Biblical Evangelism



A Theological and Practical Look at Reaching Others for Christ

Index

Lesson #	Title
1.	What is Biblical Evangelism: Introduction and Definition
2.	Obstacles to Evangelism
3.	Man-Centered Evangelism
4.	God-Centered Evangelism
5.	The Gospel, Part 1: What One Needs To Know About God
6.	The Gospel, Part 2: What One Needs To Know About Man
7.	The Gospel, Part 3: What One Needs To Know About Christ
8.	The Gospel, Part 4: What On Needs To Do In Response: Part A: Repentance
9.	The Gospel, Part 4: What One Needs To Do In Response: Part B: Faith
10.	Profession vs. Possession (False or Incomplete Gospels, the Lordship debate)
11.	Relational (Personal) Evangelism
12.	The Whole Person—Intellect, Emotion, and Will
13.	Character and Communication in Witnessing

Recommended book on evangelism:

Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1984)

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Lesson 1: What is Biblical Evangelism?

Introduction: Why study evangelism? Doesn't every Christian already know the importance of spreading the Gospel? After all, evangelism is simply "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread," as the saying goes. So, why spend time on this topic?

Actually, many professing believers do not understand or practice evangelism. Many Christians have no idea how to communicate their faith. There's even quite a bit of misunderstanding about the Gospel message itself. Further, much of the emphasis in evangelism lately has been on methods rather than on the message. And some evangelists have been guilty of manipulating their audiences into submission rather than simply delivering the good news to them. Thus, evangelism is an important subject to understand.

Objectives: The goal of this series of lessons is to give the student a thorough understanding of evangelism. We'll define evangelism, study the theological underpinnings of evangelism, and learn how to communicate the Gospel clearly and naturally. The outcome should be a renewed desire for students to reach their peers with the Gospel, accompanied by the ability to do so.

Definitions: Evangelism, testimony, witnessing—these words are often used interchangeably. But significant differences exist in the meanings of these words.

Witness: to testify, to give an account of the truth. Witnessing occurs any time a believer rehearses the facts of the Gospel within the hearing of an unbeliever. The emphasis is on communication of truth. The believer's lifestyle also gives nonverbal witness of his commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord. Both life (behavior) and lip (verbal communication) must be consistent with each other. That is, Christians must back up what they say by how they live.

Testimony: an account of how one came to be saved; one's reputation. When one is called upon to *give a testimony*, he tells about how he got saved. When one *has a good testimony* before others, it means that he has a good reputation or is an exemplary Christian. While witnessing usually refers to communicating the content of the Gospel, giving a testimony usually emphasizes one's personal journey to faith.

Note: personal testimonies may or may not be helpful in communicating the Gospel. If the emphasis is on the content of the Gospel, and how you responded to it, then a testimony may be appropriate. But if the emphasis is on the more personal and emotional aspects of salvation, the one you are witnessing to may see salvation as an interesting experience that happened to you, but one that has no bearing on him. The object in giving a testimony is not to focus on your own personal experience, but to aid in communicating the Gospel message.

What is an Evangelist?

In 2 Tim 4:5, Paul exhorts Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist." An evangelist is literally a "preacher of good news," that is, a missionary preacher of the Gospel (Eph 4:11 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers*). This title is applied to Philip (Acts 21:8 *We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist.*) who appears to have gone from city to city preaching the word (Acts 8:4, 40). Judging from the case of Philip, evangelists had neither the authority of an apostle, nor the gift of prophecy, nor the

responsibility of pastoral supervision over churches. They were itinerant preachers, their special function being to carry the Gospel to places where it was previously unknown. They seem to have had an ability for preaching the Gospel to non-Christians.[1] Thus, a true evangelist is not necessarily one who holds revival services or Bible conferences in churches, but someone who focuses on reaching the lost with the Gospel. Many missionaries would fit into this category.

Note: the fact that some are vocational evangelists does not reduce any believer's responsibility to evangelize. Some do it vocationally; others voluntarily, but all believers are required to evangelize.

Evangelism: The English word "evangelize" comes from the Latin *evangelium*. The Greek word itself is a compound of *eu*, meaning "well, good," and *angelos*, meaning "message, news." The word "evangelize" means to proclaim a good message. Broadly speaking, evangelism is virtually the same as witnessing—communicating the good news about Jesus Christ. But in a sense, evangelism is the entire process of communicating the Gospel message to an unbeliever, followed by that person's conversion, his baptism, addition to the church, and growth in the faith. Evangelism as a process does not end at a profession of faith. Actually, evangelism has just begun when a soul is born-again. The burden of Matthew 28:19 is to "disciple," not just to tell someone the Gospel.[2]

Biblical Basis for Evangelism

Matt 28:18-20 *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

The main verb here is the command "make disciples" (KJV "teach"). To disciple a person to Christ is to bring him into the relation of pupil to teacher. Disciples are those who hear, understand, and obey Jesus' teaching (12:46-50). The order is given at least to the Eleven in their role as disciples (v. 16). Therefore, they are models for all disciples. In other words, fulfilling the Great Commission is the duty of all believers.

"All nations" has the sense of "tribes," "nations," or "peoples" and means "all peoples or nations without distinction," including Jews. This is the basis of worldwide missions.

The words "Go[3] ye" have the force of a command or a commission (hence "the Great Commission"). The words "baptizing" and "teaching" describes what happens to disciples: they are baptized and taught. The NT can scarcely conceive of a disciple who is not baptized or is not instructed. Baptism is a sign both of entrance into Messiah's covenant community and of pledged submission to his lordship. The force of this command implies that Jesus' disciples are responsible for making disciples of others, a task characterized by baptism and instruction.[4]

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[1] *Easton Bible Dictionary*
[2] Luther L. Grubb, "What Must the Church Do?" in *Grace Theological Journal*, V13 #1, Wtr 72, p.20
[3] The word "go" is actually a participle ("while going" or "having gone"), but the word reflects the imperative sense of the main verb "make disciples."
[4] *Expositor's Bible Commentary*

Acts 1:8 *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

This text presents the theme for the whole Book of Acts. The mandate to witness comes as a direct commission from Jesus himself. They were his last word before his ascension and, therefore, the mandate is final and conclusive. All that follows in Acts is the result of Jesus' own intent and the fulfillment of his express word. This commission lays an obligation on all Christians.

The command includes

a person:	the person of Jesus, on whose authority the church acts and who is the object of its witness
a power:	the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the motivation for the mission
a program:	the program of the church begins at Jerusalem, moves out to "all Judea and Samaria," and extends "to the ends of the earth."

The book of Acts displays how the mission of the church in its witness to Jesus fared at Jerusalem (2:42-8:3), throughout Judea and Samaria (8:4-12:24), and as it progressed until it finally reached the imperial capital city of Rome (12:25-28:31).[5]

Luke 24:46-47: *And [Jesus] said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

In this text, Jesus Himself asserts that the message "should be preached . . . among all nations." The church is responsible to fulfill this mandate. Since the church is composed of people, each believer is to do his part in proclaiming the Gospel, both personally and in conjunction with his church.

Evaluation of Evangelism

The success or failure of evangelism, witnessing, and testifying is somewhat difficult to gauge. We are tempted to think that unless people respond positively to the message, we have failed. But remember that our duty is to plant the seed and water it. God is responsible for the yield, not us. Success is communicating the Gospel. Of course, we want to see people respond positively to the message, but responses are beyond our control.

If results were the gauge of success, many missionaries have been absolute failures. Missionaries frequently spend years evangelizing before making one convert. So success or failure in evangelism is not based on the number of converts. **[It's common for people to say that the Lord is really blessing the ministry when many people are being saved. But it's unwise to equate numbers of professions with the Lord's blessing.]**

Further, it is wrong for us to constrain, manipulate, or scare anyone into accepting Christ. We dare not use pressure tactics to persuade unbelievers to accept the Gospel. The Holy Spirit's job is to convict, reprove and rebuke sinful men of their need to repent. We simply, prayerfully, and naturally confront people with the message. We cannot control how people will respond. All we

[5] *Expositor's Bible Commentary*

can control is whether we are actively engaging in evangelism or not. Ultimately, who does or does not accept Christ depends on God, not on us. "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9).

Motivation for Evangelism

We could pursue evangelism for several purposes—duty, fame, pride, guilt, compassion, to fill the church, to please the pastor, etc. But the supreme object in evangelism is to glorify God, not to save souls or to make ourselves feel better. The only true motivation for evangelism is a zeal for God and a love for others. We serve and honor God by means of evangelism. This is a proper, God-centered (theocentric) approach that focuses on the glory of God (doxological), rather than a man-centered approach.

For Further Discussion:

1. Has one fulfilled his duty if he witnesses to an unbeliever once?
2. If someone repeatedly rejects the Gospel, should you quit proclaiming it to him?
3. Why should one not feel guilty if his evangelistic efforts do not result in conversions?
4. What is it important to adopt the proper motivation for evangelism?
5. Describe the biblical role of an evangelist.



Lesson 2: Obstacles to Evangelism

Introduction: Most believers understand their responsibility to reach others for Christ. Many do their best—they invite friends to church, pass out tracts, talk to their co-workers, etc. But many don't even do that much. Only a minority of believers ever talk to anyone else about the Lord, and only a small minority ever lead someone else to a saving knowledge of Christ. Why is this the case? Why is it so hard to evangelize? There are several reasons evangelism is so tough.

1. Misunderstandings about Evangelism

   ☹ Some believe they need a lot of specialized training to witness effectively. Perhaps they are concerned about making a mistake when communicating the Gospel—this is a serious matter, and they don't want to mess up. Or perhaps they lack the confidence to answer potential questions **[e.g., How do you know the Bible is true? How do you know Jesus rose from the dead? Why do you think you're right and all the other religions are wrong? Why does God allow so much suffering in the world? Such questions are intimidating.]**

   Answer: 1) Most believers can learn to communicate the Gospel very efficiently. If one understood it well enough to be saved himself, he should be able to tell others; 2) Tell what you know and don't worry about what you don't know. Don't be afraid to admit your lack of knowledge. Tell how you were saved. Advanced training is important and valuable, but not necessary.

   ☹ Some are afraid that people will think they are strange and will reject them. They don't want to lose friends or popularity. If they tell others about Jesus, they might suffer ridicule or insults. In other words, they are ashamed.

   Answer: we should expect some opposition to the message. Jesus was crucified for that message. The disciples were killed for it. Millions of Christians have been persecuted for it. So it shouldn't surprise us if people react negatively to the Gospel message. Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel" (Rom 1:12). Are you?

   ☹ Some may be uncomfortable with the methods of evangelism they have been taught.

   People use various methods to spread the Gospel: door-to-door evangelism ("cold calling"), street preaching, passing out tracts on the corner, telemarketing (phones), etc. Some people are uncomfortable with such activities.

   Answer: 1) these are not the only methods of evangelism. In fact, the above methods are among the least successful; 2) lack of comfort should not deter one from evangelizing. Paul, for example, endured an amazing amount of discomfort (beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, imprisonment, rejection, etc.) as he spread the Gospel. We can endure a little discomfort for the cause of Christ.

