

The Conversion of the Multitudes

Introduction. If you watched the Super Bowl, you may have seen the ads, “He Gets Us” sponsored by wealthy Bible believers. Similar ads ran in last year’s Super Bowl, and they have occasionally run throughout the year.

This year’s ad was based on Jesus’ washing the disciples feet in John 13. In this modern approach Christians are depicted as demonstrating compassion by washing the feet of those who may be considered marginalized either by society in general or by some churches and Christians.

The tagline “He Gets Us” is a biblical message (Isaiah 53:3; Hebrews 4:15). He understands our humanity. He knows our weaknesses. He feels our pain. He identifies with our temptations. He recognizes our struggles (Matthew 9:36, 14:14; 18:27; 25:31-46).

You can definitely understand what the organizers are trying to do — make Jesus more appealing to a younger generation. But many are watering down His real appeal and thus diluting His power and message.

Of course, it’s difficult to present the essence of the gospel in a 30-second commercial. But the primary need of our unprincipled culture isn’t to leave the impression that “Jesus loves us despite our sin” and that’s all. Instead, our lost world needs to know that Jesus loves us despite our sin, calls us to repentance from our sin, and saves us from the consequences of that sin.

Hegetsus.com website appears to further the ads’ soft-sell of the gospel, with more effort given to distance themselves from Christian stereotypes and to ensure site visitors they’re not trying to get them to go to church. The site barely portrays Jesus as God and says little about the cross or our need for repentance in order to escape the punishment of hell. So, Jesus definitely gets us — but do we get Him?

The conversions in the early part of Acts not only indicate the increased spread of the gospel, but they also give a pure snapshot of what Christ wanted when people are converted. These chapters also demonstrate that the expectation of trial, adversity, and self-denial weren't hindrances to the growth of the church, while materialism, greed, and covetousness were. Let’s examine how the multitudes were converted in the beginning, how the conversions continued, and what really cemented the process.

I. It Began With Powerful Preaching

A. Peter and John were considered by the Sanhedrin as “unlearned and ignorant men” (Acts 4:13).

1. “Unlearned” means “illiterate, without learning: Acts 4:13 (i.e. unversed in the learning of the Jewish schools, cp. John 7:15 ...”
2. “Ignorant” means “a private person, opposed to a magistrate, ruler, king ... in the New Testament an unlearned, illiterate man, opposed to the learned and educated ...”
3. “The word translated ‘uneducated’ means without technical training in the school of Hillel, or the school of Shammai, Jesus Himself was regarded as ‘uneducated’ (John 7:15) for He, like His apostles, had not attended the schools of the rabbis. ‘Untrained’ speaks of one who is from a private place

in life, as opposed to one who is used to appearing and speaking in public” (Reese, *New Testament History*, p. 181).

- B. However, they had “been with Jesus.”
 - 1. Peter, John, and the other apostles had spent three years in the “school of Jesus” being taught and observing how to teach.
 - a) Their training under the “Master Teacher” often involved the entire day in His company and under His instruction.
 - b) It has been observed, “If actual hours were counted, we might find that they had more semester hours of training under the greatest Teacher of all time than the average degree holder of today.”
 - 2. Peter and John didn’t meet the human standards of qualification for being teachers of the people, but they obviously knew what they were talking about (Acts 4:19-20).
 - 3. Their boldness wasn’t due to “the art of rhetoric, but was the ... deep conviction of the truth of what they spoke, and that conviction could have been obtained only by their having been with Jesus, and having been satisfied that He was Christ” (Albert Barnes).
- C. Genuine conviction that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God is of far more value in preaching than all the letters any school may be able to attach after one’s name.
 - 1. We should never reach a time when too much emphasis is placed on a particular school or preacher rather than on Jesus and His Word.
 - 2. When we look back on those God chose as His spokesmen, there were herdsmen, fishermen, carpenters, farmers, tax collectors, and tentmakers.
 - 3. There were some learned and trained men whom God was able to use, but don’t worry, God can use you no matter what your talent level.

II. It Continued Because of the Sincere Commitment of Converts

- A. Notice the effect of the lives of the saints on the unsaved in Jerusalem (Acts 4:31-33; cp. 2:47).
 - 1. The benevolence which characterized the early church was different and superior to anything previously seen in Jerusalem or the rest of the world.
 - 2. The Jews were required to lay aside a tithe for the poor in their gates — they were notorious for neglecting this (Malachi 3:8).
 - a) There were provisions in Jewish society for indentured servitude, for the payment of debts (Leviticus 25:35-55).
 - b) There were laws governing the transfer of property in order to relieve personal poverty (Leviticus 25:23-34).
 - c) The poor were given the right to glean the fields and corners (Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 24:19-22).
 - 3. However, there were no provisions for a Jew to sell his possessions and make provision for those that weren’t in his family — yet, this is what Barnabas and others did for their brethren (Acts 4:32-37).
- B. Too much can’t be said about the importance of righteous living as an aid to evangelism.

1. Jesus taught that the cause of the kingdom was advanced by the influence of its citizens (Matthew 5:13-16; 13:33).
2. Paul taught that Christians were to be ready to do good works by which others were influenced (Titus 3:8; Ephesians 2:10). Other apostles taught the same truth (1 Peter 3:1-2; 4:1-4).
3. The devil knew the power of this influence and wanted to undermine it through the sin of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

III. It Was the Result of Corrective Discipline

- A. The occasion of giving to the relief of the poor saints was an opportunity for Satan to tempt men with greed, pride, and dishonesty.
 1. The example of the righteous (Acts 4:36-37).
 2. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-2, 8).
 3. The divine punishment of such sin (Acts 5:5, 10).
 4. These events had a positive influence on both the converted and unconverted in Jerusalem (Acts 5:5, 11).
- B. They saw the effects of God's grace in the lives of Christians (Acts 4:33).
 1. They also needed to learn about God's severity (Romans 2:4-6).
 2. It's not enough to preach grace, mercy, and love — we have to also preach God's justice, righteousness, and hatred of sin.
- C. They learned that Christ expects something of His people.
 1. Christ expects that our service come from the heart freely (John 4:24).
 2. Christ expects that we deal with our sins honestly (Acts 8:20-22).
 3. Christ expects that we love each other fervently (Acts 4:32).
- D. They learned that the church is kept free of the influence of impenitent sinners.
 1. God won't fellowship sin (2 John 6-10).
 2. Those who fellowship sin lose fellowship with God (1 Corinthians 5:7-11).
 3. Keeping the church pure doesn't hamper its growth (Acts 5:14). Not exercising discipline makes a mockery out of God's command and people don't properly respect the commitment when one obeys Christ.

Conclusion. The church grew because of powerful preaching, the commitment of the Christians, and the purity which was strictly enforced by discipline. The church will still grow today by the same means. Will we have the strength to press on in the same way as those in the first century?