

Review of *The Scandal of Evangelism: A Biblical Study of the Ethics of Evangelism* by Elmer John Thiessen

Elmer Thiessen's *The Scandal of Evangelism: A Biblical Study of the Ethics of Evangelism*, is a followup volume to his earlier "The Ethics of Evangelism." As a philosopher he taught for 36 years at Medicine Hat College (Alberta, Canada) and is currently Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at Emmanuel College.

The intent of the book is to challenge and immerse the reader (both Christian and non-Christian) with a Scriptural view of evangelism (especially the New Testament) that creatively applies the "rules, principles, stories, drama, and worldview of the Scripture" to the ethics of evangelism.

The book has two Parts: the "Ethics of Evangelism in the New Testament," and then, "Applied Topics," including children, the secular academy and even humanitarianism. Thiessen begins with a broad Scriptural view of evangelism as an outgrowth of the love of God and the love of one's neighbor that is fundamental to a biblical approach to ethics. "Christ's love compels us" (2 Cor. 5;14).

The most significant contribution of the book is an apparent understanding of those who mistrust evangelism, who see it as manipulative and coercive. For them it is proselytism (what Thiessen refers to as "sheep-stealing," or simply moving members from one church or denomination to another).

Thiessen's conclusions evidence remarkable balance and restraint. He practices what he preaches. His arguments build with compelling logic from a basic definition of evangelism as "Good News," to his understanding of the importance of the Kingdom of God as prominent in the teachings of Jesus. This Kingdom is not territorial. It is about whole persons and whole societies.

This is not a “how to” manual. Thiessen insists that God did not send a message but a person. Ethical evangelism is incarnational—it proclaims and demonstrates. It grows out of a genuine love for people. Loving your enemies is a significant part of overcoming resistance to what we believe to be the truths of Christianity. There is an insistence on the dignity of persons.

Thiessen has a good command of history and philosophy but also thinks theologically. His command of the biblical understanding of evangelism is most helpful, from Matthew to Revelation.

The “Scandal” of evangelism is that its critics see most attempts to do evangelism as failing to express love, caring, respect and tolerance. They believe that evangelists are incapable of responding to their challenges with real understanding or appreciation. Are evangelists willing to suffer—can they live good lives and do good deeds even in a hostile environment? Ethical evangelism always goes high!

For Thiessen the ethics of evangelism involve truthfulness, openness, no hidden agendas. Persuasion is not the key. Total reliance upon the work of the Holy Spirit is—especially when undergirded with prayer.

At the end of Part I there is a helpful 30 point summary. Then Part II applies the lessons of Part I to specific contexts. Throughout, Thiessen begins each chapter with a story (demonstrating the importance of narrative for evangelism) and then expands on that narrative throughout the chapter, illustrating the thesis.

This book would be a valuable asset for colleges, seminaries, church school classes and even home study groups. Perhaps one potential weakness is that some of the terminology might be a challenge for some.

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