☹ Some people may be disillusioned because of their lack of success. Perhaps they have tried telling a friend or neighbor about Jesus, and they made a complete mess of it. Perhaps they have told all their friends, but none responded favorably. Since no one responded in the past, they have decided not to try again.

Answer: the goal in evangelism is to glorify God by sharing the Gospel with another person. Whether that person accepts the Gospel is not under the control of the evangelist. All biblical evangelism is successful evangelism, regardless of the results. Conversions are the fruit that God alone can give. One should not stop telling others just because his audience is not interested the first time (or the second, third, fourth, etc.). An unbeliever typically hears the Gospel several times before he is willing to accept it. So don't give up.

☹ Some consider themselves too sinful to tell others. They think of themselves as such poor examples of what a Christian should be that they are ashamed to admit they are believers, let alone tell someone else of his need for Christ.

Answer: 1) It's true that rebellious believers are bad testimonies. If their lives are a mess, or if they display ungodly attitudes and behaviors, they have nothing to offer anyone else. In fact, such people have little or no basis to think that they are Christians. It is best if they keep their mouths shut to prevent others from getting the wrong idea of what a Christian is. Those in this state need to repent; 2) God uses regular, sinful people to evangelize. One does not have to be a "super-Christian" to witness. It's OK to admit that you still struggle with sin.

2. Separation

At the time of a person's conversion, it is likely that most of the people he knows are unconverted. He naturally wants to tell his friends of his salvation experience. But as he starts fellowshipping with a church and stops sinful behavior patterns, he will likely find that he has a new set of friends. Most of the people he now associates with are Christians. Further, at church he may be hearing about the necessity of Christians to separate from ungodliness, worldliness, and all forms of evil. Hence, he spends as little time as possible around unsaved people.

The outcome of the above scenario is that many Christians have little or no contact with unsaved people. This is a problem, because every Christian is responsible to evangelize the lost.

Jesus provides us an example of how to interact with unsaved people. Although He never sinned, He spent much time with sinners. He did not join in their sinful activities, but he did not segregate himself from them. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He was accused of being "a friend of publicans and sinners" (Mt 11:19). Thus, while it is true that believers need to separate from ungodliness, it is also true that they should attempt to retain their relationships with unsaved people. It is through these relationships that believers spread the Gospel. (In a future lesson, we'll study the concept of "redemptive relationships.")

3. The Cultural Gap

   Culture has to do with traditions, language, behavior, and ways of thought. Those brought up in a Christian culture know the religious language and customs. They share core beliefs and values. But the people we are trying to reach often do not share the same background, and thus do not understand common religious words and customs. It's difficult to communicate with someone who doesn't know what words like "salvation," "justification," "repentance," and "sanctification" mean. If we use words that unbelievers don't understand, we won't be effective witnesses.

   All humans share some common ground on which we can build an evangelistic appeal. First, we're all made in the image of God (Gen 1:27; James 3:9). That means we all have intellect, emotion, and will. We all have the ability to know and understand the truth. All people have the same access to the same facts and can use reasonable arguments to discover the truth. Second, everyone knows inherently that God exists (Rom 1:19-21). While many deny this, the Bible affirms it, and we can present the Gospel to people with the knowledge that they know it to be true (even if they reject it).

4. Biblical Illiteracy, Spiritual Immaturity, Apathy, and Wrong Doctrine

   There are many reasons why believers don't evangelize. We live in a time when many professing Christians are nearly biblically illiterate. Many believers have not progressed to the place where they could make a convincing, or even accurate, presentation of the Gospel to an unbeliever. Spiritual immaturity and ignorance of the Bible hinder evangelism. Even those who do have a good grasp of the material may have no desire to reach the lost. They may see evangelism as the work of the pastor or the evangelist, but not a duty that applies to them. Thus, wrong attitudes and beliefs by professing believers are often major obstacles in evangelism. One of the purposes of this series is to prevent you from adopting these wrong notions.

5. Disobedience

   Failure to evangelize boils down to simple disobedience. Christians have received a direct, unmistakable commission: go and tell others. No excuse for not doing so is valid. "Evangelism is the inalienable responsibility of every Christian community, and every Christian man. We are all under orders to devote ourselves to spreading the good news, and to use all our ingenuity and enterprise to bring it to the notice of the whole world."[6]

6. The Spiritual Condition of the Lost

   The Bible states that the lost are in a tragic spiritual condition. The unbeliever is dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 2.1), under the wrath of God (John 3:36), hostile toward God (Rom 8:5-8), and blinded by Satan (2 Cor 4:3-4). Man does not have it in him to understand spiritual realities or to obey God. Animosity against God and rejection of God are a part of his fallen nature. He suppresses, evades and denies the truth. When he hears the Gospel, he disbelieves and disobeys it—he is wholly incapable of any positive reaction to God's Word.[7] Theologians have a term for this condition: total depravity, which we'll study in future lessons. Jesus said that the majority of people won't be saved (Matt 7:13-14). Many people

[6] J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, p. 26.
[7] Packer, p. 107

find the Gospel message offensive, and react negatively to it. So we shouldn't be surprised if few respond favorably to the message.

Some people have tried to make the message more appealing to unbelievers. Instead of preaching the need for repentance, they preach that "God has a wonderful plan for your life," and He is waiting for you to let Him enter your life. Others deny the seriousness of sin, asserting that man's real problem is a low self-esteem. Some advertise the Christian life as one of wealth and prosperity. Salvation supposedly results in a happy, fulfilled, adventurous, and exciting life. Some encourage folks to be saved as a fire escape from hell. Others show that applying biblical principles can make one's life better. Each of these approaches is man-centered, i.e., each focuses on how God or salvation can solve the unbeliever's problems and/or make his life more fulfilling. These approaches are improper, even if they seem to be working. We must preach the Gospel whether or not people like the message. We can't water it down by making it say something it does not.

Does Belief In The Sovereignty Of God Hinder Evangelism?

Some people might suggest that since God is sovereign, he needs no human help in saving anyone. However, God's normal method is to use people to spread the Gospel (Rom 10:14-15). The sovereignty of God in salvation creates the possibility that evangelism will be successful. Because man is dead in sin, he would not and cannot respond positively to the Gospel. It is only when God extends grace to a sinner that he can respond in repentance and faith. Evangelism without God's sovereignty is utterly hopeless and doomed to failure. "Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian Gospel."[8] Fortunately, God is sovereign, so evangelism is possible.

Conclusion: There are many obstacles to evangelism: misunderstandings, the results of separation, the culture gap between believers and unbelievers, spiritual immaturity and disobedience by believers, and the spiritual blindness of the lost. Nevertheless, none of these obstacles should prevent us from evangelizing.

For Further Discussion: Suggest ways of overcoming each of the obstacles mentioned above.

[8] Packer, p. 106.



Lesson 3: Man-Centered Evangelism

Introduction: What the Gospel is and how we explain it are extremely important considerations, both of which we'll discuss in this series. We don't want to be guilty of misrepresenting the Gospel or presenting half-truths as Gospel truths. We must insure that we are proclaiming the whole Gospel in the proper way.

We live in a culture that exalts things that work. If something effectively produces results, that mechanism or method must be "good." If a method or machine fails to produce the desired result, we call this "bad." Such a philosophy is called pragmatism. The popular saying "Works for me" reflects this philosophy well. Pragmatism says, "Whatever works is good."

Pragmatism in some cases is appropriate. Who wants a car that doesn't run, a boat that doesn't float or an airplane that doesn't fly? We all appreciate things that work. But in other cases, a pragmatic viewpoint is inappropriate. The kind of pragmatism that says, "The ends (goals, desired results) justify the means (methods, how to attain those goals)" is inappropriate in a Christian setting. Pragmatism applied to Christianity suggests that any method or program that results in professions of faith must be good. If the desired outcome occurs, then the method of achieving it must be good. There are multiple problems with a pragmatic approach to evangelism.

In this lesson, we'll examine a man-centered approach to the Gospel, and a man-centered approach to evangelism. By the end, you'll see why pragmatism should not influence either our message or our method of communicating that message.

A Man-Centered Approach to the Gospel

> Man-centered evangelism contains some biblical truths. Yet these truths are distorted and incomplete. Man-centered approaches encourage us to think of the Gospel message as a simple plan containing a few basic facts. **[E.g., tract "God's Simple Plan of Salvation]** When we communicate these brief ideas to an unbeliever, and he accepts them, we have won that soul to Christ. Man-centered evangelism shortens or reduces the message in an attempt to make the Gospel as attractive and easy to understand as possible. While the Gospel is not overly complicated, we need to be sure not to reduce or abbreviate the content of the message. If we strip down the doctrinal content of the Gospel, we are liable to mislead people, or even give them a false assurance of salvation. "When a half truth is presented as the whole truth, it becomes an untruth."[9]

[9] Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel*, p. 17.

The following are examples of attempts to put the Gospel into a format that is non-offensive to unbelievers. These are examples of partial truths that compromise the Gospel.

A. *View of God:* God's primary characteristic is love. A popular tract starts out by asserting, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." God is like an indulgent grandfather who desires a close relationship with the unbeliever and is patiently waiting for permission to enter his life. God is a friend who wants to make your life better. God is a gentleman; he never offends or imposes his will on the unwilling.

B. *View of humanity:* man is a sinner, but has the ability to do good. Men seek after God and truth, but lack the correct facts. Man is imperfect and needs God to fix him up. Man is sick and ignorant (but not dead).

C. *View of Christ:* Jesus has come to give mankind abundant life. His death made man's forgiveness and escape from hell possible. He's gentle and meek, compassionate and understanding, sympathetic and non-judgmental. His work was ultimately for our benefit. He's a great example of how wonderful man can be. He's like a powerful friend who helps us.

D. *View of response to the Gospel*: Jesus is waiting for us to allow him into our lives. The decision is totally up to the free will of man. God awaits the sinner's decision. Salvation is a mental assent to the facts of the Gospel—it's purely a change of the will. Salvation is by belief alone—no repentance or commitment is necessary. One simply needs to make Jesus the object of his faith. The key to salvation is in the hands of the unbeliever. God votes for you and the devil votes against you, but you cast the deciding vote.

E. *View of the Christian life:* a Christian leads an exciting, fulfilled, abundant life. God removes all problems and the believer's happiness is overflowing. Good times and pleasant feelings are the norm. Good Christians are healthy, wealthy and wise.

Each of these points contains some truth or is not far from the truth, yet each point is a half-truth that fails to present the whole truth.

