

REACHING PEOPLE FOR CHRIST

“These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here....” —ACTS 17:6

By whatever criteria we measure effectiveness in ministry, there is no question Paul was effective! People were converted to Christ in huge numbers, and despite constant opposition, churches were established throughout the Mediterranean world. To Paul’s opponents what was a negative notion of ‘trouble’ was to him a positive expression of ‘triumph’. He was turning the world upside down with the Gospel, demolishing the status quo, and bringing about a new era of life and liberation in Jesus Christ.

The effectiveness of Paul’s evangelism was not just a consequence of divine calling, but also of careful planning. An important principle he applied to his listeners was to teach what is unknown by means of what is known. If our attempts to communicate something new begin with the unfamiliar, we will almost certainly confuse our listeners and leave them disinterested. But if we start with what is already familiar and carefully build a bridge to the unfamiliar, we are likely to gain interest and understanding.

Paul looked for a common platform on which he could build a bridge that would take his listeners from their familiar territory to the unfamiliar truths of the Gospel. This meant he worked at becoming acquainted with the world of those he was speaking to. If we’re going to be fruitful in reaching people for Christ, we need to be familiar not only with the Bible, but cultural values, expectations and, if possible, personal circumstances of our listeners. We always should consider at

what point they are at in their lives, and connect in a way they can relate to.

In the one recorded Scripture of Paul preaching in a synagogue, he connects with his Jewish hearers by addressing them as ‘children of Abraham’, and begins to talk about the dramatic deliverance from Egypt under Moses, all very familiar territory to them. To a group of women in Philippi, worshipping a God they didn’t know, Paul joins them and introduces a positive message about a God they could know. To the pagans of Lystra, he finds common ground in creation, and how a living God sustains it all, putting food on their tables and joy in their hearts. To Greek philosophers in Athens, he refers to futile attempts of men to express God in terms of gold, silver and stone, and tactfully leads them to a God who gives life and breath.

When reaching people for Christ, our starting point should be in the thinking, culture and presuppositions of our hearers, so that we first get onto their territory. Then, like Paul, tactfully build that bridge that will lead them to the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help me to be sensitive to the position of others and present the message of the Gospel in a way they can relate to. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: In my witness for Christ, am I looking for common ground in which I can build a bridge to the Gospel?