So, I went ahead, since I was used to this by now. As I began to talk, like a flow of information began to occur within me and I just let it out. After a few minutes, both girls were completely amazed and moved to tears - because the Holy Spirit had given me many words of knowledge as I talked - information that I could never have known. Here I was not waiting for the Spirit, but He was waiting for me to open my mouth! Why does it often work this way? Because without faith it is impossible to please God! (Hebrews 11:6). I have learned how to zeal for them. And this is true for everyone!

Authority - Gifts

Now we come to perhaps the biggest thinking problem: we think that God only heals through gifts of healings. But if we look in the Bible, we will quickly notice that there are other ways through which God gives healing or deliverance. Just for food for thought, how can we still cast out demons today, after all there is no "gift of casting out demons"? On what basis then do the disciples in Acts cast out demons? Or better yet, how could the disciples heal the sick and cast out demons before receiving the Holy Spirit in the Gospels? Logically, this could not have been done through the spiritual gifts as we see in 1 Corinthians 12 because the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out.

In Luke 9 and 10, as well as Matthew 10, Jesus gave His disciples **authority and power** to cast out demons and heal the sick in His name. And this authority works on the basis of the *prayer of faith*. Here is the biblical evidence of this:

*"And Jesus answered and said to them: Have faith in God! **Verily I say unto you: Whoever shall say to this mountain: Lift thyself up, and cast thyself into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; to him it shall be.**"*

- Mark 11:22-23

*"But Jesus answered and said to them: **Truly I say to you: If you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what was done to the fig tree, but if you also say to this mountain: Lift yourself up and throw yourself into the sea!**" it will be done. And whatever you desire in prayer believing, you will receive."* - Matthew 21:21

*"And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, **If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye would say unto this mulberry fig tree, Unroot thyself, and plant thee in the sea. And it would obey you.**"* - Luke 17:5f

Even people who believed in Jesus even then, but were not explicitly disciples, could already pray this "prayer of faith" on his behalf:

"John said to him, Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name; and we resisted him because he did not follow us. But Jesus said, Do not resist him, for there is no one who can do a miracle in my name and soon after speak evil of me."

- Mark 9:38-39

Why would this authority in sending in Luke 10 and Matthew 10 work on the basis of a disciple's prayer of faith? Because Jesus explains it the same way to the disciples in Matthew 17. There, we are told of the only incident where someone was not immediately healed in the Gospels. Jesus comes down from the mountain of transfiguration in this story along with Peter, John and James. At the bottom, they encounter a crowd of people:

*"And when they came to the crowd, a man came to him and fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Lord, have mercy on my son!' For he is moonstruck and suffers greatly; for often he falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, but they could not heal him. And Jesus answered and said, **Unbelieving and perverse generation! Until when shall I be with you? Until when shall I bear with you? Bring him to me!** And Jesus threatened him, and the demon departed from him; and from that hour the boy was healed. Then the disciples came to Jesus by themselves, saying: **Why have we not been able to cast him out? But he saith unto them: Because of your little faith; for verily I say***

unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed from hither; and it shall be removed. And nothing will be impossible to you."- Matthew 17:14-21

Obviously, it had been possible for the disciples to heal this boy and cast out the demon even without Jesus' help, otherwise Jesus would not have spoken so sternly to them. Jesus revealed the reason why the disciples did not see success there: *little faith*. Several old manuscripts translate it as "unbelief," which I think fits the context better. Many have mustard seed faith, but a mountain of unbelief in their path. Some translations still indicate here what is handed down in the other Gospels: "*But this kind does not depart except by prayer and fasting.*"

When I started praying for the sick many years ago and saw little success, I once got this scripture while praying. When I read it, I was very confused because of the last sentence there. First Jesus says it is because of their unbelief and then it sounds like he is saying that there is another reason - they still need to do works. But then the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said, "*Prayer and fasting is not for the demon, but for the person casting out the demon, to strengthen faith and get rid of their unbelief.*"

Prayer and fasting, then, aims to draw us closer to God, "*who is the beginner and perfecter of our faith.*" (Hebrews 12:2). Meanwhile, I can completely confirm this. There have often been situations in which I could not immediately cast out a demon or an illness would not move from its place. As a result, I spent the next few days in prayer and fasting, built myself up in the Word of God and once again faced the mountain that did not want to move. But then suddenly came the breakthrough! In the meantime, I have gained a lot of experience in praying in faith - be it for deliverance or for physical healing. I can confirm that it is just as Jesus said: To exercise authority in Jesus' name, you need faith! Even Peter talks about this when he healed the lame man at the beautiful gate in Acts chapter 3:

***"And by faith in his name his name hath made strong this one, whom ye see and know; and the faith wrought by him hath given him this perfect health in the sight of you all.*" - Acts 3:16**

Now one of my great concerns in equipping other Christians for effective evangelism is to show them how to heal the sick and cast out demons with authority. And from years of experience, I can testify that this is done completely independent of any spiritual gifts. Dozens of examples serve as proof that anyone, without exception, can be equipped and trained in authority in healing and deliverance prayer. I have already taken dozens of people on the streets and equipped them to do this - without laying on of hands or anything else first to impart anything - simply by God's Word and practical demonstration, and each of them could see how God wants to work through them as well. Some of these people nowadays experience dozens if not hundreds of healings in their evangelistic ministry and lives. It confirms that the authority to heal the sick is for every Christian who claims this authority - and not for a few especially gifted people. As stated, this is the same authority that the Twelve or Seventy-two had received when they were sent out - it applies to us as well:

"And he said unto them: Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned. But these signs will follow those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink anything deadly, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the weak, and they will be well." - Mark 16:15-18

Here it is not written, "These signs will follow those who have the special gifts of healings or have been called as evangelists." It says here that these signs will follow *those who believe*.

Do you believe in Jesus and his words? Then these signs should follow you as well! You should be able to do the same things that Jesus did - yes, as He says: even greater! (John 14:12) Why? Because the

same Jesus now continues to live in you! And because of that, He is now working in and through you on this earth. We are the body of Christ. Our hands are his hands! Perhaps it is finally time to lay our hands on the sick - especially in preaching the Gospel!

"Unto them God would make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations; and that is, Christ in you, the hope of glory." - Colossians 1:27

This prayer of faith can also be used for the church!

*"Is there anyone sick among you? Let him call the elders of the church to him, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And **the prayer of faith will heal the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up [...]**." - James 5:14-15*

God has given us everything we need to proclaim His gospel in power. I remember my first mission trip to Africa with Operation Mobilization (OM). I didn't have much experience with evangelizing, nor with praying for the sick. But in Mozambique, God used an experience that changed my theology about healing forever. I got sick there and it looked like I had caught malaria. I had a high fever, chills, abdominal pain, nausea, sore throat, headache, and the like. My teammates prayed a lot for me, but nothing happened. One night I still wanted prayer again, so I asked everyone to come to me to pray for me again. They did and a girl from the team took my left hand. All of a sudden, I felt a slight stream of warmth flowing from her hand into my body and this power went to every area of my body that was hurting. Then I heard Jesus' voice in my heart saying, "Get up, for you are healed." I did and all my fever, headache or other pain was gone! I was healed! Because I had never experienced anything like that before, I was naturally very touched by it and went into my prayer time with God in the evening full of gratitude. Suddenly I saw the word "1 Peter 2:24" written out clearly in the Spirit before me. Not knowing what it said, I curiously flipped to this Bible passage (which I hoped existed at all). It was the second to last verse of chapter two and I could hardly believe it when I read the following lines:

*"who bare our sins in his own body to the wood, that we, being dead to sins, might live unto righteousness; **by whose stripes ye were healed.**"*

I was shocked because I could not remember ever hearing this in a sermon until then! Jesus paid for my healing through his wounds? I was not taught anything like this in my Baptist church. Then I saw a reference to Isaiah 53:4-5:

*"However, our sufferings - he bore them, and our pains - he took them upon himself. But we, we thought he was punished, smitten by God and bowed down. But he was pierced for our offenses, bruised for our sins. Punishment was upon him for our peace, and **through his stripes we were healed.**"*

Peter gives us the theological foundation of his healing ministry, quoting from the prophet Isaiah! And why he does not speak here exclusively of "inner healing" we see from the context, in that Matthew writes:

*"And when evening was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and **healed all that were afflicted: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, He himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.**" - Matthew 8:16-17*

I was totally surprised, because of course that would change everything when I was now praying for sick people. As I may have mentioned, I did not see many healings at first, but many words of knowledge. But I could only pray with success for people where the Lord had given me special words. If God already showed me where someone needed healing without me being able to know it, it was clear to me that He then obviously wanted to heal now, and I therefore received faith to pray for it. I saw with words of knowledge far more than 90% healed because I immediately received faith that God wanted to heal this person - I could pray the prayer of faith without problems. However, without a specific word from God, I saw virtually no one healed because I was never sure if it was really His will to heal or not. Since that day of revelation that Jesus had paid not only for my sins but also for my sicknesses and pains, everything was different. So, I didn't always have to question whether God wanted to heal the sick person before me - he had already made the payment for him 2000 years ago! From that day on, my success rate in praying for the sick without a word of knowledge for healing immediately jumped to the ceiling! From almost 2-3% to 40-50% within one day! Right after this revelation, I saw one after another healed until the end of the whole 3-month mission trip and beyond to this day! This revelation changed my whole ministry forever. My faith continued to grow with increased experience, training and hearing God's word and now on mission trips or outreaches over 90% success rate for healings or deliverances for people are not uncommon anymore. On my last mission trip to Burkina Faso, I prayed for about 450 people in two weeks on 6 crusades and other services based on the laying on of hands and the prayer of faith in Mark 16:18 Mark 11:22 and James 5:15 (others are: Matthew 22:21; Luke 17:5; Acts 3:16; Matthew 17:20, as well as Luke 10 and Matthew 10) and saw about 95% of the people instantly and immediately healed. Often this happened in front of crowds of people who witnessed it. This was not only by gifts of healings, but by exercising the authority given by God. Most healings were actually deliverances from spirits of sickness and weakness, such as those described in Luke 13. (Other examples of how evil spirits cause sickness are in Mark 9:17; Matthew 9:32; Matthew 12:22; Matthew 17:18; Luke 4:40-41; Luke 6:18.)