A Method-Centered Approach to Evangelism

A man-centered approach emphasizes method over message. Most evangelism instruction stresses the "how to's" of communicating the Gospel rather than examining the content of the Gospel. Method-centered evangelism emphasizes certain techniques that supposedly will result in the conversion of souls. Pragmatism (whatever works best) is the name of the game. **[Read from *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, p. 27-28]**

***Background of Method-Centered Evangelism*:**

Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), a leading figure in the Second Great Awakening, popularized the idea that employing certain *methods*, rather than simply proclaiming the *message*, would lead to conversions. In Finney's view, the basic barrier to conversion was the will, and the right use of "means" could affect the human will and lead to conversion.[10] His introduction of "new measures" into evangelism rejected the Reformers' emphasis on human depravity and focused instead the ability of each human to decide for Christ.[11] Finney's great insight, made perfectly clear on the first few pages of his book *Lectures on Revival*, is that conversion comes about by the exercise of free will. A preacher gets people to exercise their free will to convert by exciting the will. The more excited the will is, the more likely it is to convert. Therefore, the meeting must be exciting. Finney's preaching and his methods were designed to catch the sinner's attention, and once caught, to create an emotional outpouring that would result in conviction, which would then result in conversion.

Among the "new measures" that Finney employed to do this work were prolonged prayers and meetings, the anxious or inquirer's meeting, the anxious bench (predecessor of the altar call), public prayers for known sinners, coarse and irreverent language, and women praying in mixed gatherings. Finney pressured his listeners into decisions, which were often no more than emotional responses. The rationale for all that Finney did during revival services was the gaining of converts. The numerical success of his methods was his vindication. D.L. Moody endorsed this reasoning when he said, "It makes no difference how you get a man to God, provided you get him there."[12] Such sentiments are rampant in Evangelicalism and in Fundamentalism today.

Inappropriate evangelistic methods:

A. The Used Car Salesman Approach: making the best possible "sales pitch" and providing limited information to evoke a "sale." Used car evangelists try to "sell" the Gospel to unbelievers by making salvation as appealing as possible. They try to convince people to buy what they are selling. They present part of the truth but not the whole truth. For example, emphasizing God's love while ignoring His holiness and righteousness. Or preaching salvation through faith without mentioning repentance. Or showing the benefits of salvation without talking about the costs of discipleship. The response to the sales pitch depends on the smooth-talking salesmanship of the salesman. If you fail to make a good sales pitch, people will reject salvation; they will remain unconvinced. This approach places the burden of the evangelism process on the salesman rather than God and the Gospel message.

B. The "Come Down the Aisle to be Saved" Approach: insisting that a person must walk an aisle or make some other physical response to be saved. Preachers often

[10] Finney said that a revival is "purely a philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means." Given Finney's many unorthodox and unbiblical statements, many doubt that he was a genuine Christian.
[11] JETS 40/2 (June 1997) 328. Finney was fanatically anti-Calvinist.
[12] Don Strickland, *Charles Finney's Assault Upon Biblical Preaching*

proclaim the Gospel and then exhort their listeners to walk an aisle rather than to repent and believe. They imply that the correct response to the Gospel is external rather than internal. The danger of this method is that people confuse salvation with a physical activity—walking an aisle, raising a hand, talking to a counselor, etc. It implies that salvation is connected to a physical response. If I've made the physical response, I must be saved. But salvation is an internal, personal matter, one that does not have to be expressed by walking up front or even raising one's hand. Preachers must direct souls to Christ, not to any particular physical response.

C. High Pressure Tactics: using emotion or stress to produce a decision. High-pressure tactics range from emotional appeals to avoid the fires of hell to arguing with a person until he relents. High pressure is often brought to bear during invitations at the end of services. The evangelist encourages, berates, cajoles, and exhorts unbelievers to make a decision. He often employs highly emotional stories and music to get people to move. He may even place "ringers" in the audience who have previously agreed to go forward as examples to others. When under such influences, unbelievers may make decisions for the wrong reasons. Obviously, such decisions often prove to be short-term and shallow.

D. The "Jesus Can Meet Your Needs" Approach: showing the unbeliever how salvation can solve his problems and grant him a fulfilled, exciting life. This tactic emphasizes how employing biblical principles can make one's life better, more successful, happier, and more adventurous. God is like a cosmic vending machine and Jesus is a friendly helper. The goal is to convince the unbeliever that being saved would be in his own best interests. This approach distorts the Gospel and appeals to human selfishness. Actually, salvation may, and often does, create more problems than it solves. Thus, this appeal is unethical.

E. The "Evidence Demands a Verdict" Approach: showing the unbeliever how logical and historically accurate Christianity is. This approach seeks to answer the unbeliever's intellectual questions, with the goal of persuading him that Christianity is correct. The problem is that conversion is far more than an intellectual assent to the facts. No one is ever argued into salvation.[13] Even the demons of hell believe the basic facts of the Gospel (James 2:19). The Holy Spirit has to convict the person of his sin, his need to repent, and his need for Christ. It's far more than pure intellectual assent to a set of facts.

F. The "My Life is a Witness" Approach: proclaiming the Gospel through an exemplary Christian lifestyle in the hopes that the unbeliever would find such a lifestyle appealing. While it is true that believers ought to "let their lights shine" before unbelievers, it is impossible for unbelievers to convert to Christ on that basis alone. Frankly, the "silent witness" approach is not evangelism at all.

G. The "Jesus on My Tee Shirt" Approach: using Christian advertising to reach the lost. By use of flashy graphics, catchy phrases, and by mimicking popular tee shirt slogans, **[e.g., "No Fear" – "Fear God," "God Milk?" – "Got Jesus?" "Gold's Gym" – "God's Gym."]** believers communicate Gospel truth to the unsaved.

[13] Dale Carnegie famously quipped, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

Bumper stickers, door signs, baseball hats, ear rings, bracelets, checks, envelopes, mugs and the like help spread the Gospel. The problem with this approach is that it tends to cheapen and degrade both Christianity and the Gospel message. The Gospel is reduced to a slogan or an advertising campaign. This method simply does not communicate the content of the Gospel.

H. The "Try God" Approach: test whether belief in Jesus, prayer, and obedience to the Bible really works. If, after a week or so, Christian belief and living does not produce beneficial results, then reject Christianity and return to your former way of life (or try something else). Obviously, such a "try it out" approach is not genuine conversion. Jesus calls his disciples to count the cost before taking up his cross to follow him.

Employing any of the above methods in evangelism is inappropriate. Jesus Christ and His Gospel are not commodities to be bought and sold. Human manipulation tactics have no place in biblical evangelism. And no believer should think that living an exemplary life or wearing a Christian tee shirt fulfills his evangelistic duties. We should avoid all such method-oriented, man-centered evangelistic enterprises.

We must admit that people are occasionally saved through the use of the above methods. God is not limited by man's weaknesses and failures. Whenever someone communicates the true Gospel, people may be saved, or at least a seed may be planted. So we're not absolutely ruling out the possibility that someone may have been saved using the above methods. But these methods are unacceptable even if they "work" from time to time.

The primary weakness of the man-centered approach to evangelism (besides being unbiblical) is it's high view of human nature. It suggests that man is sinful but not dead, estranged but not God's enemy, and unwilling but not unable to seek God's pardon. The true biblical position is that man is utterly unable to contribute anything to his own salvation. His spiritual condition is far worse than he thinks it is (cf. Eph 2:2-3, 4:17-19). All he can do is throw himself upon the mercy of God. He has neither the ability nor the inclination to repent or believe apart from the Holy Spirit using the Gospel to bring about the sinner's conversion.

Note the Quote: Man-centered evangelism shortens the message. It so focuses on man that it reduces God… It allows the most imprecise Gospel messages to become common currency.[14]

We should rejoice whenever Christ is preached, even if methods and motives are suspect (Phil 1:15-18). Yet when we engage in evangelism, we should do our best to communicate the Gospel clearly, accurately, and appropriately. We want to proclaim the whole Gospel, not an abbreviated version of it. We want to focus on the message, not the method. We want to emphasize truth over experience. And we want the center of the evangelistic effort to be God and not man.

What About Tracts?

Passing out tracts can be an effective evangelistic tool. Many people have come to Christ because of Gospel tracts. Just make sure the tract accurately and fully proclaims the Gospel

[14] Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth* (Inter-Varsity, 1984), 31.

message. Unfortunately, many tracts fall into the above errors—they give limited or inaccurate information, they play on the emotions, or they appeal to man's inherent selfishness. However, good tracts are available, and the believer can use them as effective tools. Giving tracts to those you know, and then discussing them, is a good idea.

Conclusion: Biblical evangelists want to avoid both man-centered and method-centered evangelism. In the next lesson, we'll discuss God-centered and message-centered evangelism.

For Further Discussion:

1. Have you ever made a spiritual decision because of an emotionally charged message or a high-pressure speaker? Was the decision a lasting one?
2. What is the underlying problem with man-centered evangelism? **[It's all dependent upon the idea that man is in charge of the process. Salvation is simply getting the man to change his mind. God-centered evangelism stresses communicating the message and letting the Word and the Holy Spirit do the work of conversion. Conversion is not something man drums up—it's the work of God.]**
3. What are some of the negative results of man-centered evangelism? **[1.) the worst is a false assurance of salvation for those who are not saved; 2.) an emphasis on method over message; 3.) a focus on numbers as a gauge of success; 4.) reliance upon human ability/skill rather than the power of God.]**
4. What might be the outcome if an evangelistic message focuses only on the fact that "God is love"? **[The unsaved person might think that he is safe in spite of his sin. He can relax, excuse himself, and delay repentance because God loves him as he is. A human definition of love implies that God does not judge or punish those he loves.]**



Lesson 4: God-Centered Evangelism

Introduction: In the last lesson, we discussed man-centered evangelism, which focuses on methods of communicating the Gospel rather than on the message.

A Brief Review of Man-Centered Evangelism:

- ☹ *View of God:* God's primary characteristic is love. God is a friend who wants to make your life better.
- ☹ *View of humanity:* Man is a sinner, but has the ability to do good. Men seek after God and truth, but lack the correct facts.
- ☹ *View of Christ:* Jesus has come to give mankind abundant life. His death made man's forgiveness and escape from hell possible.
- ☹ *View of response to the Gospel*: Jesus is waiting for us to allow him into our lives. Salvation is a mental assent to the facts of the Gospel—it's purely a change of the will.
- ☹ *View of the Christian life:* a Christian leads an exciting, fulfilled, abundant life. God removes all problems and the believer's happiness is overflowing.

As we noted earlier, the primary weakness of the man-centered approach to evangelism is it's high view of human nature. It suggests that man is sinful but not dead, estranged but not God's enemy, and unwilling but not unable to seek God's pardon. The man-centered approach is not entirely faulty, but it fails to communicate the whole truth. It abbreviates the Gospel, focuses on methods rather than on the message, emphasizes experience over truth, and centers on man rather than God.

In this lesson, we'll examine a God-centered approach to the Gospel, and a God-centered approach to evangelism.

I. A God-Centered Approach to the Gospel

A. *View of God:* God is the holy, righteous, all-mighty, sovereign Creator. God has total authority over all mankind, and does as he pleases with His creation. Holiness, not love, is God's chief attribute. God must enable man's fallen will for it to respond to God's invitation. God rules.

