



Seven Weeks in Peru

Conferences - Tribal Ministry - Mission Team

By Steven Shepard

On May 21st I took off for seven weeks in Peru, which is much longer than my usual stay. Though it wasn't the easiest trip, it was filled with manifestations of God's glory, which makes any hardship worth bearing.

My first 11 days were spent in the capital city of Lima, teaching on biblical foundations in two conferences and in various churches. I rejoiced to see how God's Word has worked to inspire in many hearts a greater love toward God and fervency to serve the Lord. The message from many pulpits has changed. The vision now is for a training center to equip more pastors. Again and again during my stay in Peru, I saw the great need that pastors and church planters have for biblical training.

I then spent about five weeks in and around the jungle city of Pucallpa. The first weeks were spent teaching among the Shipibo and Yora tribes, meeting with native missionaries, and preparing for our mission team. The Yoras are an isolated tribe of about 600 people who live in a remote village deep in the jungles. Because the Peruvian government has prohibited all outsiders from going to their village, Wycliffe missionaries flew representatives of the Yora tribe to Pucallpa to hear the Gospel. I had no idea how they would respond. For five days my co-worker, Cesar Soto, and I taught through the key parts of the biblical narrative using an interpreter from Spanish to Yora. Hearing the Gospel for the first time, the Yoras were filled with a sense of urgency. They asked for more and more stories and declared, "We want a church in our village. We are afraid we will forget. We want someone to come and teach us." On the fourth day I asked the Yoras, "**Who will say it is true? Father God, not wanting to punish us, punished His Son, who died for our bad acts, and was brought back to life again. Who will say, 'This is the truth!' If we make Jesus our chief, then He will welcome us to where He is.**" (They have no word for "believe" in their language). Then they all immediately and enthusiastically affirmed their faith in Christ. I believe that God made at least most of them "new creatures" during those days. Please pray for the Lord to establish His church among the Yoras.

At the end of my stay, a 14 member mission team served for nine days in four jungle villages and in Lima. They held four medical clinics, two eye glass clinics, three women's groups, and five children's outreaches. They also completed a roof structure for a new church building. One of the team's highlights involved a Shipibo wedding. Before the group came, I taught on the topic of what it means to be married before God. This resulted in the Shipibo church's first wedding with 12 couples wanting to say their vows. It was an extraordinary event. Our group decorated, took pictures, and served cake. The church was packed. The couples, dressed in their very best, walked slowly down the aisle to the traditional music of the wedding march (which they chose). Many Shipibos had not previously understood God's plan for marriage. In addition, as older traditions have broken down, there is a need for another way to recognize marriage in their culture. As the couples said their vows, promising to be faithful "until separated by death," they set an example for the many young people present.



Above: Representatives of the unreached Yora tribe

Below: A Shipibo couple says their vows at the "Lamb of God" church.



Pictured above is Jaime, a Yora man who said to me, "Please do not forget us; please care about us. Please talk to Father God about us." Then, on our last day, when we had gone past the time for lunch, and after almost five hours in the heat, Jaime said with a loud voice, "We want to keep hearing; we are not hungry; and we are not tired." When Jaime later returned to his village, he began to share the Word from house to house.



The Balance of the Gospel

Article by Christy Shepard

“Behold then the kindness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22a)

When the Gospel is properly preached, there is a balance between the Bad News and the Good News, the severity of God and the kindness of God. “Unmerited favor,” the very definition of grace, actually sums up this innate balance between the two parts of the Gospel message. We are commanded to “behold” this balance, to focus on it and to thoroughly understand it (Phil. 1:27.) Though kindness is mentioned before severity above, it was written well after Paul had already devoted his first three chapters to the Bad News before he introduced the Good News at Romans 3:21. The order of presentation is important because the Bad News establishes the context and need of the Good News. Therefore, I will also begin in that order.

The severity of God refers to His justice, holiness, and position as Creator. In no way do these attributes diminish God’s love or goodness, but rather reinforce them. By nature creatures are dependent, yet the entire human race has chosen to rebel against and reject their Maker. This insanity is called SIN. In our quest to become like gods, we gained instead the knowledge of evil, spiritual blindness, and death. Proudful insanity deceives us into loving its lies and our chains of corruption, while hating the very One who is our source of life, truth, and fulfillment. We continually take sustenance from our Creator without even a word of thanks. God declares that all have sinned. No one does good, not even one. We are all guilty of sin, cut off from God, and under His wrath. It is only just that we must die. The proper response in accepting this Bad News is to literally shut our mouths. No more boasting. No more suppressing the truth by arguing against God or making excuses. Agreement with God’s judgment produces SILENCE. We are guilty. It is at this point that we are ready to hear the Good News.

The kindness of God refers to His innate goodness, love, compassion, and mercy. He alone is the source of these qualities. From within His own nature, God has chosen to save a people for Himself from a hostile, sinful, and hopeless humanity. God incarnate, Jesus Christ, came to earth to pay the death penalty of sin by taking our place on the cross. His resurrection proves His power and authority to be our savior. God’s Holy Spirit raises His children from spiritual death, being born again as a new creature able and willing to seek God. Those believing in Jesus Christ are forgiven of all their sins, are now reconciled, and have PEACE with their Maker and eternal life. This plan of salvation originated with God alone. No one can claim that he deserves God’s favor. The balanced Gospel levels humanity both in sin and salvation so that no one can boast over another. Instead, it produces genuine humility.

When one part of God’s Message is emphasized over the other, it becomes distorted and diluted and ceases to be the powerful tool of God for saving sinners. Both the justice and love of God must be equally preached. Over emphasizing “unmerited” produces condemnation, legalism, and fear. Over emphasizing “favor” produces pride, lawlessness, and presumption. Therefore, since God has entrusted His church to proclaim His Gospel to the world, it should be our top priority to get this balance correct. We are to speak this truth in love. To distort truth in order to avoid offense is not true love. It is only by the Gospel of Grace that God saves souls. How much do we really care about the people around us? They will perish without the Gospel. Moved by compassion, love tells the truth even to its enemies, because it identifies with their need of deliverance from sin and death. Richard Baxter once wrote, “I preach as a dying man to dying men.”



Above: CPI co-worker Otoniel Pardo at a conference in Lima. CPI distributed about 200 books.



Above: Shipibo lady walks Kerri Stern to her lodging after a four hour journey by boat to reach the village.

Below: Miranda Wagner distributes food to a woman in a Yaminahua village located by a landfill on the outskirts of the city.



Consider becoming a partner with CPI in world missions!

Prayers are requested for Steven and Jonathan Shepard’s exploratory trip to Uganda (Nov 2-17).