*"And, behold, there was a woman eighteen years old, **having a spirit of infirmity**; and she was bent together, and utterly unable to rise. And when Jesus saw her, he called unto her, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thy infirmity. And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she became straight, glorifying God. [...] But this one, who is a daughter of Abraham, **whom Satan bound, behold, eighteen years, should she not be loosed from this bondage on the Sabbath day?**" - Luke 13:10-16*

In this, for example, we saw at a crusade a woman about thirty years old who had been completely deaf all her life from meningitis she had had as a baby. I first prayed for her for a few minutes, but nothing happened. But I knew that "faith with perseverance inherits God's promises" (Hebrews 6:12) and kept praying, knowing that Jesus had paid for her healing. For more than half an hour I spoke to this woman's ears and just did not give up. Then all of a sudden, I felt in my spirit that it was accomplished and at that moment her ears opened and she could hear normally for the first time since she was an infant! It was an incredible miracle. Witnesses to this miracle, as I had been one, were close to tears. An outsider representing the Western Church could certainly have said, "If after the twentieth prayer her ears are still not open, then it must not be God's will to heal this woman." But when I read the Gospels, I see that Jesus never said anything like that to people ever.

Everyone who came to Jesus was healed, and everyone on whom Jesus laid hands was made well! If Jesus didn't talk like that, why do we? The answer is because we have never learned to pray in authority with a persevering faith. Even Jesus once prayed two times for a blind man! (See Mark 8:22-26) Moreover, I had not spoken to God about their deafness, but to the deafness about my God! Jesus said:

*"for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, **you will speak to this mountain**, 'Lift yourself up from here to there,' and it will lift itself up. And nothing will be impossible to you."
- Matthew 17:20*

Jesus is not saying here, "then you will say to God," or "ask God," he is saying that we *will speak to the mountain personally!* Jesus makes it clear to us that we are not simply saying a prayer here but speaking in authority to the mountain. There is not even a mention of prayer here. Therefore, when I pray on the street or for strangers while evangelizing for their sickness or pain, I am commanding the sickness - or whatever the cause - to go in Jesus' name, just as Jesus and the disciples did! And I am telling you, if people experience an immediate change in their body, their hearts are amazingly open for the gospel!

Take the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles in your hand and you will see that in healings often no prayer is made to God at all, but it is commanded in His name! The disciples took Jesus' words seriously and started to speak to mountains and they were moved. The reason we often don't move mountains today is because we have stopped speaking to them! And when we do, we soon stop because we do not see success. We lack the faith with perseverance that inherits the promises! (Hebrews 6:12) And thus we no longer follow Jesus' words. The prayer I hear most often these days is one that couldn't be further from the biblical model: "Lord, if it be your will, please stretch out your hand and heal this person." Most of the time, we don't even pray that anymore, but simply that God may yet guide the hands of the doctors. I'm not saying that you can't pray something like that, but no one in the Gospels or in Acts ever prayed like that. I want to remind the Reader: we want to look at this topic purely on a biblical basis and not from our church system and traditions.

*"Now Simon's mother-in-law was seized with a strong fever, and they besought him for her. And bending over her, **he threatened the fever**, and it left her; but she immediately arose and ministered to them." - Luke 4:38-39*

*"**be cleansed!**" - Matthew 8:3*

*"**Go thy way**, and be it done unto thee, as thou hast believed." - Matthew 8:13*

*"Then he arose and **threatened the winds** and the lake, and there was a great calm." - Matthew 8:26*

*"**Go your way**. But they went out." - Matthew 8:32*

*"**Get up**, take up your bed, and go [...]" - Matthew 9:6*

*"**Stretch out your hand!**" - Matthew 12:13*

*"**Be it done to you as you wish!**" - Matthew 15:28*

*"**And he threatened him**, saying, **Cease, and depart from him.**" - Mark 1:25*

*"**I command you: depart from him!** [...]" - Mark 9:25*

*"Young man, I say to you, **get up!** And the dead man sat up and began to speak [...]" - Luke 7:14-15*

These are only a few excerpts from the healings in the Gospels and one notices that Jesus permanently spoke to the diseases or demons in a command tone. He did not pray to God here but exercised his

authority! And the same authority he gave us in his name. In the same style, the apostles and disciples also carried out this authority.

"And Peter said, Silver and gold do I not possess; but what I have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, Walk about. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up." - Acts 3:6-7

"But what I have, that I give to you". For this sentence Peter would probably have been kicked out of most churches today. Who does Peter think he is to say, "*what I have*"? And then he also takes his hand and raises him up himself! Does he want to force God to heal? This is probably how most Christians would have reacted if they had witnessed such a situation today.

No, Peter knew very well that Jesus had given him the authority to cast out demons and heal the sick in His name and he exercised this authority. Strictly speaking, here again he did not even pray to God.

Likewise with the other healings we know of by Peter in the book of Acts:

"Get up and make your own bed! And immediately he got up." - Acts 9:34

*"And he turned to the body, and said, **Tabita, arise.** And she opened her eyes [...]." - Acts 9:40*

I could quote more scriptures, but I think the point was clearly made.

We wait for God to finally do something, but I believe God waits for us until we finally obey Him and speak to the mountains and lay our hands on the sick!

Do you regularly lay hands on the sick and cast out demons? If not, I would start as soon as possible, even if you don't see immediate results. I once heard a preacher say:

"Better to be obedient without results than to be disobedient without results."

There is so much false teaching when it comes to divine healing that some people just won't overlook losses and invent a theology that puts God in charge. After all, God is "sovereign." To this I can only reply: "Then let him be sovereign! For in His sovereign will he has commissioned us to lay hands on the sick and to heal and to cast out demons in his name, to speak to mountains that they may be moved, and to receive in faith asking all things."

"My people perish for lack of knowledge." - Hosea 4:6

How true is this phrase in our day? We have been given a responsibility by God on His behalf. Are you living up to that responsibility in your life? If you don't know how to do this because you have no experience with it, look in Appendix A "Evangelism and Discipleship Tools." There you will be able to see and learn even more intensively how to use your God-given authority in evangelism.

In a final thought, I want to round out this topic: If you want to know what God's will is, look to Jesus, for "*he is the image of the invisible God.*" (Colossians 1:15) and whoever has seen Jesus has also seen the Father (John 14:9) and he is the "*imprint of his being*" (Hebrews 1:3). So, if you want to know what God's will is about healing, look to Jesus. Did he ever turn away anyone who wanted healing? Did he ever tell someone, "I can't heal you because it's not your time."? Or did Jesus ever say what we hear and say all the time today? No. Every single person who came to Jesus was healed, and everyone on whom Jesus laid hands was healed. Even with the Canaanite woman to whom Jesus first said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." the Father gave Jesus a course correction and healed her

daughter! What an insanely good God we have who even deviates from His original plan to heal people who are in need of Him! And she received because of her demand by faith. And so she prayed the prayer of faith and received even though Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.

I've also never read of Jesus making someone sick and then telling them, "God wants to teach you something with the sickness." This way of thinking is not uncommon among Christians. At the same time, I often ask myself this: if you are so convinced that God does not want to heal you, why do you take medicine and still go to the doctor? That would mean that you are trying to get out of God's will! I think many people have not thought about it in this way.

Can God make a bad situation work for the good? Of course, (see Romans 8:28) but that doesn't mean He sends it! No, we have thought this up to make us feel better in our distress because we have no success in praying for the sick. Sickness was and is obviously a work of the devil:

*"Jesus of Nazareth, as God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and **healing all that were oppressed of the devil**; for God was with him." - Acts 10:38*

So, let's stop the lack of knowledge and we will have more and more victories that the devil wants so much to hold back under false teachings. Believe me, I have certainly seen more sick people not healed than most Christians I know and yet I do not stop obeying Jesus and praying for them. Although I have prayed for thousands and seen more healings than I could have ever imagined, many have not been healed either. Some have even died on the sick bed, but others who should be dead now are alive today because I did not take it personally and understand that we are in a battlefield, and all are growing! After all, the goal of the evangelist and the other of the fivefold ministry is to equip the saints for the work of ministry *"until we all attain to full manhood to the full measure of the growth of the fullness of Christ. [...] Let us therefore in all things grow up into him who is the head, Christ."* (cf. Ephesians 4:12-15).

For the apostles, the mission of Jesus was apparently not a matter of dispute, as much as it is today. Perhaps because they did not have as much input as we have today, where countless people share their opinions on the Internet or there are countless different denominations that Jesus never originally prompted. If the devil knows that a household divided with itself cannot stand (Luke 11:17), he will naturally do everything he can to sow disunity and make simple things complicated so that we will be destroyed by lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6) and not experience freedom through lack of truth (John 8:32). Paul had the same concern in the early churches he planted:

*"But I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so perhaps your minds will be turned away from **simplicity and purity toward Christ** and will be corrupted. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we preached not, or ye receive another spirit, which ye received not, or another gospel, which ye received not, ye bear it well." - 2 Corinthians 11:3-4*

Even Paul says here paraphrased, "It is simple and not complicated, do not be confused!" For this reason, I have devoted myself to this manuscript so that all of us, no matter what denomination we come from, can return to the simplicity and purity of Christ when it comes to the subject of evangelism in order to carry out the Great Commission. My concern is that we get back to reading the Word of God as if we were reading it through the eyes of a child who has not yet gone through pre-programming through teaching. Even though this is not always easy - especially if you have believed or been taught a certain thing for years. But ultimately, we will all have to answer to Jesus Christ one day and either

be rewarded or honored for keeping His word or be humbled and humiliated for failing to obey Him. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 2:6-9; Rev. 20:12)

"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and so teach men, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do them, and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

- Matthew 5:19

"Now everyone who hears these words of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the downpour fell, and the streams came, and the winds blew and rushed against that house; and it did not fall, because it was founded on the rock. And every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the downpour descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat against that house; and it fell, and the fall thereof was great." - Matthew 7:24-27