B. *View of humanity:* Man is thoroughly sinful and will not and cannot come to God by his own will power. Humanity is blind, lost and dead in sin. Man is an enemy of God and a rebel who needs a new mind, heart and will.

C. *View of Christ:* Jesus is the perfect Son of God who sacrificed Himself as the payment for sin. The ultimate aim of His earthly work was the glory of God, not the salvation of man. His life of obedience and sacrificial death were equally important. He is prophet, priest, and king. Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

D. *View of response to the Gospel*: One must repent of his sin, i.e., he must acknowledge that he has sinned, feel sorry for it, ask forgiveness for it, and forsake it. He must turn to Christ in faith with his whole self—mind, heart, and will. Accepting Christ means submitting to his authority. Both repentance and faith are gifts from God and cannot be worked up by man's unaided will.

E. *View of the Christian life:* The Christian experiences continual, steady growth as he struggles against sin and toward Christ-likeness. Obedience is the key to joyful living. Life is dedicated to God-honoring behavior and attitudes, not self-satisfaction. Serving others, rather than being served, is an essential aspect of the Christian life. Assurance of salvation comes through the work of the Holy Spirit[15] and through the evidence of a changed lifestyle.

Last time we looked at several man-centered methods of evangelism. A man-centered approach emphasizes method over message. Method-oriented evangelism emphasizes certain techniques that supposedly will result in the conversion of souls. Pragmatism (whatever works best) sets the agenda. Now let's consider God-centered evangelism.

II. A God-Centered Approach to Evangelism

God-centered evangelism emphasizes the following:

1. Methods and means of evangelism are flexible. Over the history of the church, believers have used various means of spreading the Gospel. The method is secondary to the message. God-centered evangelism may use a variety of methods to communicate the Gospel. Any appropriate method will do, as long as the message gets across. God-centered evangelists don't put much stock in popular or trendy evangelistic programs.

   We should not be so committed to a program or method that we keep using it when it is no longer useful or appropriate.

   [E.g., cold calling or door knocking—at one time was more acceptable than it is now. Today, most people don't appreciate door-to-door visitation. In some locations, it's virtually impossible to visit like that. Yet some would say that you are un-spiritual if you don't go door-to-door. That's because they put too much value on the method.]

2. God-centered evangelism is message-driven. The central goal is to communicate the good news about Jesus Christ, and that message alone. It also insists that the whole message of the Gospel be proclaimed, not just the positive parts of it. Christ is not presented as simply a fire escape from hell. He's not the "Mr. Fix-it" who can solve all problems. Following Christ is not just a way to make one feel better about himself. God-centered evangelism does not shy away from proclaiming the wretched condition the unsaved person is in or the costs of discipleship. We cannot water down the message in order to make it more popular.

3. God-centered evangelism recognizes that God, not man, is sovereign. "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). God calls His people to salvation. We can plant, water, and

[15] The Holy Spirit convinces the believer that the Word is true (John 16:7) and that the believer is truly saved (Rom 8:16).

weed, but "God gives the increase" (1 Cor 3:6-7). The evangelist's responsibility is to proclaim the message clearly, accurately, and boldly, and to pray for sinners to respond. There is no need for extra measures or special methods to generate responses. We cannot argue anyone into the kingdom, nor can we intellectually convince anyone to be saved. We never use emotional manipulation to produce converts. Conviction of sin is the work of the Holy Spirit, not the evangelist. We rely on the power of the message and the power of the Holy Spirit, not our own abilities to persuade.

"Though it is proper to reason with men, persuade men, beseech men, there will be no response unless God in His grace attends with enabling power the words we speak. Our evangelism must be based on a dependence on the Lord. Our hope of results must be in Him, not in man's will or in any other faculty of our hearer."[16]

4. Success is not defined in terms of how many respond, but in terms of the faithfulness and obedience of the evangelist. "The results of preaching depend, not on the wishes and intentions of men, but on the will of God Almighty."[17] Hence, whether none, few, or many respond to the Gospel, God gets the glory, not the evangelist.

   A corollary to this idea is that pressure tactics are not only not necessary, they are dangerous. Manipulating a non-genuine profession of faith will often have disastrous results, both for the person and for the church. An emotional response to a pressurized altar call is exactly what the evangelist does not want. Such "decisions" are often false, shallow, and short-lived. Those who do respond to such manipulation may possess a false assurance of salvation. Obviously, a church full of such false professors would be a mess. Thus, the biblical evangelist will proclaim the message of the Gospel, invite the unsaved to respond in repentance and faith, and leave the matter with God.

5. The God-centered evangelist expects to see the fruits of repentance (Matt 3:8) in the life of a professing believer. Those who are converted to Christ are new creatures (2 Cor 5:17), and should thus display clear evidence of a commitment to Christ. A Christlike lifestyle is the most significant evidence of a true state of regeneration (1 John 2:3-6). Those who persist in sin and unrepentant disobedience after professing to be saved are accounted as false professors. An initial positive response to Christ doesn't guarantee anything (see the Parable of the Soils, Matt 13). It doesn't matter what people *say* is true if their behavior doesn't match their words (Matt 7:17-23; Titus 1:15-16). A true believer will ultimately persevere in faith and in good works. Those who fail to persevere never had true faith to begin with (1 John 2:19).

   This is contrary to the popular idea of the persistent "carnal" Christian. The mythic "carnal" Christian is one who professes salvation but never makes any progress in the Christian life. The fruit/evidence of his life points to the fact that that he was never genuinely born again. A person of this sort is not carnal; he's unsaved.

6. Pragmatism (whatever works best) is not a consideration. The main question is, "What honors and pleases God the most," not "What will get the most converts."

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[16] Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel*, p. 86.
[17] J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, p. 41.

Hence, some methods of evangelism that may yield a great many responses are not used because they are deemed inappropriate. The ends never justify the means.

7. God-centered evangelism adopts several presuppositions: man knows inherently that God exists and that God is good, powerful, and worthy of worship. Due to his sinful, rebellious heart, he suppresses that knowledge and worships other gods, especially himself (Rom 1:16f). There is no need to validate or prove the Bible from external evidence. The Bible validates itself. The Gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation. The main reasons people reject God and the Bible are spiritual, not intellectual.
8. God-centered evangelism approaches people is on the basis of the Gospel. We should not appeal to people's needs, wants, fears, or fancies. We're not selling goods or services. We simply proclaim the message and exhort people to respond to it.

Conclusion: A God-centered understanding of the Gospel differs significantly from a man-centered approach. Hence, a God-centered evangelistic method differs markedly from a man-centered method. The philosophy, methods, and practices of churches that are man-centered will be vastly different from those of God-centered churches.

For Further Discussion:

1. Which do you think would be more acceptable with the unsaved world, a man-centered philosophy or a God-centered one? **[man-centered, because it makes more sense, is less offensive, and is easier.]**
2. Why don't we want to appeal to the felt needs of our audience? **[i.e., show them how salvation can make their lives better—no hell, better marriages, more success at work, better interpersonal relations, etc.**

   If we approach people in that way, we run the risk generating false professions. I.e., people "get saved" for the wrong reasons—they want the success and good things Christianity has to offer. Those are results of salvation but not reasons to get saved.]
3. What are the underlying presuppositions in a God-centered approach? **[1. That God is sovereign in the whole matter of salvation; 2. That the message is more important than the messenger; 3. That we cannot persuade or constrain professions of faith; 4. That our duty is to proclaim the message, not worry about results.]**
4. Can we legitimately say that, since God is sovereign, the believer does not need to bother with evangelism? (After all, God will save those He wants without our help.) **[No, such an attitude is inconsistent with the mandate to evangelize. God uses means to bring about his chosen ends. The preaching of the Gospel is one of those means.]**



Lesson 5: The Gospel, Part 1: God

As we mentioned previously, one of the weaknesses of man-centered evangelism is a softening or weakening of the Gospel. In an attempt to make the Gospel message as attractive, simple, and non-threatening as possible, some have stripped the message of vital content. We must not be guilty of summarizing or simplifying the Gospel out of existence.

What exactly is the Gospel? It's a common biblical word, but is quite meaningless to many people. The word "Gospel" (from the Anglo-Saxon "God-spell") literally means "good word" or "good news." It is the rendering of the Greek *euangelion*, i.e., "good message." William Tyndale long ago suggested that the Gospel signified "good, merry, glad and joyful tidings, that makes a man's heart glad, and makes him sing, dance, and leap for joy." It's a common NT word, used over 75 times, mostly by Paul. The word has three basic meanings (depending on the context):

1. The joyous proclamation of God's redemptive activity in Christ Jesus on behalf of man enslaved by sin. More simply put, the Gospel is the good news which tells about Jesus Christ.[18]
2. The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are called gospels. These works are not exactly biographies, but are selective histories describing the person and work of Christ. Sometimes the writers are called "evangelists."
3. The term is often used to express collectively the Gospel doctrines, and "preaching the Gospel" is often used to include not only the proclaiming of the good tidings, but the teaching men how to be saved; the declaring of all the truths, precepts, promises, and threatenings of Christianity.[19]

The word is used in various contexts:

"the Gospel of the grace of God" Acts 20:24

"the Gospel of the kingdom" Mt 4:23

"the Gospel of Christ" Rom 1:16

"the Gospel of peace" Eph 6:15

"the glorious Gospel" 2 Cor 4:4; 1Tim 1:11

"the everlasting Gospel" Rev 14:6

"the Gospel of salvation" Eph 1:13

A Definition: The Gospel includes the proclamation of the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, a theological evaluation of the person of Jesus as both Lord and Christ, and a summons to repent and believe for the forgiveness of sins.[20]

The Gospel is the instrument of conviction (1 Thes 1:5) and of conversion (Col 1:6), the very power of God for salvation to those who believe (Rom 1:16).

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[18] R.H. Mounce in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*
[19] John Gill
[20] John Gill

In the next four lessons, we'll examine what the Bible proclaims to be the content of the Gospel. When presenting the Gospel, we want to focus on four main topics: God, man, Jesus Christ, the appropriate response—repentance and faith.

This lesson will look at the first issue one must understand: Who is God?

When witnessing, we must start with a definition of God Himself. "Evangelism always requires preaching on the attributes of God."[21] Because most people in our culture are biblically illiterate, we cannot assume that they have a proper view of God. In fact, we must assume the opposite—they probably know very little about God, or what they know is deeply corrupted. **[This is a drastic change that has occurred in the last several decades. Previously, most people in the US had a working knowledge of the Bible, and understood right from wrong. The Bible was taught in public schools, so most people knew. Not so anymore.]** Hence, we have to start with the very basics of theology. We must begin the evangelistic message with God and His glory. We can't explain the work of Christ until we present a true picture of God.

Elements of the Gospel:

1. God is the Sovereign Creator

   Unbelievers need to understand that:

   A. The God of the Bible exists. There is no room for atheism, pantheism, polytheism, or any other theisms other than biblical monotheism. Those who disbelieve or doubt his existence are fools. God has communicated to man. The Bible is a true revelation of the person and work of God.

