
Words of Truth

“Relationship Evangelism” Is False Doctrine

By: Brian A. Yeager

I want to begin this study by clearly stating that I am NOT teaching that your influence is not effective in teaching people. Our influence on the world is necessary in teaching (Proverbs 4:18, Matthew 5:14-16, Philippians 2:14-16, I Timothy 4:12, and I Peter 3:1-7). People will look at our lives and see if we “practice what we preach” (I Peter 2:10-16 and I Peter 3:8-17). This is not wrong. We are supposed to practice what we preach (I Timothy 4:16). It is wrong to be a hypocrite (Romans 2:1-29). The Bible teaches us and others to judge fruit (Matthew 7:15-20) rather than appearance (John 7:24). Therefore, once again, let me declare plainly that we do teach a multitude of lessons by our conduct.

Now, after that clarification, I want you to read this quote: “RELATIONSHIP EVANGELISM,” THEN, IS... 1. Adapting the two means to the best advantage for the person we are seeking to lead to Christ 2. A process of developing meaningful relationships with other people... a. In which we allow the beauty of the gospel to first be demonstrated in our lives b. In which we ‘build bridges’ (develop relationships) with our prospects that allow the ‘traffic’ (i.e., the gospel) to flow freely and naturally 3. That which involves gradually developing relationships with those who are lost... a. By working with an unlimited pool of contacts (family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc.) b. By normally starting with those closest to us and working outward in concentric circles of concern 4. The development of relationships that involve several progressive levels... a) The initial contact b) Becoming better acquainted c) Being a servant d) Being a friend e) Sharing your faith f) Witness of the “Body” g) Exposure to the gospel h) Invitation” (Mark Copeland; http://executableoutlines.com/re/re_02.htm).

The source of this quote is a Florida College, false preacher for an apostate church of Christ in Florida. He has a series of sermon outlines teaching his followers to use this tactic of teaching. His entire doctrine is, admittedly, based on a book written by a man. Notice: “Note: The basic outline for this lesson was adapted heavily from ‘Lifestyle Evangelism’, by Joseph Aldrich” (http://executableoutlines.com/re/re_01.htm). In a five minute search about Joseph Aldrich you can find that he was the president of Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon, and is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary (http://www.amazon.com/Lifestyle-Evangelism-Learning-Those-Around-ebook/dp/B004EWEVTQ/ref=la_B001KCP88Q_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1398633314&sr=1-1). If you look at the “doctrinal statements” from Multnomah, you find that they believe in salvation through grace by faith only (<http://www.multnomah.edu/about/doctrinal-statement/>). This man is the SOURCE for the doctrine of “Relationship Evangelism” as taught by Mark Copeland. That, in itself, tells you to run for the hills from this ideology (Colossians 2:8 and Colossians 2:18-23). The source of “relationship evangelism” is NOT the Scriptures. If the doctrine were the truth, that’s where you would read about it (II Timothy 3:16-17). There are some other things that make this doctrine false!

Some Huge Problems With The “Relationship Evangelism” Errors

Honesty is supposed to be a key characteristic of Christians (Romans 12:17). It is absolutely dishonest to begin relationships with people under false pretenses. If you befriend someone just to “teach them”, that is lying to them. If your goal is to “build bridges” and establish contacts, you’re using an approach like you’re a salesman. Where will lying get you (Revelation 21:8)? Consider this: “*Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another*” (Ephesians 4:25).

Another huge error in the mindset of “relationship evangelism” is the lack of urgency. The Bible teaches us not to act like there is a tomorrow when it comes to matters of spiritual importance (Proverbs 27:1, Matthew 6:24-34, Luke 12:16-21, and James 4:13-16). Any time someone is teaching otherwise, they are teaching a false doctrine. We do not have the time to develop relationships as a means to teach someone. The Lord will come at an unexpected time (Matthew 24:35-25:30). We need to act and speak like people who know that. We need a sense of urgency (Isaiah 62:6-7, Ezekiel 3:17-21, John 4:31-35, and Acts 20:26-27).

Another huge error in the mindset of “relationship evangelism” is the underlying implication that the Gospel alone is not effective enough to convert. In Mark Copeland’s false teaching he says this: “What may have worked well in times past may not today because of changing conditions” (http://executableoutlines.com/re/re_02.htm). Well, frankly, Mark is an idiot. The word of God, alone, is sufficient to the effective conversion of the lost (Psalms 19:7, Mark 16:15-16, Romans 1:16, Colossians 1:5-6, and I Thessalonians 2:13).

Another huge error in the mindset of “relationship evangelism” is the idea presented in prioritizing people like they are sales prospects. Notice: “WHAT IS AN “EVANGELISM PROSPECT LIST”? A. SIMPLY STATED, IT IS A LIST OF NAMES 1. Of individuals that we would like to see saved... C. SIFT THROUGH YOUR LIST TO DETERMINE WHICH TO GIVE PRIORITY... D. NARROW YOUR LIST DOWN TO NO MORE THAN TEN PEOPLE” (http://executableoutlines.com/re/re_03.htm). Does the word of God teach this? NO!!!!!! We are supposed to try and help all who are willing to hear the Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38-39, Romans 10:11-17, Romans 16:25-26, I Thessalonians 1:7-10, and Titus 1:1-3).

As we’ve briefly stated already, the idea of “relationship evangelism” is first and foremost wrong because the word of God says nothing of it. The reason Copeland cannot use many Scriptures in his outlines and he has to refer to denominational writings, is because his doctrine is not biblically true. Therefore, it is wrong to believe and/or practice (Proverbs 30:5-6, I Corinthians 4:6, Galatians 1:6-10, II John 9, and Revelation 22:18-19).

Conclusion

Reading through some of this material made me very angry (cf. John 2:13-17). There are many more errors of this doctrine time will not permit to be exposed. The weaknesses in churches of Christ stem from errors such as these. People are not being taught and converted; but being treated like merchandise (II Peter 2:1-3). We must be the ones who stand firm and continue to have our faith and trust in the truth (Proverbs 23:23 and John 8:32). We cannot blend in to bring people to Christ. Rather, we must stand apart (John 17:9-17)!