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man that looketh on his natural face in a mirror. For he has looked at himself and gone away, and he has immediately forgotten how he was constituted. But he who has looked into the perfect law of liberty, and has abided in it, not being a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, he will be blessed in his deeds." - James 1:22-25

In summary, we can say that God has endowed us in His name and authority, as well as additionally with the gifts of His Spirit. However, we must learn to walk in His authority by becoming not only hearers, but doers of the Word. So that in the end we will return just like 72 and say:

"But the seventy returned with joy, saying: Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. But he said to them: I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I have given you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. But do not rejoice over this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in the heavens!" - Luke 10:17-20

This authority to cast out demons and heal the sick is for every Christian, and it is available to us as witnesses especially for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Even if we do not always have 100% success in this, just as the disciples in Matthew 17 did not always have it either, let us still persevere in loving Jesus with our obedience, for *"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, to heed than the fat of rams. For unruliness is a sin like divination, and reluctance is like idolatry and idolatry." - 1 Samuel 15:22*

Often when we evangelize, we get into unnecessary discussions and we try to talk people into the kingdom of God. But no one can convict others by his own wise words. Our job is simply to preach the gospel while walking in faith, healing the sick and casting out demons. The Holy Spirit is the best evangelist! He will give conviction through God's Word, and He wants to confirm His Word with signs and wonders! Then we will be able to say like Paul:

"And I, when I came to you, brethren, came not to preach unto you with excellency of speech or wisdom the mystery of God. For I took it upon myself to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him as crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and with fear, and in much trembling: and my speech and my preaching consisted not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in instruction of the Spirit and of power; that your faith might rest, not on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." - 1 Corinthians 2:1-4

I can tell you from my experience what a big difference it makes to preach the gospel with power, as Jesus and his disciples did. When people are supernaturally healed or delivered or God powerfully meets them, that is the best heart opener to share the gospel because the kingdom of God has come near to them.

To summarize, I want to state again what we have worked out through the many biblical passages. Jesus' healings, deliverances and his proclamation of the gospel were inseparable. He called his works a witness, without which people would not have to believe him. And this witness He also gives to the disciples on their missionary journeys in his name, when He sent them out. At the end of the Gospels, we learn that this is an equipment with authority and power through the Holy Spirit for every Christian. In fact, in the Acts of the Apostles, this is exactly why the disciples are to wait before they are sent out, so that they may be filled with power to be His witnesses.

"Ye are witnesses of this: and, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you. But ye, abide in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high!" - Luke 24:48-49

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." - Acts 1:8

So not only have we received authority in His name, but we have also received the supernatural gifts of His Spirit to be empowered as witnesses. And all the signs that the Lord promised us would follow us in preaching, we read in black and white throughout the Apostles' Acts from beginning to end. Even in the epistles we read that signs and wonders confirmed the preaching, so that their faith - Paul says - was not based on his wise words or eloquence, but on God's power. And so, too, any disciple of Jesus who takes his words seriously and does them can see the same signs in the proclamation if he puts his mind to it. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, and he lives in us and wants to do the same things through us - his body - as he did then, which is why he gave us his Spirit, who fills us with power. It is a growth process to grow in authority and gifts of the Spirit and one must take bold steps in faith to see how to walk on water. However, one will not see it unless one dares to step out of the boat. If we never speak to mountains, we must not expect them to move. If we do not lay hands on the sick, we must not be surprised if we do not see healings. If we do things completely different from what Jesus or his disciples did and demonstrated, we must not be surprised if we see completely different results.

As I said, in the beginning I had no one who could have equipped me and taken me by the hand. I had to study God's Word step by step and act on it - and when I did, I saw the same things that are written in the Bible. But actually, it is intended by the Lord that we be taught by older brothers and sisters (Matthew 28:18f) and equipped by the fivefold ministry for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11ff), which includes the Great Commission addressed to every believer.

If the whole subject is new territory for you, then I recommend you seek out other Christians who have experience in this area and can take you on missions. To find such people, feel free to contact me (see last page before the appendix) or click on a link in Appendix A to a world map with markers where you can find people in your area who do this and are willing to guide you (see "TLR Map" in the appendix). However, in the appendix I will go into more detail about some of the questions asked, such as the question from Paul Dorn im Fleisch (Appendix B).

In addition, I have written a script called: "Equipping for Biblical Healing and Deliverance Prayer", so that this equipping happens once again in fullness on the basis of a comprehensive Bible study, which I will immediately send free of charge on request to anyone who wants it (my contact details can be found at the end of the script)

You are the salt of the earth - more than words alone

The previous two chapters have dealt in detail with what we should proclaim and with what power we should do so. But besides these two important pillars, there is another one and I would like to explain it with the help of this Bible passage:

"You are the salt of the earth." - Matthew 5:13

"Now the salt is good. But if even the salt has become powerless, with what shall it be seasoned? It is not fit for the land or for fertilizer; cast it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" - Luke 14:34-35

What does Jesus mean when he says that salt can become powerless? In other words, yes, he is saying that we can become powerless and unfit. But how does that happen?

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become a sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have divination, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so that I move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I distribute all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I lay down my body that I may gain glory, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Have you ever met people who are walking in God's authority, have much knowledge, but are proud, arrogant, hard-hearted, and have little fruit of love about them? Knowledge or authority alone do not make a true witness of Jesus. Because the most powerful witness is your life itself! If you also live the gospel, not just talk about it - you testify to the changing power of God in your life. Signs and wonders do not confirm your life, but God's Word. But if your life does not confirm God's Word, what kind of testimony would that be? It would be like a salesman promoting Samsung with full commitment and charisma, wearing an Apple T-shirt, and carrying an iPhone in his pocket. One would immediately wonder why he doesn't live what he says. It makes the testimony and advertisement for Samsung unbelievable. Likewise, our lives can speak the opposite of what we proclaim with our mouths. In the context of Luke 14, Jesus is talking about the fact that whoever loves father or mother and even his own life more, does not take up his cross and denies himself, cannot be his disciple. Jesus is talking here about what makes a disciple. So, becoming powerless and useless means when you have not yet given up your life and you are still the center of attention because you still love your own life, family and possessions more than Jesus. What is the consequence if someone has not done that? Selfishness still rules the heart.

"Love is longsuffering, love is kind, love does not envy, love does not puff itself up, it does not behave indecently, it does not seek its own, it does not allow itself to be embittered, it does not impute evil, it does not rejoice in unrighteousness; but rejoices with the truth, enduring all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things." - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

*"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; that, as I have loved you, ye also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
- John 13:34-35*

By our love, people will know us as disciples of Jesus!

I will use the following story to show how important it is in preaching to live out the Gospel and not just testify with your mouth:

Once a refugee named Moussa came to our church for a church asylum. It is the last place where people are still allowed to stay when they should be deported. He was a Muslim. I took just about every opportunity when I was in church to talk to him about the gospel and to love him as Jesus would. One time he had tendinitis and I saw an opportunity to pray for him to be healed. He only agreed very stubbornly and after prayer he said, "It still hurts!" and slammed his door in front of us obviously annoyed. I was very sad, but I had been trying to meet him with Jesus' love as best I could for weeks. Then a day later the phone rang at our house: it was Moussa! I was very surprised and suddenly he said, "I'm sorry for the way I reacted yesterday. I was thinking and I just wanted to say thank you. No one has ever loved me the way you did. If you want, feel free to pray for me again." I was speechless when I heard that! The next Sunday we went into a side room together and I prayed again for his wrist. This time I didn't ask right away about change and thanked him for just letting me pray for him again. From that moment on, I later learned, his wrist was healed! He told others that since the moment of my prayer, all pain was completely gone! Hallelujah!

I believe that with Moussa, as well as with many others, my life spoke far louder than my words. We not only bring light to people in darkness, but we ourselves are the light in the darkness!

"You are the light of the world. [...] So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in the heavens." - Matthew 5:14&16

"Beloved, I exhort you as sojourners and strangers, that ye abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, and conduct your walk well among the nations, that, wherein they speak against you as evildoers, they may, from the good works which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation!"
- 1 Peter 2:11-12

Even in the next chapter, Peter says that unbelieving husbands can be won to Christ by the good walk of the wife:

*"Likewise ye wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, that, though some obey not the word, **they may be won without word by the walk of wives**, having looked upon your walk which is pure in fear!" - 1 Peter 3:1-2*

Your own life and the good fruits that hang on you testify that God has given you a new life and you have passed from death to life. Therefore, if we as the salt of the earth lose our love and good fruits, we become powerless and useless.

"Taste and see that the LORD is good!" - Psalm 34:8

How can others taste and see in us that the Lord is kind if rotten fruit hangs on us? We would be a terrible testimony to the Lord and His gospel.

Many you know may never pick up a Bible. When will you realize that you may be in the only Bible they will ever read? We are the Body of Christ, representing Jesus here on earth, "for as He is, so are we in this world." (1 John 4:17)

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as beloved children! And walk in love, just as the Christ also loved us and gave himself up for us" - Ephesians 5:1-2.

Now, as we preach the Gospel and heal the sick, we must also walk in His character.

"But a servant of the Lord ought not to contend, but to be mild toward all, able to teach, forbearing, rebuking the adversaries with meekness, hoping whether God will not give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth, and that they may be sobered up again out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to his will." - 2 Timothy 2:24-26

"Remind them [...] not to blaspheme anyone, not to be contentious, to be mild, to show all meekness toward all men." - Titus 3:2

"But be ready at all times to answer to everyone who demands an account of the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and reverence! And have a good conscience, that those who slander your good walk in Christ may be ashamed in it, wherein evil is said to you." - 1 Peter 3:15-16

"Preach the word, stand ready in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching!" - 2 Timothy 4:2

Those who wish to share the gospel must do so with **meekness, gentleness, patience, and reverence**, so that our words may be salted by a good walk in Christ:

"Walk in wisdom toward those who are without, buy out the right time! Let your word always be in grace, seasoned with salt; knowing how to answer each one!" - Colossians 4:5-6

I want to show you the preaching without words by an example of Jesus. It is about the capture in Gethsemane when Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest.