      Many people reject this first assertion of Christianity. It's usually not that they are convinced intellectually that there is no God. Instead, people don't want there to be a God because His existence would impose limits on their behavior. Note this quote by the atheistic French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre.

      "God does not exist and . . . we have to face all the consequences of this. It is very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears with him. . . . [I]f God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct."

      Likewise, Friedrich Nietzsche (whom we'll consider later in this series) declared, "When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet. This morality is by no means self-evident… Christianity is a system, a whole view of things thought out together. By breaking one main concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole."

      Many want exactly that—an entire break with Christian morality. That's why they deny the existence of God; it gives them the right to do whatever they want without feeling guilty. If there is no God, then everything is permissible.

   B. Because we are God's creation, He owns us and we have no inherent rights. He may do with us as He pleases. He is the potter and we are the clay. Man's duty is to honor and obey God.

[21] Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel*, p. 25.

C. God, by His good pleasure, freely created and sustains us, and we are fully dependent upon Him for everything necessary to live and to enjoy life.

D. God created us to bring honor and glory to Himself. Because God is the highest standard, there can be no greater goal than to bring honor to God.

E. We are accountable to Him, and He will judge us one day.

F. God's primary characteristic is holiness. God is unique, set apart, and absolutely morally pure. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

G. God is righteous. He is, and sets the standard of, right and wrong. Therefore, I know whether I am righteous, not by comparing myself to others, but by comparing myself to God Himself.

H. God is also gracious, merciful and loving. He has provided a way for those who have rebelled against Him to be forgiven. He will save those who humbly seek Him.

Note: We are required to proclaim and explain the above truths. But it's not our duty to prove God's existence. We simply declare what the Bible says is true. We start where the Bible starts: "In the beginning, God created." The Bible asserts, it does not prove. It's up to God to convince people of the truth of Scriptures. That's the job of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11).

Assignment: In Acts 17:24-31, Paul gives a detailed presentation of theology. What are the attributes of God that Paul discusses here?

Who God is: **[Creator, Lord of heaven and earth, the One in whom we live and move and have our being.]**

Who God is not: **[is not far from us, not like gold or silver]**

What God does: **[gives life to all, has made men, has determined the times appointed and the bounds of men's habitation, commands all men to repent, will come in judgment.]**

What God does not do: **[dwells not in temples, is not worshipped with men's hands, has need of nothing]**

What does Paul's presentation suggest about how we should present the Gospel to people? **[We tell people very clearly what God is like and what He is not like. We shouldn't shy away from doctrinal truth. Theology is part of the message.]**

Other Key Verses: Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 6:1-3; Romans 9:19-21; Revelation 4:11

Main Point: God exists and has an absolute claim on our lives as our Creator. He owns us, and we are accountable to Him.

Key Question: Since God has created you and graciously given you all that you have; and since He owns you because you are His creation, why don't you love and obey Him as He has commanded you?

Potential Reactions: No one likes to be told that someone else is his master. People greatly value personal freedom and self-determination (autonomy), especially in our society. So those who hear that God is their owner will likely react negatively. On the other hand, there are some who will welcome such news. The law of God is written in men's hearts (Rom 2:15), and an

accurate Gospel presentation will resonate with this internal law. God will use a Gospel presentation to save some.

Conclusion: It's important for all believers to understand precisely what the Gospel is and what it is not. An accurate presentation of the Gospel must begin with a definition of who God is and what He is like. God is the sovereign, holy and righteous creator.

For Further Discussion:

What if people are not convinced when you tell them about God? **[That's a matter between them and God. We do not need to prove anything—we simply declare what is true. We *could* bring forth some very strong arguments in support of our assertions—why the Bible is true, historical and archeological support, etc. But ultimately, the Holy Spirit must convince people of the truth of Scripture. The Gospel, not our arguments, is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16). We should not be discouraged if people don't believe what we tell them.]**



Lesson 6: The Gospel, Part 2: Man

We learned last time that the proper place to start a presentation of the Gospel is with a clear, accurate definition of God. The essential truth to communicate is that God exists and has an absolute claim on our lives as our Creator. He owns us, and we are accountable to Him. Once this is established, we can go on to the next topic—man and his sinful condition.

Unbelievers must understand the state of their relationship to God. Because of their biblical illiteracy, many people have a wrong understanding of their spiritual condition. They may not even admit that they are sinners. If they admit their sin, they may not be too concerned about it. So the goal here is to show people the true nature of their spiritual state apart from God.

Elements of the Gospel:

1. God is the sovereign creator.
2. Man is the sinful creature.

   Unbelievers need to understand that:

   A. People are neither soulless machines nor mere animals. People today believe that they are one or the other—either a random collection of chemicals or an animal that emerged from the purposeless, meaningless process of natural evolution. The Bible asserts that people are creatures made in the image of God for the purpose of glorifying and fellowshipping with God. As God's creation, humans have nobility and value. Yet mankind is fallen, broken, and sinful. Humans must acknowledge their sinfulness and recognize how God has provided the means for sinners to find forgiveness.

   B. All people are sinners. All are guilty of offending a holy and righteous God. All have failed to fulfill the purpose for which they were created.

      1. Biblical definitions for sin:

         ☹ To miss the mark. Judges 20:16; Rom 3:23. This is the most common idea.

         ☹ To pass over a boundary, to pass by. Normally translated "transgression." A transgressor is a lawbreaker. Num 14:41-42; Matt 15:2-3; 1 John 3:4

         ☹ To rebel. Rebellion is a stubborn disobedience—sin with a bad attitude. Isa 1:2-4.

         ☹ To pervert or make crooked. Isa 19:14

         ☹ Others: foolishness, wickedness, disobedience, ignorance, failure, trespass

The essential or basic aspect of sin is selfishness, placing oneself in the place of God; a failure to let God be God.

Sin is also a principle within man. All men have a sin nature (Gal 3:22). Sin is a condition, a character quality or state of being.

Definitions:

Strong: "Sin is lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state."

Thiessen: "Sin is both and act and a principle, both guilt and pollution."

Sins of commission: doing what should not be done. 1 Tim 5:13

Sins of omission: failing to do what should have been done. James 4:17

Notes: It's not only certain behaviors that are sinful. The Bible frequently mentions sins of the heart such as hatred, coveting, lust, idolatry, pride, and unbelief. Paul states, "Whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). So the fact that a person is moral in his behavior does not guarantee his purity of heart.

Many people are unconcerned about their eternal destiny because they are ignorant regarding how desperate their sinful condition is. They don't measure themselves by God's absolutes but by comparison to others. They will admit failures, imperfections, and mistakes, but many people consider themselves to be basically good despite their faults. As long as they have not committed particularly heinous sins, they assume that God will forgive them, especially if they are religious or charitable. Such people need to be made aware of the depths of their sin, their utter alienation from God, and their ultimate destiny if they fail to repent.

Apathetic people need to be lovingly shocked. They will never submit to radical heart surgery if they do not see their true guilt before a holy God. Their security is false. They think there is peace when there isn't.[22]

When presenting the Gospel, take plenty of time to define the concept of sin. Most people either see sin as the really bad offenses (murder, robbery, adultery) or they deny that the sins they are guilty of are particularly serious. Thus, it's important to show people how sinful they are in God's sight. Good places to start: the Ten Commandments (Ex 20, and especially as interpreted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Matt 5-7), the story of the Rich Young Ruler (Luke 18:18-30), and Paul's life (Rom 7:7-13).

2. The consequences of sin is death. Rom 6:23

   a) Physical death occurs because of sin. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body.

   b) Spiritual death occurs because of sin. Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God (Isa 59:1-2). The unsaved person

[22] Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, 53.

is in a current state of spiritual death (Eph 2:1-2) and is condemned (John 3:36).

c) The Second Death occurs because of sin (Rev 20:14). Those who continue in their sinful condition will be eternally separated from God in a place of eternal punishment.

Many people today deny that God punishes anyone—even depraved sinners—eternally. They claim that God's love prevents him from imposing such a barbaric and inhumane form of punishment on those made in his own image. A failure to understand the true nature and demerit of sin often leads to a denial of the eternal punishment of the wicked.

C. Sin extends to the whole of man's being. Man is totally depraved.

Total depravity does not mean that every person's lifestyle is equally corrupt and wicked, or that sinners are always as bad as they could be. Total depravity does mean that the unredeemed are depraved in their minds, their hearts, their wills, their emotions, and their physical beings. They are utterly incapable of anything but sin. Sinners may not always sin as wickedly as possible, but they cannot do anything to please God or earn His favor. Sin has tainted every aspect of their being.[23]

1. Depravity means that sin has penetrated every part of the human nature—body, soul and spirit. Jer 17:9; Rom 3:11-12; Titus 1:15
2. Depravity means that the unsaved person has the capacity to commit the worst kinds of sin. Given the proper circumstances, any sin is possible. Rom 1:18ff.
3. Depravity means that when an unbeliever does right, it is for the wrong reasons. Such good works do not aid in salvation. **[are not meritorious.]** Isa 64:6
4. Depravity means that sinners are getting worse and worse. 2 Tim 3:13
5. Depravity means that the unsaved person has no possible means of salvation within himself. He is dead and condemned. He is unable and unwilling to seek God or seek forgiveness. He has no comprehension of spiritual things. Rom 3:10-11; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:1-2

Other Key Verses: Isaiah 64:6-7; Jer 17:9; Rom 1:18ff, 3:10-23, 7:7-25; Phil 3:4-6

Main Point: The unbeliever has rebelled against his Creator and is dead in trespasses and sin. He is separated from God and under His wrath and condemnation. His spiritual condition is desperate.

John 3:36 *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*

[23] John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 65.

Key Question: Do you deny the fact that your sin has separated you from God, prevented a right relationship with Him, and will eventually result in eternal punishment?

Views of Sin's Effect upon Salvation

Christians agree that "all have sinned." They agree that Jesus provides the solution to this problem. But there is some disagreement among believers as to the extent of sin, the need for grace, and the ability of man to contribute something to his own salvation. Here are the options:

☹ **Man + nothing:** Man has the ability to take the initial steps toward salvation by his own efforts, apart from special grace. Man possesses an unconditionally free will and has the power to choose either evil or good. Man can merit salvation if he lives a righteous life. The fall of Adam does not influence man toward sin. Nothing in the human nature is hindering man from seeking and finding God. Man is spiritually well.[24]

☹ **Man + God:** The power for man to do good is weak but not lost. God's grace and free will are mixed. Man must make the initial steps toward God. Man and God cooperate in salvation.

☹ **God + man:** Man is spiritually sick, but retains the ability to choose God. Man needs God's help in salvation. God extends assistance to all men (called "prevenient grace"), who then either accept or reject the offer of salvation. God makes the initial step toward man, but man must also move toward God of his own free will.[25]

☺ **God + nothing:** Unsaved man is spiritually dead and thus has no ability or desire to do good or to seek God. God both initiates and brings to pass the salvation of believers. Repentance and faith are gifts from God and are not generated by unaided man. God seeks man, not *vice versa*. Man adds nothing; he can only receive the benefits that God offers.

