



The Power of God's Word in Peru

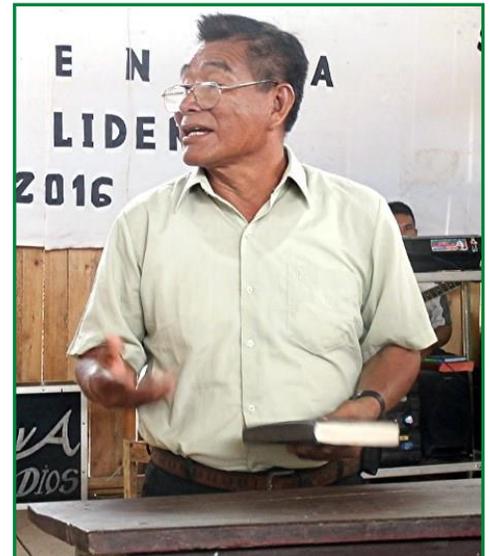
(January 28–March 7) – By Steven Shepard

I spent much of my time in Peru teaching. To give you an idea about how busy I was, I had 27 speaking engagements in just under six weeks. Lives were changed, but it was not because of me. It is God's Word that has the power. When people understood the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross – that He paid for all their sins, past, present, and future – they began to experience the freedom that only His grace can bring: freedom from legalism, guilt, fear, and slavery to a self-focused life.

Our first conference was in a remote Shipibo village called Nuevo Olaya. I went with Pastor Samuel Rios from Lima and several Shipibo leaders from Pucallpa, traveling about six hours by "fast boat." (The regular boat would have taken two days.) About 100 people from ten Shipibo villages assembled to hear God's Word over a period of three days. Though it was very hot and buggy, everyone persevered and listened with eagerness. Jorge, the coordinating pastor said, "Thank you for coming to my church to bring the Gospel of Christ, which has greatly strengthened my spiritual life and my congregation. I ask for the prayers of Church Planting International, as I want to make a plan to go to the villages which have no churches." Marcial, one of the Shipibo pastors who came with us from Pucallpa also remarked, "I understood that Christ died on the cross to take away my sins, that now He sees us as those who do not have sin. When I received the teachings it changed my life. It changed my mind to trust in God and not people. I now have a foundation that I am teaching to my family and to the churches and can feel peace in my heart."

Right after the Shipibo conference, Pastor Rios and I went back to Lima and then to the town of Juan Jui in the high jungles for another three-day conference with about 80 pastors and leaders from seven churches. Once again, we preached and taught about the Gospel of grace and the finished work of Christ. The people had been taught a performance-based religion, but when they heard the Word they received it with joy, including the pastor who invited us and coordinated the meetings.

During the final two weeks of my stay, Pastor Otoniel Pardo and I taught a course in Lima on the Attributes of God in our newly-launched Bible Institute, "Word of Grace." There were about 25 students. Some had recently come out of a church where they were given very destructive teachings which focused on subjective experience, submission to leaders, the "prosperity gospel," and manipulating people to give money. One student remarked, "To have participated was very important and beautiful because I have begun to know this precious God, who is infinite and great...I know I am in the hands of a sovereign God who has everything under His control." This coming June and July will bring two more conferences, first with the unreached Yora tribe, and then with the Matses.



Above: Samuel Ramirez teaching in Nuevo Olaya

Below: Otoniel Pardo and Steven Shepard at the Bible Institute in Lima



Biblical Principles of Church Planting

By Steven Shepard

*I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
(Matthew 16:18b)*

Church Planting International is dedicated to the planting and multiplying of churches around the world. But what does it mean to plant churches and how does it happen? In order to understand the answer to these questions, we must first understand what a church is. The Church is not a building. Nor is it a meeting of people who gather on Sunday. The word for “church” in the New Testament is “ecclesia” which means “called out ones.” The **Church** is the community of believers from all nations which God has called out of the world to be His people. It is the Lord who calls His people, who changes their hearts, and who indwells them by His Spirit. Jesus said, **“I will build My church.”** It is **Jesus** that builds His Church, and it is certain that He will do it. This has always been His purpose throughout history. Jesus loved His Church from all eternity. He came to give His life for His Church. And He is coming again to receive her to Himself. (Acts 2:39; Romans 1:5-7; Revelation 17:14)

When Jesus said that He would build His Church, He was referring to the **universal, invisible** Church which only He can see. Only believers that are in communion with Christ are part of this Church. The word church, however, is also used to refer to **local** congregations which are **visible** to others. Unlike the invisible, universal Church, local churches are usually made up of both converted and unconverted people. Church planting has to do with establishing these local congregations of believers. Local churches are the primary means that Christ uses to build His universal Church, which is composed of only true believers. **Here are some important principles about the planting of biblical local churches:**

1. A biblical local church is simply a congregation that believes and proclaims the true gospel. The gospel is the message about the person and work of Christ as Savior and Lord, and His promise of forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Him. (1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Philippians 1:27)
2. The planting of biblical churches is 100% the work of Christ, but His people are used as instruments in the process.
3. Biblical local churches do not result from man-made methods, such as appealing to “felt needs,” or entertainment. They are not the result of getting people to do certain external works such as praying a prayer or being baptized. Rather, biblical churches are the result of the inward work of the Spirit that alone can change the heart. (John 3:5-7; 6:44)
4. God’s method for establishing churches is for His people to proclaim the biblical gospel, through which God inwardly and spiritually calls people to Himself by His Spirit. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 Peter 1:23-25)
5. In addition to proclaiming the gospel, those who serve God in the establishment of local churches should give themselves to prayer, worship, acts of compassion, and the love of the brethren. (Acts 2:42-47)
6. In establishing local churches, leadership is key. There must be godly and humble leaders who have a proper understanding of God’s message and a God-given ability to proclaim it. With these kinds of leaders, churches will be firmly established. Without them, they will fall apart. (Ephesians 4:11-12)
7. We must never lose site that the purpose of local churches is the calling forth of Jesus’ universal Church, and that this Church will be a **victorious** Church. Jesus said, “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Hades refers to the realm of the dead. The gates of death did not prevail over Jesus and will not prevail over the church that Jesus is building. Local churches may come and go, but not one member in Jesus’ Church, whom He has called, will perish. (John 6:39; 10:27-29; Rom 8:30)

“For one week I was joined by CPI Board Member Tom Hopkins and Preston Smith (top right). Together we looked at properties for the proposed CPI Center, to be located in the jungle city of Yarinacocha. Also pictured are Shipibo co-workers Josue Ramirez (bottom left), wife Bani, and Samuel Ramirez. Preston is currently serving part time as CPI Director of Operations and Development and is seeking financial partners that would enable him to serve full time. This will enable Christy and I to spend more time on the mission field, which is what we feel called to do.” – Steven Shepard

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Above: Shipibo village of Nuevo Olaya

Below: Pastor Luis with his harmonica at the Nuevo Olaya conference