*"While he yet spake, behold, there came a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew nigh to Jesus to kiss him. And Jesus said unto him, Judas, dost thou deliver up the Son of man with a kiss? But when they that were about him saw what it would be, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, Let it be so far. And he touched his ear, and healed him."
- Luke 22:47-51*

Now imagine you are Malchus, the servant of the high priest. You see Jesus as a false prophet and blasphemer. You try to arrest him, but Peter one of the disciples fights back and knocks your ear off in a failed attempt to hit your head. Your side is covered in blood, and you are in incredible pain. Then this Jesus, whom you consider scum, steps up to you and looks at you with eyes full of love that go right through your soul. He doesn't say a word and puts his hand on your ear that is full of blood - and all the pain disappears. Then the other soldiers who had come with you grab Jesus and drag him away. Still in shock, you put your hand to your head and in disbelief touch your ear that was just lying on the ground - now completely healed! Imagine that you, as a servant of the high priest, come back to the temple and people ask you what happened because your one whole side and shoulder is covered in blood. What do you tell them? That the Jesus you were going to arrest healed your ear that was lying on the ground a few minutes ago? You know that probably no one will believe you, but that's exactly what just happened.

What do you think happened to Malchus after that night? I'm pretty sure I'll meet Malchus someday in heaven. If an experience like that doesn't change your life, I don't know what could.

"By this we have known love, that he laid down his life for us; we also are guilty of laying down our lives for the brethren. But he that hath earthly possessions, and seeth his brother lack, and shutteth up his

heart against him, how abideth the love of God in him? Children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth!" - 1 John 3:16-18

"But if a brother or sister is scantily clad and lacks daily food, but someone among you says to them: 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled!' but you do not give them what is necessary for the body, what good is it? So also faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith from my works!"

- James 2:15-18

I can tell you that the behavior of Christians has probably turned more people away from the faith than anything else.

So, what potential there is in evangelism if we represent Jesus in our actions and behavior! Over and over again I have heard testimonies of others who have come to faith through acts of unconditional love by genuine followers of Jesus. My personal experience is that people are greatly moved when you meet them with Jesus' love and their hearts are softened by it, and they ask, "What is it that you have that makes you so different from others?" and that is exactly where you can, as Peter describes it, give people an account of where the hope you carry comes from. Again and again, I see how people can perceive light in our eyes when evangelizing - people who want nothing to do with God!

"The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be clear, thy whole body shall be light: but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be dark. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great the darkness!" - Matthew 6:22-23

Once I was on the street with a friend and he was talking to a punk with a green and yellow mohawk. My friend was talking about Jesus and the gospel that changed his life. However, he was discussing with him until all of a sudden, I heard him say to him, "Hey, I see something in your eyes. I see light coming out of them. I don't know why, but somehow, I'm getting emotional right now. What do you have in your eyes, dude?" then he turned to me and said, "Dude, what does he have in his eyes? There's something special about this kid." and I witnessed him suddenly start wiping tears from his eyes - he had no idea what he was seeing and perceiving there, but he saw that it was real!

Your behavior and the love you show others while evangelizing have more impact on your words than you can imagine. We not only witness from the light, but we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth! Your life must be different from that of other people who do not know God. It must stand out, like a lamp in the night:

"So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in the heavens." - Matthew 5:16

Pure motivations

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if any man build upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall make it plain, being revealed in fire. And what each one's work is like, the fire will reveal. If any man's work shall remain, which he hath built upon it, he shall receive reward: if any man's work shall burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet as by fire."

- 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

All that we have done for God will one day be tested before God. What does this mean? I think this means, for one thing, that we can only build with God's Word and works and not with ours - for example, a false or incomplete, compromised gospel. In the same way, if the house is not built on the right foundation: the Word of God, it will collapse (see Matthew 7:24-29).

And secondly, I believe this is also about motivation. Was your purpose to honor God and obey out of love, or so that you would lift up your own name and advance your own kingdom? Paul describes this situation in the first chapter of Philippians:

"Though some preach Christ even out of envy and strife, yet some also out of good will. Some out of love, knowing that I am appointed to defend the gospel; others out of self-interest do not proclaim Christ loudly [...]." - Philippians 1:15-17

The passage from 1 Corinthians 3 means that if the works you supposedly did for God were not out of pure motivations, they will burn before God, and you will receive no reward or credit for them. I think of the words from 1 Corinthians 13 and Matthew:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so that I move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I distribute all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I lay down my body that I may gain glory, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

"Take heed to your righteousness, that ye practice it not before men, to be seen of them! Otherwise you will have no reward with your Father who is in the heavens. Now when you give alms, you shall not trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward there. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee." - Matthew 6:1-4

James even makes it clear that if you evangelize out of selfishness and self-serving motivations, that you may even be working against God:

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show forth his works from a good walk in meekness of wisdom! But if you have bitter jealousy and selfishness in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth! This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but an earthly, sensual, devilish one. For where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is brokenness and every evil deed."

- James 3:13-16

When we preach the gospel out of wrong motives, whatever they may be, we are at the same time inviting into that process disruption and every evil deed! This does not sound fruitful or beneficial to evangelism. So, it is about good works from a pure heart that we are to have.

"If any man think that he serve God, and bridle not his tongue, but deceive his heart, his worship is vain. A pure and undefiled service before God and the Father is this: To visit orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep oneself unspotted from the world." - James 1:26-27

All of these scriptures are meant to give a clear warning that it is not just a matter of you obeying God, but also doing it out of right heart and motivation, walking in His character. If you don't, you can even destroy God's work by doing so and cause harm. When I think about the time before my conversion, I am struck by how this very point was the reason why I moved away from the gospel. I kept hearing the right words, but often saw how people who called themselves Christians spoke a very different language with their behavior and actions and did not represent the gospel in their lives - but rather the opposite: they did not "keep themselves unspotted from the world." This stark contrast moved me away from faith in Jesus because I found no authenticity in it. Many behaved just like the people who did not know God.

"They pretend to know God, but in works they deny Him and are abominable and disobedient and unfit for any good work." - Titus 1:16

Further, Paul writes in his letter to Titus to exhort Christians to live blamelessly, "lest the word of God be blasphemed." (Titus 2:5)

"So also faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. But someone will say, You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith from my works!" - James 2:17-18

Does your life and the way you evangelize reflect the Gospel you preach?

My mission

In the previous chapters we have analyzed in more detail the basic pillars of preaching through a Bible study. Now, in this last chapter, I would like to talk more about practical implementations.

Sow, water, reap

When we preach the gospel, we will either meet people who are already very close to the kingdom of God, those who are not, or those who have never heard of the gospel. Not everyone will be at the same level, so this should be taken into account in the preaching. You should not think that if you could not lead someone to Christ right away, you were not successful in evangelizing. Likewise, in the normal case, if you have led someone to Christ, you should not believe that you were solely responsible for it:

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and the harvest is coming?' Behold, I say unto you: Lift up your eyes and look at the fields! For they are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives reward and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: It is another who sows and another who reaps. I have sent you to reap what you have not labored at; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." - John 4:35-38

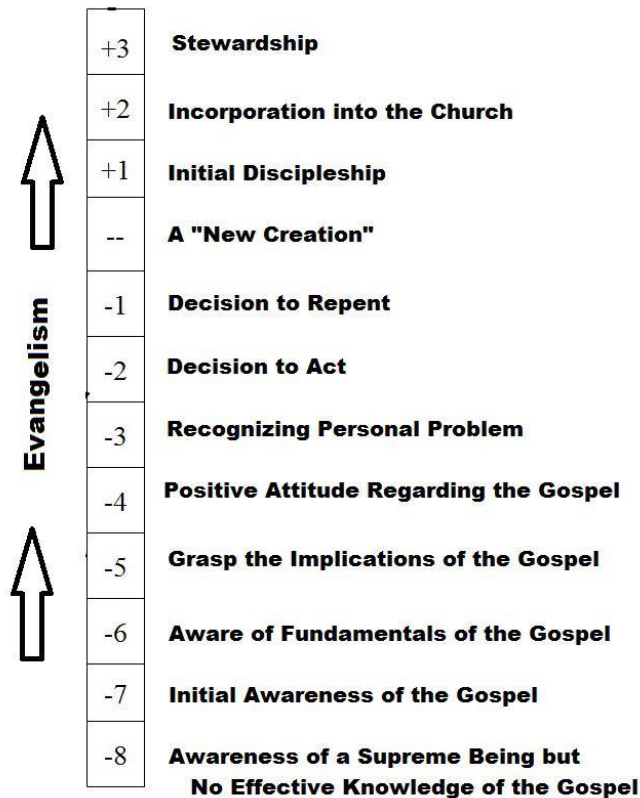
Here Jesus explains to the disciples that bringing in the harvest is a process in which several are involved, and they can "rejoice together." If you have led someone to Christ in evangelism, you can assume that others before you have cooperated to this point and you have entered into their work to reap what others have previously sown and watered.

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the growth. But he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own work." - 1 Corinthians 3:6-8

This is very important to understand because it will keep you from becoming discouraged or developing pride. Paul is saying here that he had not done the work on them alone, but Apollos continued to water what he himself had planted. You will very likely, in evangelizing, build on things that others have already laid and others will in turn build on what you yourself have laid.

"For God's fellow workers are we; God's field, God's building are you. According to the grace of God which is given to me, I, as a wise master builder, have laid the foundation; but another builds upon it; but let each one see how he builds upon it." - 1 Corinthians 3:9-10

And so that no one can boast, God says in His Word that He alone brings growth. Therefore, it doesn't matter if you water, sow or reap - it is God in everything that brings about the growth. I would like to explain the different stages of work using the "angel scale." The angel scale owes its name not to the "heavenly angels" but to the missiologist James F. Engel. He explored the question of how not-yet-Christians experience the process of evangelism and designed a scale. At the zero mark, the conversion event is set.