Which of these views is correct? It should be obvious that man is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1) and has no ability—or even true desire—within himself to seek God (Rom 3:18f). Man's spiritual nature before salvation is darkened, alienated from God, ignorant, and blind (Eph 4:17-18). If he continues in this state without repentance, his destiny will be eternal destruction. His only hope is in God granting him mercy and grace.

Conclusion: The goal of this part of a Gospel presentation is to impress upon the unbeliever the dreadful state of his spiritual condition. He is lost, dead, and condemned. It's only after understanding this awful reality that one will begin to see his need of a Savior.

Note the Quote: When asked how he would witness to someone if he only had one hour to speak, Francis Schaeffer[26] stated, "I would spend 45-50 minutes on the negative, to really show him his dilemma—that he is morally dead—then I'd take 10-15 minutes to preach the Gospel. I believe that much of our evangelistic and personal work today is not clear simply because we are too anxious to get to the answer without having a man realize the real cause of his sickness, which is true moral guilt in the presence of God."

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[24] This view is not Christian. It contradicts the basic claims of the Bible.
[25] One famous evangelist illustrated this view when he said, "Salvation is 99% God and 1% man."
[26] Schaeffer (1912-84) was a famous evangelical philosopher, teacher and writer.

For Further Discussion:

1. What would you say to a person who was religious (morally upright) but lost? **[The morally upright person needs to understand his true sinfulness. 1. Show the fact that <u>all</u> have sinned; 2. Point out that even small things (thoughts, attitudes) can be sinful; 3. Read the story of the publican and the Pharisee; 4. Show that no one is saved by works; 5. Review the 10 Commandments and Jesus' commentary on them; 6. Read the first 3 chapters of Romans.]**
2. Why is it important to define sin when you are presenting the Gospel? **[Because most people in our culture have a wrong view of sin—they may not believe in it at all, or they may think that sin is only the big ones (murder, robbery, etc.)]**
3. What if the person you are talking to refuses to acknowledge his depraved spiritual condition? **[Then he's probably not ready to get saved. A person must understand that he is lost and blind before he acknowledges his need to be found and be healed.]**



Lesson 7: The Gospel, Part 3: Jesus Christ

We've learned thus far that the proper place to start a presentation of the Gospel is with a clear and accurate definition of God. God exists and has an absolute claim on our lives as our Creator. Unbelievers must also understand the state of their relationship to God—they are lost, dead, and condemned, totally unable to save themselves.

Today we'll discuss the third topic to communicate when witnessing: the person and work of Jesus Christ.

1. God is the sovereign creator.
2. Man is the sinful creature.
3. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the only Savior.

   Unbelievers need to understand and accept certain facts regarding:

   A. The person of Jesus Christ (who He is)

      1. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity (John 1:1-14). He is essentially equal with God. Several facts show that He is fully God. He is eternal (John 1:1), holy (Heb 7:26), omnipresent (Eph 1:22-23), omnipotent (Matt 28:18), and omniscient (Col 2:3). He created the universe (John 1:3, 10) and currently sustains all things (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3).
      2. Jesus Christ was a human being. Several facts show that He is truly man. He was born (Matt 1:1), possessed a body (John 1:14) and soul (Matt 26:38), grew (Luke 2:52) was tempted (Heb 4:15), and died (John 19:30).
      3. Jesus Christ is the God-Man. He is fully God and fully man. He has all the attributes of God and all the attributes of man.
      4. Jesus Christ is the one and only savior and redeemer (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). There is no other means of salvation. Christianity claims to be exclusive—it provides the one and only way of salvation. All other religions and "saviors" are illegitimate.
      5. Jesus Christ is compassionate and merciful, and invites sinners to come to Him for salvation (Matt 11:28-30; John 4; Luke 7:36-50).
      6. Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Acts 10:36; Rev 17:14). He has all authority in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18).

B. The work of Jesus Christ (what He has done)

1. He came to earth in the flesh (John 1:14). He was a real human being with a physical body. He was not a phantom or spirit.

2. He lived a life of perfect obedience. He perfectly fulfilled the Law of Moses. He never sinned (Heb 4:15).

3. He offered himself as the innocent, substitutionary sacrifice for sin. He took the guilt of sinners upon himself and endured God's judgment for it in his death on the cross (2 Cor 5:21). He took upon himself the punishment that sinners so richly deserve. His sacrifice satisfied the just anger of a holy God against sin (Col 1:20).

   Theologians often describe Jesus' life and death in terms of active and passive obedience. Jesus actively obeyed all the OT commands. He lived a perfectly obedient life, never violating the Law of Moses or any moral standard God had imposed. On the cross, he passively endured the penalty for sins he did not commit. The merits of both his righteous life and his sacrificial death are imputed to believers.

   While the death of Christ is sufficient for all people (Heb 2:9; 1 John 2:2), it is efficient only for those who exercise faith in Him (1 Tim 4:10; Jam 2:14-19). The value of Jesus' sacrificial death is infinite; it has enough value to cover the sins of any repentant sinner. But it actually covers/redeems only the sins of those who repent and believe the Gospel. Only believers benefit savingly from Jesus' sacrificial death.

4. He rose from the dead, conquering sin and death, and proving the truth of all he said and did (Rom 1:4, 4:25). He ascended back to his Father and is currently interceding for believers.

   The Gospel clearly includes Jesus' bodily, physical resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-8). When proclaiming the Gospel to unbelievers, we dare not neglect asserting the fact of Jesus' physical resurrection (not merely his continuing spiritual influence among the disciples). He rose again, and hundreds of eyewitnesses could testify to the fact.

5. He will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). Believers will receive rewards; unbelievers will be cast into hell (1 Cor 3:11-17; Rev 20:11).

Main Point: Jesus Christ, the God-man, through his life, death, and resurrection, provides the one and only way to eternal life.

Key Passages: Isa 53:1-11; Mark 10:33-34, 45; John 14:6; Acts 2:22-24, 36; 4:12

Review: God is our righteous and holy creator. Man is sinful and separated from God. Jesus Christ has provided the only means of bridging the gap between God and man.

Question: Why are you trying to reach God through any means other than Jesus Christ?

False Ideas about Jesus Christ

[The names of these ideas come from the men who proposed them (except Docetism).]

Arianism: Jesus is not equal with God, nor does he share deity with God the Father. Jesus is an intermediate, created being between God and the world. Jehovah's Witnesses are Arians.

Docetism: **[Docetism (pronounced "dose-a-tism") comes from the Greek word**

Note: The orthodox **[meaning lit. "straight," and thus correct]** doctrines regarding the person and work of Christ were hammered out at various church councils in the early centuries of the church. These councils were convened to study various issues of Christology—how can Jesus be both God and man? How many natures does he have? Councils at Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451) and others resulted in an orthodox view of Christ that all genuine Christians hold (or certainly should hold) today. **[It's interesting to note that modern cults reject about 1500 years of orthodoxy.]**

Conclusion: The goal of this part of a Gospel presentation is to give the unbeliever the necessary facts about Jesus Christ and to show him that there is no other way to be saved than by through the means that Jesus Christ has provided.

For Further Discussion:

1. What about those who have never heard about Jesus Christ? Does God have a "plan B" of salvation for them? **[If the only way of salvation is thru Christ, then those who have never heard cannot be saved. Remember that God extends salvation to whomever He wants. The fact that God saves anyone is pure grace. This should also motivate us toward missions.**

   It's become popular, even within Christianity, to reject the idea of the exclusivity of Christianity. Some say that any true/sincere believer in "God" will be saved (Islam, Jews, etc.). Others suggest that God will give everyone a chance to be saved even if they've never heard of Christ. Only those who understand the Gospel and willfully reject it will be damned. But John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 seem to be pretty clear—only believers in Christ will be saved.]

2. How far in error about the person and work of Christ can one be and still be saved? **[You have to be pretty close to orthodox in order to be saved. Some of the finer points are unimportant (e.g., how many natures Jesus has). You don't need to understand all the fine points of Christology at the point of salvation, but a believer will accept them as he learns them. Genuine believers should accept orthodox doctrine when they hear it. Remember 2 John 9]**

3. Why is it so important that we maintain both the true humanity and the genuine deity of Jesus Christ? **[Salvation depends upon both the full humanity and the full deity of Christ. He had to be genuinely human to understand us and suffer for us. He had to be God to pay the infinite penalty for our sin. Thus, anything less than full humanity and full deity would fail to save.]**



The Gospel, Part 4a: the response: repentance

We've learned thus far that the proper place to start a presentation of the Gospel is with a clear and accurate definition of God. God exists and has an absolute claim on our lives as our Creator. Unbelievers must also understand the state of their relationship to God—they are lost, dead, and condemned. We learned last time that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, provided the only means of salvation through His perfect life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection.

The Gospel message requires a response. Mental assent to the concepts contained in the Gospel is certainly required but is not enough by itself. The evangelist must press home the point that people must respond to the message. "Whenever evangelism takes place, the witness should seek for a genuine response. Superficial, well-meaning decisions tend to sabotage the real thing."[27]

Note: Another way to "sabotage the real thing" is to call for a physical response to the Gospel. That is, activities such as walking an aisle, signing a card, raising one's hand, talking to a counselor, and the like often go hand-in-hand with an invitation to be saved.[28] But we must not confuse or substitute a physical response for a genuine heart response. One is not saved by a physical activity. The evangelist must explain that such actions are not the basis of salvation. He must avoid connecting salvation to a physical activity. "Faith and repentance are inward movements of the mind, emotion and will. They cannot be measured by simple outward tests."[29] Urge people to respond to the Gospel, but don't attach a physical activity to it. Make sure your audience knows that you are talking about an internal, heart decision.

[This is one of the dangers of the invitation system—the evangelist makes too much of a connection between being saved and walking an aisle or doing some other activity. E.g., "If you want to be saved, come forward." It's easy for people to think that they are saved because they came forward, signed a card, or whatever.

Remember as well that the whole idea of coming forward to receive Christ started with Finney, is a rather recent development, and is not a necessary part of a Gospel presentation. I'm not against invitations, as long as you clearly convey the idea that salvation is not a physical activity.]

The proper response to the Gospel has two parts: repentance and faith. When one repents of his sin and turns to Christ in faith, he is born again/converted/regenerated/saved.

The first aspect of a correct response to the Gospel is repentance. Repentance and faith are like two sides of the same coin—they do not occur independently, and they cannot be separated. "Repentance and faith are Siamese twins. Where one is found, the other will not be absent."[30] Let's examine the first part of the equation—repentance.

4a. Repentance

A. Texts

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[27] Jim Petersen, *Evangelism as a Lifestyle*, p. 115.
[28] In fact, it's quite common for evangelists to insist that concerned people come forward in order to be saved. The typical reason given is that "a decision without action is just a good intention."
[29] Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel*, p. 72.
[30] Chantry, p. 57.