This scale refers only to a Western culture. In other cultures, the steps may be different. For example, in Africa, most believe in the supernatural, but have other beliefs - such as Islam or nature religions. Nevertheless, the process is the same. Now, if you have an encounter with someone who is at the bottom of the scale and you share the gospel with them in a powerful way, they may not convert immediately, but they may have now moved from -8 to -5 on the scale and found interest in the Christian faith. The next time someone now meets him, he is already much more open to the Gospel than before! Your work has brought fruit, even if you were not the one who ultimately reaped the harvest. Suppose you were to evangelize all your life and see very few people come to faith and follow Jesus in the process. Then someday when you are in heaven, you may realize and understand that you were involved in saving hundreds of souls! And even if you will lead hundreds to Christ in this life, it may mean that you were merely the one who reaped what dozens had already sown and watered before. So, you have been only one part of a great chain! And let us not forget that we are merely laborers in God's vineyard. We are not responsible for the fruit or the growth. We are responsible for doing what we have been told to do, building with God's tools, and building materials that He has given us - not our own. That is what this script was dedicated to, that we learn to build with what He has given us in His Word.

We are also not always responsible for how the good news is received by people. In evangelizing, you will encounter many different soils on which you sow the Word of God that will produce different responses.

Matthew 13:3-23:

"Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the birds came and ate it up. But other fell on the stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had not deep earth. But when the sun rose, it was burned, and because it had no root, it withered. But another fell among thorns, and the thorns sprouted up and choked it. But other fell on the good earth and gave fruit: one a hundredfold, another sixty, another thirty. [...]"

As often as anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart; it is this one with whom seed was sown on the way. But with him who was sown on the stony ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; but he has no root in himself, but is only a man of the moment; and when tribulation arises or persecution for the word's sake, he immediately takes offense. But with him who is sown among thorns, it is he who hears the word, and the care of the times and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and he bears no fruit. But with him that is sown on the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, that bringeth forth fruit indeed; and the one beareth an hundredfold, the other sixty, the other thirty."

It may be that you are sowing the gospel on a heart that is still very closed and does not accept the word directly. But through your encounter, it may be that God uses you to dig up the earth (from -8 to -5 in the engel scale) and remove some stones or weeds. If someone else then sows again on that soil, it may now bear fruit. Therefore, it should always be our prayer after such encounters that God will continue to work the heart until the soil of the heart is ready to hear and receive the Word so that it will bear fruit.

I clearly remember an encounter I had once in 2017 on a mission trip in London. There, in a Starbucks, we encountered two Italians sitting across from us. I started talking to them, planting small but precious seeds, and in the end, we were even able to pray for them. However, I noticed how hard the heart of the one Italian I had been talking to for the most part was. Before we left, he asked us for our Facebook names, and we gave them to him. Now that we were back outside and walking on, we prayed that God would grow that seed and soften his heart more for the Gospel by sending other workers after us to continue watering it. I even remember praying further, "God, send him a godly wife if it is possible." (I don't know why I prayed that, but it seemed good at the time.)

Almost two years later, God once spoke to me one evening, "Brood the eggs I will give you." And He spoke to me about discipleship, that He would soon send me someone that I should take by the hand spiritually. A day later I got a message on Facebook, and it was this Italian guy from London! He wrote, "Hey, remember me? I'm the Italian guy you met in Starbucks almost 2 years ago. You won't believe what's happened to me since then. ". He told me that he had met a woman who then led him to Christ. In the meantime, he had been baptized, but was looking for true discipleship. During this time, God suddenly spoke to him to write to me to be discipled by me. I was amazed! I was able to witness what I just wrote about here. The one that led him to Christ was building on encounters that God had prepared earlier in his life! And I had now become a part of the chain again and got to disciple him. What a privilege! For some time, we have been on the phone regularly and I see him growing spiritually. I still remember very clearly my prayer from that time: "Lord let the seed grow that was sown today and send more workers to water and harvest. Work on his heart and thereby open it more and more to your Gospel." Don't forget to still pray for these people after each encounter, because it is God alone who gives the growth. As if this thing wasn't the best part of the story: his friend who was also there at the time had back problems and I had been allowed to pray for him briefly before we left. I didn't ask him about a change in his body right away, though, unlike I usually did. We also prayed a short prayer for him after we said goodbye. He too was converted to Jesus, as the first Italian told me, and what's even better, he now leads a Bible course for his congregation! He told me that when they were leaving the store, he suddenly noticed that his back was feeling better and he told his friend in amazement. Isn't that an encouraging story for seemingly unfruitful experiences in evangelism? The encounter at that time was not spectacular and it could have been forgotten relatively quickly. But every seed we had sown - be it prayer for more workers, prayer for healing, or simply the seed of God's Word, God had made grow! How often we underestimate what God can do with small seeds or inconspicuous encounters when we make ourselves available to Him!

Discipleship

The story of the two Italians makes clear what the process of conversion to God can look like, but it does not stop there. Let us remember that Jesus said:

"Make disciples [...]." and not: "make professing Christians."

According to this, the Great Commission is not fulfilled if people have not yet been led into true discipleship. But how can this be well implemented?

First, we must recognize that this task is not just for the pastor or other believers, but for every follower of Jesus. If you see opportunities for a brother or sister to need discipleship, we should jump right in. I always try to disciple at least one - more if I can. I view this task with the same responsibility as going out and evangelizing.

In the following, I would like to discuss a few concepts that have helped me a lot so far in understanding the concept of discipleship in the context of the Bible.

First, discipleship at the time was - not just teaching, as is often the case today - but teaching, showing, and modeling so that the person can imitate the walk in Christ because they can witness what is being taught in action.

"Remember your leaders who have spoken the word of God to you! Look at the outcome of their walk, and imitate their faith!" - Hebrews 13:7

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." - 1 Corinthians 11:1

"But you have followed exactly my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my faith, my longsuffering, my love, my perseverance, my persecutions, my sufferings [...]." - 2 Timothy 3:10

In the letter to Timothy or Titus, Paul writes how they are now to disciple the new believers:

*"Let no one despise your youth; **rather, be an example of believers in word, in walk, in love, in faith, in chastity.** Until I come, be careful to preach, to exhort, to teach!" - 1 Timothy 4:12-13*

*"In the same way, exhort young men to be **prudent by presenting yourself in everything as an example of good works.**" - Titus 2:6*

*"You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, **entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also!**" - 2 Timothy 2:1-2*

In addition to discipling with a single person, you can also form a discipleship group with several. This has additional advantages that I would like to explain. But before I do, I want to ask the reader a question: Were the disciples all believers in Jesus when they started following Jesus? The answer is no. Most of the disciples became true believers in Jesus at some point in the middle. Some not even at the end. As they walked with him, they experienced more and more evidence of his sonship with God. That is, Jesus disciplined people who didn't even really all believe in him firmly yet.

Leading a discipleship group with people who were not even all saved seemed illogical to me until some years ago. But then I was introduced to a discipleship concept by missionary friends that seemed to be successful and tested, so that one could start such a group with non-Christians or take interested people into such a group. When the time presented itself, I decided to test this myself and start a

group. I started it with a more experienced Christian whom I had trained and taken along in evangelism at that time; a believer who had come to faith but had not yet been made a disciple; and a very interested and truth-seeking person who was not yet a believer. So, there were many stages of spiritual development. I then facilitated this discipleship group using a pre-designed structure for the various evenings. The special thing about the concept is that no one teaches directly, but that through prefabricated questions to the Bible text in the round everyone can give his answer to it. Questions are asked like: "What do we learn about God/Jesus? Who in the story do you most identify with?" At the end, goals are then set specifically on how to apply Jesus' words to everyday life and prayers are said for one another. The more detailed structure and how to start such discipleship groups is in Appendix B under "Discipleship."

The exciting thing was that after two meetings the seeker was already ready to be baptized and is now living the life of a true disciple of Jesus. He regularly tells me stories of his ministry, how he shares the gospel with people and people are healed when he prays for them on his workplace. From this discipleship group came the opportunity to reach even unbelieving friends of the participants who were open to Christianity. And in addition, it is a perfect opportunity to bring people from the street who have gained interest or are already very close to the decision to follow Jesus. In the process of studying the Word of God with others, people can now very easily go from being interested to being participants. And if not, strong seeds were sown to them that evening or evenings that others can now continue to water. I often made the mistake in the beginning of sending people to a church and then not caring about them further. However, from experience, Sunday morning is not a suitable place for God seeking people. The sermons are usually not designed for new people at all, the worship is very unfamiliar to many, and the time is much too early for most - plus it is very impersonal there and personal questions or concerns cannot be addressed. Discipleship does not take place on Sunday morning, but in a smaller and much more personal circle, which is why it is worth inviting such people to a smaller circle with few other brothers and sisters. That way you can be much more responsive and personal to the person. The fruit I have seen from this is far better than sending someone to Sunday service. To that end, I have attached such a simple and straightforward concept for a discipleship group. For example, if I do not yet have a suitable small group for an interested person, I ask certain brothers and sisters from the congregation if they would like to study the Bible and pray for each other together with the interested person for a few evenings in an informal and non-binding way. This often leads to really sustainable small groups, or it just stays with a few valuable evenings, where you can simply bring people closer to the Word of God, because you study the Word together and exchange ideas. It is not a frontal preaching for the newcomer, which often has a very positive effect, because the person himself is taken into a Bible study and deals with the texts himself.

Person of peace

For this reason, I want to tell the reader again specifically the mistake I made for a long time in the area of discipleship. I learned how to pray for the sick, cast out demons, and sow precious seeds, but I often did not complete what I began. I was on the road almost weekly in my home and saw healings on every outreach and often many contacts that I could have built on. After a few months I had more than 30 contacts who were willing to even meet with me again to hear more about Jesus and also be disciplined. Some didn't get back in touch, but some did, and I could have seen a lot of fruit by focusing on them with a little effort. However, instead of taking time for some contacts and really disciplining them further, I often left those contacts or tried to send them to churches on Sundays that I knew. But sending people to a church on Sundays almost never works out, as explained earlier. I should have invested myself personally in these people much more but kept pushing away the responsibility to do

so. It's like a man who begets children but doesn't want to take care of them. Yet Jesus gives the disciples the following instructions when sending them out in Luke 10:

"Go. Behold, I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry neither purse nor bag nor sandals, and greet no one on the way. But into whichever house ye enter, first say, Peace to that house. And if there be a son of peace there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return unto you. But abide in this house, and eat and drink what they have. For the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from one house to another! And into whatsoever city ye come, and they receive you, eat that which is set before you, and heal the sick therein, and say unto them: The kingdom of God has come near to you."- Luke 10:3-9

Jesus tells the disciples that when they come to a town and are welcomed by people there, they should stay there and not go straight to the next house. Why should they not go to the next house right away? Because they have found a "person of peace"! This is the one who receives the message, as well as its messenger, and is ready to become a disciple. But if one goes immediately to the next house instead of investing oneself in this house and its family, no real disciples are produced who can then become ambassadors themselves. You produce babies, but they will die off again due to lack of nourishment if no one continues to explain the Word to them and lead them into independent and self-reliant discipleship. Just as a baby has not yet learned to survive on its own in the beginning, parents must care for the child until it is ready to feed and care for itself on its own. What parent would leave their newborn on its own or drop it off in front of an orphanage for others to take care of? It was the same with me when I met persons of peace. Instead of staying with them and discipling them, I left them or tried to drop them off in front of a church like an orphan. That's why Jesus tells his disciples, "Stay, and don't go to the next house right away!" In fact, the consequence of this was that this house now became the light for that city. They became able to disciple others in turn. For this reason, the disciples, who were always sent out in pairs, could go to the next city with a clear conscience! This is exactly what Peter and Paul did on their missionary journeys.

Acts 9:36-43:

"Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabita, which is translated Dorkas. This one was rich in good works and almsgiving, which she practiced. But it happened in those days that she fell sick and died. And when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper chamber. Now Lydda being near Joppa, the disciples, when they heard that Peter was there, sent two men unto him, saying: Do not hesitate to come to us! But Peter arose and went with them; and when he had arrived, they led him into the upper chamber. And all the widows came to him weeping, and showed him the undergarments and the upper garments which Dorkas had made while she was with them. And Peter drove them all out, and knelt down, and prayed. And he turned to the body, and said, Tabita, arise. And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and raised her up; and he called the saints and the widows, and presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. And it came to pass that he abode many days in Joppa with one Simon the tanner."

Here we see Peter carrying out the commission as in Luke 10. He enters a city, heals the sick, raises the dead and proclaims God's message, and then stays with persons of peace. Immediately after this, we are told of the story with Cornelius the centurion. He was obviously a son of peace with his whole household and God even led Peter to him so that he and all who stayed with him could hear the message of God.

Acts 10:1-8

"Now a man in Caesarea named Cornelius—a centurion of what was called the Italic multitude, devout and godly with all his household, giving much alms to the people and praying to God always—saw clearly in an appearance about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God come in to him and say to him, 'Cornelius!' But he looked at him eagerly, and was filled with fear, and said, 'What is it, Lord?' And he said unto him, 'Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon, whose surname is Peter. The latter lodged with Simon the tanner, whose house was by the sea. And when the angel that talked with him was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that were continually with him: and when he had told them all things, he sent them to Joppa.'"

Then something interesting happens, which I have also experienced, that the person of peace opens the door to his whole house with family and friends to hear the gospel:

Verse 24 & 27

"But Cornelius, having called together his relatives and nearest friends, was waiting for them. [...] And while talking with him, he went in and finds many gathered."

Then something amazing happens. It says that while he was still preaching the Holy Spirit came upon all who heard the word:

Verse 44

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word."

Then verse 48 goes on to say:

"And he commanded that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay a few days."

Peter did not leave immediately but stayed a few days! When Peter returned to Jerusalem, he explained his actions to the disciples there, mentioning:

Acts 11:13-14:

"And he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, saying, 'Send to Joppa, and send for Simon, whose surname is Peter. He will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your house.'"

The same is noticed likewise with Paul's missionary journeys in the 14th chapter:

Verse 21ff:

*"And when they had preached the gospel to that city, **and made disciples of many, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch. They fortified the souls of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith. [...] But they tarried with the disciples for no small time.**"*

Again, we see how Paul did not go on until he had disciplined the converts. Afterwards, he even goes back to the disciples already made to further strengthen them in the faith. As commanded in Luke 10, they did not just go from house to house when they found someone to receive them. In the same way, I too should have stayed with some to make disciples of them before going on to preach the gospel to others. Very often the "make disciples!" aspect is missing in our evangelism today. We keep sending

them to already existing churches to take on this task. But what if there is no church nearby? Where do we send them then? The Acts of the Apostles shows us that now we are called to plant a church from the persons of peace and newly won disciples. The churches that Paul planted in this way were exactly in this style. They were house churches; they didn't need big budgets or equipment. Only a house. A house church often developed from a person of peace and his house! But because this sounds so very foreign to our church system, most strongly criticize such thinking. They would rather plant churches the "normal way", with a church building, a pastor who has studied theology, etc. Is this wrong? From my point of view, this is not wrong, but it is not necessarily the biblical model of church planting. Because the biblical model of evangelism and church planting has a higher value than our current church system. Nowadays, we only allow people to be preachers and shepherds if they have a theology degree behind them. But in the Acts of the Apostles, no one had a specific degree behind them. When Peter and John are to answer before the high council, it even says:

*"But when they saw the frankness of Peter and John, and **perceived that they were unlearned and uneducated men**, they marveled; and they recognized **them as having been with Jesus.**" - Acts 4:13*

The only necessary quality that makes a leader is that he walks with Jesus and walks in the Word of God - not that he has had any special degree. In fact, today we find just the opposite. We find people who study theology who do not even follow Jesus and then are appointed as a pastor or minister of a church. Is it wrong to study the Bible? Of course not, in fact we should. But it is not enough to study theology, you need a relationship with Jesus and an exemplary discipleship to feed God's sheep. In fact, in Germany many theology professors in state universities are not even real disciples of Jesus and they openly profess it.

*"And you? The anointing you received from him abides in you, **and you have no need for anyone to teach you, but as his anointing teaches you about everything, it is true and not a lie. And as it has instructed you, abide in him.**" - 1 John 2:27*

When John speaks of the anointing, he is speaking of the Holy Spirit abiding in us. Jesus also says that the Holy Spirit would teach us:

*"Many things yet have I to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. But when that one, the Spirit of truth, has come, **he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak from himself, but what he hears he will speak, and what is coming he will proclaim to you.**" - John 16:12-13*

*"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **he will teach you all things and remind you of all that I have said to you.**" - John 14:26*

We need training from the Holy Spirit Himself who will teach us all things! Biblically, we do not need anyone to teach us, as it says in the 1st Epistle of John. Even when Paul came to faith, he immediately went away to Arabia and "did not consult flesh and blood." (Galatians 1:16-17) He stayed there for 3 years and came back with revelations from the Holy Spirit and became the most important author of the New Testament! The only ones we should learn from are those who have proven by their walk that they know what they are talking about and have become true followers with good fruit. I will not listen to someone with a degree if I don't see the fruit of Jesus in his life. But I would be ready to listen to a homeless person if he or she has a walk of pure love that really imitates Jesus!

*"Remember your leaders who have spoken the word of God to you! **Look at the outcome of their walk, and imitate their faith!** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by diverse and strange teachings!" - Hebrews 13:7-9*

It is also clear from the third chapter of the First Letter to Timothy that leaders and teacher in the church must lead an exemplary life in order to be allowed to carry out these offices in the first place. So, we can see that the term "church" or "congregation" had completely different connotations at that time, in contrast to today. Because we as Christians have the Bible as our foundation, we should see that we do not stray too far from the biblical understanding of a church. When we think about "church," we have a very specific image in mind. A church building with a pastor and many people listening to his sermon every Sunday in the church service. But I would like to question this image of the church in the light of the Bible, because nowhere can we find such a structure in the Word of God. There rather a congregation is described where everyone has a word of encouragement, teaching, prophecy or spiritual gift for the edification of the church and where the fivefold ministry equips the body in the various tasks of Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Corinthians 14 and Ephesians 4).

*"What then, brethren? **When you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a speech in tongues, has an interpretation; let everything be done for edification [...].**" - 1 Corinthians 14:26f*

Several more materials on the subject of church planting will be provided in the appendix. Let us now go back to the book of Acts where we see how Paul planted a house church from a person of peace.

Acts 16:11-15:

"And on the Sabbath day we went out of the gate by a river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. And a woman named Lydia, a purple-haired woman of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, was listening; whose heart the Lord opened, that she might give heed to the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized, and her house, she besought, saying, If ye judge that I am a believer in the Lord, enter into my house, and abide. And she compelled us."

Apparently they had gone to the house of Lydia, who is the person of peace here, and had preached the gospel to the whole household and then baptized them. But then Lydia wanted Paul and his companions to stay in her house. They wanted to hear and learn more. One can assume that the whole house became a house church!

Only when they had now made disciples of them, they went on. Thereupon they were arrested and thrown into prison. As Paul and Silas were singing and worshipping God in the cells, a great earthquake occurred, and the all the doors and shackles came off. The following then happens to the jailer:

"But when the jailer awoke from sleep and saw the doors of the prison open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, thinking that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself! For we are all here. And he called for light, and leaped in: and trembling he fell down before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out, and said: Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved? And they said: Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. And they spake the word of the Lord unto him with all that were in his house. And he took them unto him in that hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and he was baptized, and all his own immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and had the table set for them, and rejoiced, believing in God, with all his household." - Acts 16:27-34

We see again how Paul enters the house of the Person of Peace, who is the jailer here, to preach the gospel to everyone there. The result of this was: everyone was baptized and saved! Just like in Luke 10, they eat and drink what is put before them. We should follow this example as best we can. When we have found someone who accepts the message, we should not immediately go to the next person, but stay with him and proclaim the good news with him to his whole house. In this way, there is a chance that the whole family and even friends can be reached. One can then either personally disciple the converted person or start a discipleship group with several. Then, when they are truly discipled and understand their gospel mission, they can be taught to disciple others. One should keep in touch so as to strengthen the brothers and sisters in the faith. This is exactly what we see in the next verses as Paul returned to Lydia's house and encouraged her:

"And when they were come out of the prison, they went to Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they exhorted (footnote: "o. encouraged, comforted") them, and departed." - Acts 16:40