Isa 55:7 *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

Luke 18:13 *God, be merciful to me, the sinner!*

Luke 24:47 . . . *repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Acts 3:19 *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*

Acts 11:18 *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

Acts 17:30b . . . *but now [God] commands all men every where to repent.*

Acts 20:21 *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thes 1:9 *... ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*

B. Definition: Repentance is an interesting and often misunderstood concept.

1. The Bible includes words for feelings of regret or remorse (Mt 27:4—Judas; 2 Cor 7:10 "the sorrow of the world"). Regret or remorse may cause one to feel bad and even change his mind (e.g., Judas) without having a genuine change of heart. Regret/remorse that does not find its ultimate solution in Christ is not true repentance.

2. The literal meaning of "repentance" is "a change of mind."

   a) a change of mind away from <u>sin</u>

      Rev 9:21 *Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.*

   b) a change of mind toward <u>God</u>

      Acts 20:21 *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

      1 Thessalonians 1:9 . . . ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

3. The biblical words for repentance imply a change of mind and purpose.

   a) Repentance includes the <u>intellect</u>—the knowledge of sin; i.e., you understand what sin is. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 Jn 3:4).

   b) Repentance includes the <u>emotions</u>—a genuine regret or sorrow for sin; a change of feeling regarding sin.

Repentance is not remorse that one has been caught sinning. It's sorrow over having violated God's will. We call it "contrition" –genuine sorrow over one's sin.

2 Corinthians 7:10 *For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted…*

c) Repentance includes the <u>will</u>—a desire to seek forgiveness, a change of purpose. It is a determination to abandon disobedience and to surrender the will to Christ, an intention to abandon sin.

Repentance includes actual <u>turning</u> away from sin and toward God. The sinner exercises his will when he genuinely turns from sin and seeks pardon from God through Jesus.

4. Repentance is best described as a turning away from sin and toward God. It's a total about-face. It's an inner response of the whole person <u>away</u> from sin and <u>toward</u> God. True repentance is a change of heart and purpose affecting the <u>whole</u> man—intellect, emotion and will.

The true penitent is conscious of guilt (Ps 51:4, 9) of pollution (Ps 51:5, 7, 10) and of helplessness (Ps 51:11; 109:21, 22). Thus he acknowledges himself to be just what God has always seen him to be and declares him to be. But repentance comprehends not only such a sense of sin, but also an apprehension of mercy, without which there can be no true repentance (Ps 51:1; 130:4).[31]

C. The Origin of Repentance

Repentance is the act of the sinner turning from sin. But the true or ultimate origin is not <u>man</u> himself. Repentance is a <u>gift</u> of God by an operation of the Holy Spirit. It is an act of man under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Man cannot and would not repent in and of himself.

Acts 11:18 *When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."*

2 Tim 2:25 . . . *if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.*

D. The Fruits (Results) of Repentance

Matthew 3:8 *Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance.*

When a sinner, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, turns from his sin and places his faith in Christ, he is a "new creature" (2 Cor 5:17). As such, virtually every part of his life will demonstrate his new spiritual condition. Repentance will have "fruits worthy" it. For the Christian, the power of sin is broken and the grace of God is effective. This gives the believer the ability to overcome temptation and live a holy, although not sinless, lifestyle. As the believer grows "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18), he steadily puts off the old and puts on the new (Eph 4:22-24). <u>Evidence</u> reveals that a true conversion has

[31] *Easton's Bible Dictionary*

occurred. Without such evidence, there is little assurance that genuine repentance has happened.

E. False or Inadequate Definitions of Repentance

1. Some assert that repentance has no place in the Gospel at all. They say that it *may* accompany salvation, but not necessarily. Others claim that turning from sin is a human work that cannot be added to grace.

   Why is this wrong? **[Repentance and faith always go together. Jesus and the apostles taught repentance, not just faith. Also, since repentance is a gift, it is not a human work. We are not teaching that the sinner must clean himself up before believing in Christ.]**

2. Penance: the idea that one must pay for his own sin by some painful or sacrificial activity **[The RCC prescribes penance when one confesses his sin to a priest. The penance is supposed to pay for the temporal aspects of sin.]**

   Why is this wrong? **[Jesus paid for all our sin, so we don't have to.]**

3. Resolve: turning over a new leaf; a desire or commitment to do better **[e.g., New Year's resolution]**

   Why is this wrong? **[Resolve is part of repentance, but only part. It falls short of the full definition.]**

4. Regret (sorrow for sin): Judas was sorry for his sin and regretted his actions, but this was not true repentance (Mt 27:3). The rich young ruler went away sad, too, but this was not repentance (Mark 10:22).

   Why is this wrong? **[Same as #3.]**

5. A pure change of mind (only): in particular, one changes his mind from disbelief to belief. Repentance in this view is a simple change of mind about God and Jesus Christ. It's purely an intellectual activity.

   Why is this wrong? **[Same as #3. Repentance affects intellect, emotion, and will. It includes sorrow for sin and a turning from it. It's a total-person response, not just the mind.]**

F. The Basis of Repentance

A person repents because he is convinced that he is sinful and under God's wrath and condemnation. While it is the Holy Spirit who does the convicting of sin, it's the messenger's job to show the sinner how desperate his condition is. The best way to do so is to show the unbeliever how he has broken God's law. Reading the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), and James 2:10 (*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.)* will suffice to show that all people have broken God's law and are guilty. No one can claim to be "pretty good" or "not that bad." Only when one understands the depravity of his own soul will he sense the need to repent.

Main Point: Part of the appropriate response to the Gospel message is repentance. When one is convicted of his sin, he must turn from it.

Key Passages: Ps 51:1-17; Isa 55:7; Luke 18:13, 24:47; Acts 11:18; 17:30b, 20:21

Review: God is our righteous and holy creator. Man is sinful and separated from God. Jesus Christ has provided the only means of bridging the gap between God and man. The first part of an appropriate response is repentance—acknowledging one's sin and turning away from it.

Questions: Are you willing to admit that you have offended God by your rebellion against Him? Are you sorry about your sin? Are you willing to turn away from your sinfulness?

Conclusion: The command to "turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21) summarizes the Gospel invitation.[32] The Bible is clear: Repentance is at the heart of the Gospel call. We need to confront sin and call sinners to repentance—to a radical break from the love of sin and a seeking of the Lord's mercy. Unless we are preaching repentance, we are not preaching the Gospel our Lord has charged us to preach. If we fail to call people to turn from their sins, we are not communicating the same Gospel the apostles proclaimed.[33]

For Further Discussion:

1. What is the spiritual condition of a person who believes (or says he does) but has not repented? **[He is unsaved. A partial response is inadequate. Or (potentially) he may be misled—he may have repented, but he just did not recognize that he was repenting (i.e., he's ignorant, untaught).]**
2. Does repentance imply that one will no longer sin? **[No, but a true convert will remain penitent—sensitive to sin and willing to turn from it whenever he sins.]**
3. What can you do if a person doesn't sense his need to repent? **[1. It's really the Holy Spirit's job to convict of sin, not ours; 2. We can show the person the true state of his sinful condition before God by referring to the 10 Commandments and the Sermon on the Mt.]**

[32] Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, p 70.
[33] John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, p. 74, 85.



The Gospel, Part 4b: the response: faith

We've learned thus far that the proper place to start a presentation of the Gospel is with a clear and accurate definition of God. The God of the Bible exists and has an absolute claim on our lives as our Creator. Unbelievers must also understand the state of their relationship to God—they are lost, spiritually dead, and condemned. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, provided the only means of salvation through His perfect life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection. We learned last time that the Gospel message requires a two-part response: repentance and faith. Repentance is a total-person turning away from sin.

When one turns from sin, he turns to God in faith. Faith is the other side of repentance—they go together. When one repents of his sin and puts his faith in Christ, he is converted.

So what exactly is faith? We'll deal with that issue in this lesson.

Review:

1. God is the sovereign creator.
2. Man is the sinful creature.
3. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the only Savior.

4a. The first part of a proper response to the Gospel is repentance

4b. The second part of a proper response to the Gospel is faith

A. Texts:

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten [i.e., one-and-only, unique] Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Acts 16:31 *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

Romans 1:17 *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*

Romans 10:9 *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

Ephesians 2:8 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

B. Definition:

1. The short definition: saving faith is the knowledge of, assent to, and unreserved trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

2. A fuller definition:

a) Part of faith is knowledge of some facts. This is the content of what is believed. One must know about God, sin, Christ, repentance and faith. In particular, one must understand the facts about the person and work of Christ. This is the intellectual aspect of faith.

Faith is not some kind of mindless "leap" into the dark. There is a factual, historical, intellectual basis for our faith. Faith is grounded on objective reality.[34]

b) Part of faith is assent or affirmation of the truth. One must accept the facts as true and applicable to oneself personally. This is the emotional aspect of faith.

c) Part of faith is trust or confidence. One relies upon the person and work of Christ—He is the object of faith (Acts 16:31). Faith is believing the facts of the Gospel and trusting the Person of Christ. It is wholly leaning on Christ. Faith lays hold of Christ Himself. This is the volitional aspect of faith—an exercise of the will.

Faith, like repentance, is a whole-person response—intellect, emotion, and will.

Note: An aspect or part of faith is submission. Since faith is confidence, reliance, and trust in Christ, it follows that those who have faith in Christ are submissive to Him. Faith results in loyalty, submission, and duty. Simply put, faith in Christ as Savior always results in commitment to Him as Lord.

Note the Quote: Practical acknowledgement of Jesus' Lordship, yielding to His rule by following, is the very fiber of saving faith. . . . Unless you bow to Christ's scepter, you will not receive the benefits of Christ's sacrifice.[35]

We are not saying that salvation is the result of obedience—that would be adding works to faith. We are saying that genuine faith believes who Jesus is—our Lord and Savior. A most basic expression of faith is confession that "Jesus is Lord" (Rom 10:9; cf. 1:3, 6:23).

C. The Origin of Faith

1. Saving faith is different from ordinary trust or confidence, which anyone can exercise. Saving faith is not ordinary trust turned toward Jesus Christ.

[34] John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, p 46.
[35] Chantry, p. 60.

2. Saving faith does not come from the senses (seeing, touching, smelling, etc.). It does not come from historical investigation, nor does it come from human reasoning. Saving faith is not the result of being convinced or persuaded intellectually that the Gospel is true. Such things may be involved from a human point of view, but such things are not the sufficient grounds for faith.

3. Saving faith is a gift from God. While it is the sinner who believes, the ability and desire to believe come from God. Man has no capacity within himself to believe. God must enable him to believe.