Now, do I have to accompany everyone who opens up right away to his house and meet the family? No, (see Philip and the eunuch) but if the opportunity arises, it should definitely be taken. You reach many more people. Even if you don't go on to the next person right away and therefore may see "less immediate decisions" for Christ, 5 new disciples can bear far more fruit in a year than 50 new converts without further discipleship. Through discipleship, multiplication occurs, and the new disciples can now themselves disciple others who can in turn disciple others. In this way, exponential fruit can be produced that cannot be compared to many quick-fix decisions. When I think back over the last few years of evangelism, I would much rather have exchanged the many hundreds of "decisions for Christ" for a dozen disciples who would now themselves be able to disciple others. Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, already knew what He was doing when He told us in Matthew 28:18-20:

*"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you**. And behold, I am with you always, even to the consummation of the age."*

I hope I have been able to lay a biblical foundation for evangelism with this script and equip you as a Christian - or rather, as a disciple of Jesus - with the Word of God for this ministry. Because it was not possible within the scope of this work to go into detail about individual tools or methods of discipleship or preaching, reference is made in the appendix to good sources for inspiration and further equipping. It cannot be guaranteed that the sources or ministries referenced perfectly reflect all aspects of biblical evangelism. However, many good things can be copied, such as certain areas of healing the sick, preaching or discipleship. However, I would like to point out that one should judge for oneself what is worth copying for biblical evangelism. For example, there are good ministries that may implement aspects of preaching the Word well biblically, but neither walk in the power of the Spirit nor show how to disciple converts. There may be much to learn from some ministries in exercising the power of the Spirit and authority in Jesus' name, but not necessarily in preaching or discipleship. Therefore, as 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says, the reader should himself "test everything, but keep what is good!"

If you personally, your small group, home group or church is looking for more equipping in biblical evangelism, feel free to contact me. I am willing to come to your city or country without pay to equip as many as possible for this important task. And not only theoretically, but also practically on the streets or in outreaches with the power of the Holy Spirit. For the supplementary script on "Equipping for Biblical Healing and Deliverance Prayer" just let me know and I will send it to you free of charge.

God's rich blessings to you!

E-mail: florian.boeffel@freenet.de or by phone: +49 (0) 177/7259179 (Whatsapp also possib

Appendix - Materials

Appendix A: "Discipleship and Evangelism Tools

Preaching the Word:

"The Last Reformation" (Ministry and Movement) by Thorben Sondergard "The Pioneer School - Lesson 8: how to share the gospel":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwLTCYvcw6s>

"The Last Reformation" by Thorben Sondergard "How to meet God - Gospel with cards":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNme1cRSODI>

"Living Waters" (ministry), series "The Way of the Master", a series on equipping for preaching using the law, bringing knowledge to sin. Special recommendation: the first 4 episodes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjGXFYFRrk&list=PLIMAX6WHtnhBZQN47uyPlmaokO9NXodrU>

"Living Waters" Apologetics:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3B82C219AC3A6847>

"Living Waters" Resources: "Icebreakers, free and creative gospel tracts, books, etc.":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBfV0zIxSns&list=PLIMAX6WHtnhBqO3-D-tGim5CZWbPyIkt6>

"Living Waters", Kirk Cameron, Ray Comfort: How to witness to family members":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53oGAdRIY5c>

"Momentum" (ministry) by Julio Mazara: "Foundations for sharing the Gospel" (in English):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQ57z0IOHxo&feature=emb_logo

Evangelism with power

"The Last Reformation": "TLR Map".

<https://thelastreformation.com/network/>

"The Last Reformation", The movie "The Beginning" & "7 days Adventure with God":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zka4DUYeJ5g>

&

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-n6SJJHpb8>

"The Last Reformation," Healings on the Street (New York City):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOCE--KFaVw>

"The Last Reformation," Healings on the Street (Poland):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39m0vFARku8>

"The Last Reformation," Healings on the Street (England):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5CVc6uO6N8>

"John G. Lake Ministries" (ministry), Curry Blake: "Training in Divine Healing" (in German):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZF5WKMO4M8E&list=PL2QIPbhHzPe6JEKwYzDsQFxlOfZeGjiQt>

"John G. Lake Ministries" (ministry), Curry Blake: same only in English:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbZj8Bp7daA&list=PLmv8hnRBZcy_5PLT8eYKYaOjFP5pRpoWv

"Lifestyle Christianity," by Todd White, evangelism documentary/film:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzotFAOCZ7M>

"Lifestyle Christianity," by Todd White, evangelism documentary in Israel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7usORKzMGA>

Todd White, Healings on the Road:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IULLzthJpV4&list=PLCD931BFF65E661C8>

Thomas Fischer, Healings on the Road:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E62EgXvqfrc>

Tom Loud, Healing Miracles
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDj3DJWloTjMCF1mOBsRAqw>

Discipleship

"Momentum" (ministry), Julio Mazara, "How to start a discipleship group":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbzplhfViNQ>

"Momentum," Resources: discipleship, Discipleship Group Process "7 stories of hope" (concept also applicable to other Bible passages):
<http://themomentum.org/resource/7-stories-of-hope/>

"Momentum," Resources: discipleship and church planting:
<http://themomentum.org/resource/4-fields-of-kingdom-growth-nathan-shank/>

Church Planting

"Momentum," Julio Mazara, Church Planting - Playlist (8 sessions):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8a-ioSHeteA&list=PL_o4DLLGbjpm56Cbt8F-KDv8JSbmPq_U_

"Momentum," Resources: discipleship and church planting:
<http://themomentum.org/resource/4-fields-of-kingdom-growth-nathan-shank/>

Appendix B: "Paul's Thorn in the Flesh."

Over and over again, I have seen people sometimes claim their illness is their "thorn in the flesh," referring to 2 Corinthians 12. Therefore, they say, God would not want to heal them. When I realized all the revelations of God's will in His Word and that Jesus had already paid for our healing and freedom, this passage confused me at first. It didn't fit together in my eyes at first. Again and again I heard sermons that used this passage as proof that God did not always want to heal and Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was thereby interpreted as a disease. This connection has been made so many times that it was hard to imagine anything else when reading this passage. What else could the "thorn in the flesh" be? But are we sure that Paul is talking here about a physical, chronic illness from which Jesus would not heal him?

The discoveries I made as I looked more closely and studied this passage of Scripture were very surprising to me and will probably be very surprising to you readers, too. Let's take a look at this passage together and analyze it.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10:

*"Vaunted must be; though it profit nothing, yet I will come upon appearances and revelations of the Lord. I know of a man in Christ that fourteen years ago - whether in the body, I do not know, or outside the body, I do not know; God knows - that this one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know about the person in question - whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know; God knows - that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not for a human being to utter. Of this I will boast; but of myself I will not boast, but of the infirmities. For if I will boast, yet will I not be foolish, for I will speak the truth. But I refrain from this, lest anyone think more highly of me than what he sees in me or hears from me, even because of the extraordinary nature of the revelations. **Therefore, so that I do not exalt myself, a thorn for the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to strike me with fists, so that I do not exalt myself. For this cause I called upon the Lord three times, that he might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Very gladly will I now rather boast of my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore I am well pleased with infirmities, with abuses, with hardships, with persecutions, with fears for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong.**"*

Before we look more closely at the word "thorn in the flesh," we will look more closely at the context as a first step. The first thing Paul describes in this chapter is that he had received "extraordinary revelations" from the Lord and because of this he was given a 'thorn in the flesh'. So, if someone says to me that God will not heal him because it is his personal "thorn in the flesh," I would first ask the person what extraordinary revelations did the Lord give him so that the Lord would have to give him a thorn in the flesh? What revelations have you received from the Lord that are on the same level as those from the famous apostle Paul, who wrote more in the New Testament than any other author? So, you see that in order to claim such a thing, one must first prove to have received "extraordinary revelations" from the Lord on the same or similar level as Paul. I don't know if there is anyone on earth who could even claim this. We wouldn't even have to analyze the broader context or do a close word study on the historical phrase "thorn in the flesh" to rule out the possibility of just about anyone on earth having a thorn in the flesh that Paul is talking about here. Even if this had indeed been a disease, there would be practically no problem with praying for the sick. Let that be said first before we dive deeper into the text. However, we want to find out if the interpretation is even justified.

We therefore look further at the context, and we notice that in the next sentence the 'thorn in the flesh' is equated with an angel of Satan who "beats him with fists." Since the word 'angel' can also be translated as 'messenger', this passage can also be translated as 'messenger of Satan'. So first of all, it should be noted that Paul's thorn in the flesh was not a messenger of God, but a messenger of Satan.

God had allowed the devil to "strike him with fists" so that Paul would not exalt himself. But did Jesus ever say in the Gospels that he would allow the devil to make us sick for this purpose and that we should boast in our sicknesses? Did he not give us all authority over this, that we might be delivered from it? Has he not himself healed all diseases and infirmities? Has he not promised and pledged this to us in his word? That would be just like your father promising something and then not keeping it. You could not trust his word one hundred percent. Yet in the same letter where Paul also tells of the thorn in the flesh, he writes just the opposite:

"For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us, by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea done. For as many promises of God as there are, in him is the Yes, therefore also through him the Amen, to God's glory through us." - 2 Corinthians 1:20

"Paul I know what I have promised and pledged, but I have made an exception in your case. I want the devil to make you sick, that will help your character. If you are sick, then I am strong through you. Please just accept that, I am God, and you are not. My grace for you is enough." If God suddenly acts against His own promises, then there is something wrong with that alone, because it is simply contradictory. God makes promises but doesn't always keep them? No, Jesus never said that he would use spirits of sickness to try to make himself strong through us. Rather, He cast them out - every single time and told us to do the same! So, what afflictions from the devil is God allowing to happen to Paul? The context could not be clearer. And that's what we want to look at now.

Before we do that, it is important to know that the epistles originally did not have chapters, but are a complete, coherent letter. We added chapters and verses after the fact to bring structure into it. What Paul says in chapter 12, he writes in a flow from the previous chapter. At the end of chapter 11, the verses just before this passage, the heading of the subchapter is "Proving the Apostle in Sufferings and Infirmities." So, what were Paul's sufferings and infirmities in which he boasts?

"You are servants of Christ?" - I speak nonsensically - I exceedingly. In labors the more, in prisons the more, in beatings exceedingly, in dangers of death often. From Jews I have received five times forty blows less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods, once I have been stoned; three times I have been shipwrecked; one day and one night I have spent in distress at sea; often in travel, in dangers from rivers, in dangers from robbers, in dangers from my people, in dangers from the nations, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the desert, in dangers on the sea, in dangers among false brethren; in toil and complaint, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; besides the rest, those things which daily come upon me: The care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who takes offense, and I do not burn? If boasting is necessary, I will boast of the signs of my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever, knows that I do not lie. In Damascus the governor of King Aretas was guarding the city of the Damascene to take me captive, and through a window I was let down through the wall in a basket and escaped his hands." - 2 Corinthians 11:23-33

Paul's sufferings and weaknesses were his abuses, hardships, fears and persecutions! He specifically lists the signs of his 'weakness' here: Trouble, dangers, discomfort, waking, hunger, thirst, frequent fasting, cold, nakedness, worry for all the churches, and that he is permanently whipped and beaten for Jesus' sake. Not once does "sickness" appear in it. He even boasts in this chapter about his many weaknesses and afflictions, proudly enumerating them as he suffered for the Lord. And I find it quite remarkable what he can list there. Now that Jesus has told him that His grace is sufficient for him, he even repeats what he already listed in chapter 11 and is now content with his 'thorn in the flesh':

*"For this reason I have called upon the Lord three times to depart from me. And he has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength comes to perfection in weakness.' Very gladly will I now rather boast of my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore I delight in **infirmities, in abuses, in distresses, in persecutions, in anxieties** for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." - Verses 8-10*

He literally repeated the exact same thing that he listed all in 2 Corinthians 11. This was what the Lord would not take from him! His thorn in the flesh was the constant abuse, weaknesses, hardships, persecutions and fears for Christ's sake. If it had been a sickness, he would have written, "Therefore I have been well pleased with my sickness [...]" but instead he enumerated all the afflictions he had encountered in his apostolic work. The context could not be more obvious.

Imagine you are on a mission from the Lord and everywhere you go you are either whipped, stoned or thrown into prison. He was beaten five times with 39 blows, beaten three times with rods, and even stoned once and left like death! The scourging and floggings were so severe in those days that some even died in the process. Now imagine you are on the way on behalf of the Lord and then something like this happens to you. Your back is covered with open wounds, and you are hanging in a dungeon covered in blood because you followed God's instructions to preach His gospel. It takes days for the wounds to heal completely. You go to the next town and the same thing happens there again! And now imagine that you go to the third city and again they want to do this to you! There everybody would ask God: "Lord, I am now on the way in your order, could you not perhaps once hold my back free? There are so many confirming clues that could not make it any clearer. For example, that he equates 'thorn in the flesh' with 'being beaten with fists'. This strange comparison suddenly makes sense because he literally recounts in a few verses earlier how often and excessively he was repeatedly beaten and mistreated while evangelizing. Not only that, but he mentions that he called on the Lord exactly three times because of it. Why? Because he experienced such fierce persecution and mistreatment in exactly three cities! In fact, he mentions this in the Second Epistle to Timothy:

*"But you followed my teaching, [...] my perseverance, my persecutions, my sufferings, which happened to me in (1.) **Antioch**, in (2.) **Iconium**, in (3.) **Lystra**. These persecutions I endured, and from all of them the Lord saved me. But all also who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." - 2 Timothy 3:10-12*

Now when he asked Jesus to take these away, Jesus could not do so because he had promised that not only Paul but also all his disciples would have to suffer for him in this way and therefore Paul promises that every true follower of Jesus will not be spared persecution either. In the Acts of the Apostles we read how for Paul even from Jesus again extra such sufferings were announced by persecutions, when he spoke to Hananias about Paul:

*"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way. For this man is a chosen instrument of mine to bear my name both before nations and kings and sons of Israel. **For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name.**" - Acts 9:15-16*

The only sufferings God has promised is persecution for His name's sake. This He has announced over and over again. (See Matthew 5:10; Matthew 24:9-10; 2 Timothy 3:12; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17; John 15:18; Luke 6:22; John 16:33; Romans 8:35; Matthew 5:44; Matthew 5:11; Mark 10:29-30; Romans 12:14; John 16:1-4; Revelation 13:10; Revelation 2:10; John 21:18-19, etc.).

I think we can all agree that it is hard to become proud when when you are preaching instead of being cheered by crowds, stones start flying in your direction. We also never see anyone boasting about their

illness. But we can certainly read how the disciples boasted in their suffering for Christ's sake. Thus Paul writes:

"In the future do not trouble me! For I bear the marks of Jesus in my body." - Galatians 6:17
*"And when they had sent for the apostles, they beat them, and commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. They therefore departed from the high council, **full of joy that they had been made worthy to suffer reproach for the name [of Jesus] [...]**." - Acts 5:40-41*

The persecution was so fierce that the Holy Spirit showed Paul that shackles and afflictions would await him in almost every city:

*"[...] except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me from city to city, saying **that shackles and afflictions await me**. But I do not count my life worth mentioning, that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus: to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." - Acts 20:23-24*

So, if we look at the context alone, it is impossible to argue that Paul could have meant sickness by the "thorn in the flesh." In the context of the entire New Testament, it makes equally little sense because it would directly contradict the statements and actions of Jesus. Now the only question is why Paul used just this expression to summarize all these sufferings he experienced. We do not know such an expression in our time and therefore cannot immediately understand what it stands for. However, before drawing your own conclusions, you should first investigate whether this expression, that a pointed object stuck in your body, was already known in the biblical context and had a concrete meaning. Once you research this figure of speech in the Bible, it turns out that this expression was by no means unknown at that time. It had a concrete meaning at that time and the listeners knew what it meant, unlike us today, because it was already used repeatedly in the Old Testament scriptures. Paul was an excellent student of the scriptures and a Pharisee who had been taught under Gamaliel, a very well-known Jewish teacher in Jerusalem.

"And he saith, I am a Jewish man, born at Tarsus in Cilicia; but brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strictness of my father's law, I was, as ye all are this day, a zealot for God." - Acts 22:3

So, he was more than familiar with the language of the Old Testament. Now anyone familiar with the Old Testament will notice that human persecution is repeatedly compared to a pointed object stuck in your body! Here are just a few examples:

Deuteronomy 33:55:

*"But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those you leave of them will become **thorns in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they will afflict you in the land where you dwell.**"*

(Here thorns and thorns in eye and side stand for human persecution).

Joshua 23:13:

*"then you shall know for certain that the LORD your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you. And they shall then become a snare and a trap for you, **a scourge in your flanks and a thorn in your eyes**, until you are taken away from this good land which the LORD your God has given you."*

(Here the expression scourge or thorn in the flank or eye stands for the contestation of hostile nations. Flank in anatomy describes the lateral abdominal region).

*Judges 2:3: So I also said, I will not drive them out before you! They will become **scourges for your sides**[1], and their gods will become a snare for you."*

(Footnote [1] of the Elberfelder translation says the following: cf. Jos 23:13; some add after Deut 33:55: thorns; others change to: they will be your enemies.

Here the expression scourge or thorn in their sides stands for human persecution by other nations).

*Ezekiel 2:6: "And you, son of man, do not fear them, nor be afraid of their words, **though thorns surround you and you sit on scorpions**. Do not be afraid of their words, and do not be frightened by their face. For a rebellious house are they."*

(Here the expression "to sit on thorns and scorpions" stands for human temptation and persecution.)

Human persecution is equated with expressions such as thorn, sting or scourge in the body regions such as the eye, flank (side abdominal region) or side. Thus, the suffering under human persecution is always compared figuratively with the pain of a sharp object stuck in the body. This figure of speech is not as common in our time as it was in those days. If you now compare this together with the context in 2 Corinthians 12, it should now be clear for absolutely everyone, because the context is exactly the same as in the other Bible passages! It should now be unmistakably cleared up that Paul here could not possibly have been speaking of a God-given disease from which Jesus did not want to heal him, but of all the persecutions, afflictions, mistreatments, hardships, weaknesses, and fears for Christ's sake that He had already promised Paul before. Paul suffered greatly from these and asked the Lord to take them away from him, however, the Lord said to him that His grace was sufficient for him and in his weaknesses His power came to completion. We learn from this that we cannot pray away things that He has already promised us.

"For to this you were called; for Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps; [...]" - 1 Peter 2:21

Paul was now content with these things and even spoke of now having pleasure in them. Peter also spoke of the fact that whoever suffers for Jesus' name should be blessed and rejoice! For us, however, this is sometimes still difficult to imagine.

"Beloved, do not be alienated by the fire of persecution among you, which is happening to you as a trial, as if something foreign were happening to you; but rejoice insofar as you are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice in the revelation of His glory! If you are reproached in the name of Christ, blessed are you! For the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

- 1 Peter 4:12-14

"Very gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore I am well pleased with: Infirmities, in abuses, in distresses, in persecutions, in anxieties for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." - Verse 9-10

In his first letter to the Corinthians, he also mentioned these sufferings that he must go through as an apostle of Christ.

*"For it seems to me that God has set us apostles as last, destined as it were to die; for we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ; we weak, but you strong; you honored, but we despised. **Until this hour we suffer hunger and thirst and nakedness, being beaten and having no place to stay, laboring laboriously with our own hands. When we are reviled, we bless; when we suffer persecution, we endure; when we are***

blasphemed, we comfort; the refuse of the world we have become, the dregs of all until now. - 1 Corinthians 4:9-13

"In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." - John 16:33

"For to this you were called; for Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps;[...]" - 1 Peter 2:21

"Beloved, do not be alienated by the fire of persecution among you, which is happening to you as a trial, as if something foreign were happening to you; but rejoice, insofar as you are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice in the revelation of his glory! If you are reproached in the name of Christ, blessed are you! For the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

- 1 Peter 4:12-14

"[...] my persecutions, my sufferings, which happened to me in Antioch, in Iconium, in Lystra. These persecutions I endured, and from all of them the Lord saved me. But all also who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." - 2 Timothy 3:11-12