   Note several texts in this regard:

   John 6:44 *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:*

   Acts 14:27 *God . . . opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.*

   1 Corinthians 12:3 *[N]o man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.*

   Ephesians 2:8 *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

   Philippians 1:29 *For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.*

4. Definition: Saving faith is an operation of the Holy Spirit on the will of the sinner by which he freely and voluntarily believes the Gospel message. "Faith is the act of a heart made alive by the sovereign power of God."[36]

D. False or Inadequate Definitions of Faith

1. Misleading or vague ideas or terms: any of the following statements by themselves are inadequate to convey the true idea of faith. A thorough discussion of what faith means is necessary.

   a) "Ask Jesus into your heart (or life)."

   b) "Accept Jesus as your personal savior."

   c) "Give your heart to Jesus."

   d) "Come to Christ."

   e) "Believe in Jesus."

2. Intellectual faith: mere assent in the facts of the Gospel. Some say that simple faith is all that God requires—no repentance of sin, no submission to the Lordship of Christ, just pure acknowledgement of the facts. "Easy-believism" is a suitable label for such an idea. Believing the facts is certainly necessary for salvation but not sufficient for salvation.

E. Other Expressions for Faith

[36] Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel*, p. 84.

1. Receive (John 1:12)
2. Drink (John 4:14)
3. Eat (John 6:53)
4. Commit or deposit something (2 Tim 1:12)
5. Obey (Heb 5:9)

V. The Results of Faith

Faith is an internal reality with external consequences. Works are not part of faith, but faith will inevitably result in good works and godly behavior. Just as repentance has fruits worthy of it (Luke 3:8), so faith has consequences in keeping with it. Faith is the root; works are the fruit. Faith that does not produce fruit is dead (i.e., non-existent) faith (James 2:19).[37]

A. Faith obeys. Scriptures frequently equate obedience with faith (John 3:36; 1 Pet 1:22). Believing and obeying are such parallel ideas that the NT uses the words interchangeably in some cases. One gets saved by obeying the Gospel (Rom 10:16). Saving faith results in a desire to obey the commands of Christ (1 John 2:3-6).

B. Faith endures. The doctrine of perseverance asserts that one who is truly saved will persevere (continue) in faith and good works. Those who fail to persevere were never truly saved (1 John 2:19).

Main Point: The appropriate response to the Gospel message is repentance and faith. Saving faith is an operation of the Holy Spirit on the will of the sinner by which he freely and voluntarily believes the Gospel message. The convert understand the facts of the Gospel, personally accepts those facts as true, and places his whole trust and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ for the saving of his soul.

Key Passages: John 3:16, 3:36; Acts 16:31; Rom 1:17; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8

Review: God is our righteous and holy creator. Man is sinful and separated from God. Jesus Christ, by his perfect life and sacrificial death, has provided the only means of bridging the gap between God and man. The first part of an appropriate response is repentance—acknowledging one's sin and turning away from it. The second part of the response is faith—belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith go together in one act called conversion or being born again.

Questions: Are you willing to recognize Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Do you assent wholeheartedly that the facts of the Gospel apply to you? Do you want to cast yourself upon him as your only hope of salvation?

Conclusion: The person and work of Jesus Christ is the object of saving faith. When one turns from sin and trusts in Christ, he is saved.

For Further Discussion:

[37] MacArthur, p. 50-53.

1. What is easy-believism and why is it a problem? **[Easy-believism is the idea that a basic acknowledgment of the facts of the Gospel is sufficient for salvation.**

   Besides the fact that it's unbiblical, doing so results in false professions of faith. People may think they are saved when they really are not.]

2. Can people exercise saving faith on their own initiative? **[no]** Why not? **[1. Because of total depravity; 2. Because saving faith is a gift from God to his sheep.]**

3. Why do people believe? **[Ultimately, it's because God gives them the ability to do so. The Holy Spirit convinces people of the truth of the Gospel.]**

4. Can a person claim to believe in Christ and still not be saved? **[Yes, see Matt 7:21-23. Plenty of false profession occurs.]**

5. What is true of those who at one time claimed to be saved but later abandoned the faith? **[E.g., "I used to be a born-again Christian." They were never saved in the first place. 1 Jn 2:19. True believers will persevere in faith and good works. You can't lose your salvation.]**



Lesson 10: Profession vs. Possession

False or Incomplete Gospels

We have tried thus far in this series to go into some depth regarding the content of and response to the Gospel. It ought to be abundantly clear by now that evangelism requires more than just a five-minute chat. To communicate the content of the Gospel in an accurate and meaningful way may take an extended length of time.

We've examined the content of the Gospel and the appropriate response to it. Before going on to discuss how to do evangelism, we're going to look at some wrong ideas regarding evangelism. It's important to do so because such ideas are quite common, and we want to avoid them.

The primary target for criticism in this lesson is a doctrine known as easy-believism. Easy-believism is a dangerous doctrine because it produces false professions of faith, fills the church with unbelievers or immature believers, and gives a false sense of security those who may be lost.

Primary Teachings of Easy-Believism:

☹ Salvation is based purely on belief or faith. Anyone who believes in Jesus is saved. Faith is defined as simply believing the facts of the Gospel. All one does is accept the free gift of salvation with no strings attached.

☹ Repentance is not required for salvation. Some re-define repentance to mean a simple change of mind from unbelief to belief. Others assert that no kind of repentance is involved in salvation. Some even say that requiring repentance would amount to adding works to faith.

☹ Submission to the Lordship of Christ is not required for salvation. One need only trust Christ as Savior at the point of salvation; at some later point, one will hopefully recognize Him as Lord. Ideas like commitment, submission, and loyalty have no place in an evangelistic invitation. Many Christians accept the free gift of salvation without any intent of following Jesus obediently; obedience/submission is not part of the decision.

☹ Nothing about the costs of salvation is mentioned in an evangelistic invitation. The evangelist mentions only the benefits of salvation and the ease of attaining it.

☹ Since believing in Jesus is so easy, one need not go into much depth or take much time when communicating the Gospel. One need only convince the unbeliever that he is a sinner and that Jesus is the Savior.

☹ Since belief in Jesus is all that is necessary for salvation, the evangelist is encouraged to use any and all methods to generate belief.

☹ No evidence of salvation need follow belief. One may live his entire Christian life in bondage to sin. Such believers are carnal Christians—they are believers who have never grown in their faith or shown any fruit of salvation beyond a profession of faith. Even if a person

renounces the faith, the fact that he at one point professed faith in Christ is enough to guarantee his salvation. As long as a person believed in Christ at some point in time, then he is saved, whether or not that belief continues. The believer need not persevere in faith or good works. As long as one claims to believe, his faith is genuine.

☹ Easy-believism typically asserts that there are two classes of Christians: carnal and spiritual.

- Carnal Christians continue to exhibit sinful attitudes and behaviors just as they did before they were saved. A professing believer may persist in carnality (i.e., fleshly/sinful living) for his entire life. His faith may be "dead" (James 2:17), but it will still save him. Carnal Christians tend to be deeply unhappy and unsettled because they know that they should follow Jesus obediently, yet they refuse to renounce the world and its attractions. They ultimately fight against Jesus' leadership and purposes for them, even though they claim to believe in Jesus. So they are very conflicted and need to make a one-time personal decision to deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow Jesus obediently.

- Spiritual Christians have made a decision at some point after salvation to commit or devote themselves to Christ. This decision typically comes at some crisis point, often in response to an emotional appeal after a sermon. When the believer determines to forsake all to follow Christ, lay it all on the altar, and/or be sold out for Jesus, he moves from carnality to spirituality. It is only after this decision that the believer is able to grow and change. This decision generally does not happen at the point of salvation. At salvation, all one expects is that the sinner admits his sin and receives the gift of salvation.

- Regular Christians are believers; committed Christians are disciples. Discipleship is a higher level of Christianity that is encouraged but not required of regular believers.

☹ Assurance of salvation is based on one's decision and on the promises of Scripture. If one doubts his salvation, he simply looks back to his decision to believe Jesus as the basis of his assurance. It may help to consult a record of one's previous decision, such as an inscription in one's Bible or a decision card.

Responses to Easy-Believism:

I. Faith is more than mere intellectual assent to the Gospel. Faith is a total-person response (intellect, emotion and will) to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

   A. Repentance is a necessary part of the response to the Gospel. (See Lesson Eight)

   B. Submission to the authority of Christ is a required part of faith. Words such as commitment, submission, and loyalty are perfectly suitable when describing saving faith. The evangelist must present Jesus as the NT does—he is the Lord, and he expects believers to take up the cross and follow him obediently.

   C. The evangelist carefully discusses the costs of discipleship. Jesus called his disciples to self-denial and submission. He called them to leave everything. He

insisted on first place (Luke 14:26-33; Matt 10:34-38; John 12:25). One cannot invite a sinner to Christ without telling him the costs involved.[38]

D. The evangelist takes all the time necessary to carefully discuss the issues involved in conversion to Christ. He wants to reduce the possibility of a <u>false</u> profession of faith.

E. The evangelist uses only those methods that are in keeping with the character of God and with the evangelistic task. Since preaching is the primary means of proclaiming the Gospel (1 Cor 1:18f), preaching is preeminent.

II. <u>Evidence</u> of salvation will always follow true conversion. New creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) will give evidence of their new spiritual state by a radical change in attitudes and behaviors. Lack of spiritual <u>fruit</u> is evidence of a lost condition (Matt 7:15-20). True believers will persevere (continue) in faith and good works. They may backslide for a time, but they will not ultimately reject Christ. We do not expect sinless perfection, only some fruit of repentance.

Evidences of salvation from 1 John: true believers

- <u>walk</u> in the light (1:6-7). They display Christ-like behaviors and attitudes.
- are <u>sensitive</u> about sin. They confess and forsake it (1:8-10).
- are <u>obedient</u> (2:3-5, 29). Jesus said, "If you love me, obey my commandments."
- <u>love</u> other believers (3:10-15, 5:1-2). No love = no salvation.
- <u>affirm</u> sound doctrine (2:20-23). They are orthodox.
- <u>follow</u> after holiness (2:29, 3:6-9). They are not sinless, but they are striving to cease from sin and follow the Lord.

Those who display such evidence in their lives can be <u>assured</u> that they are saved. Those who lack such evidence should seriously question the validity of their profession. Since evidence of salvation usually takes time to develop (like fruit), we should not immediately assure a new convert that he is truly saved; wait until the fruit shows up.

III. The idea that a true believer can continue in a <u>carnal</u> state is false. There are not two categories of believers (carnal and spiritual, believer and disciple). <u>All</u> Christians are called to discipleship and should strive to fulfill the biblical characteristics of true disciples. A Christian will continue to struggle with sin (Rom 7), but he will also make progress in his desire to be more like Christ (Eph 4:22-24). One continuing a carnal lifestyle should not think that he is saved. Those who continue in sin without repentance and/or who apostatize were never truly saved in the first place (1 John 2:19).

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[38] "The cross not only brings Christ's life to an end, it ends also the first life, the old life, of every one of his true followers. It destroys the old pattern . . . in the believer's life, and brings it to an end. Then God who raised Christ from the dead raises the believer and a new life begins…. We must do something about the cross, and one of two things only we can do—flee it or die upon it." A.W. Tozer, *The Roots of Righteousness*, p. 61-63. Quoted in *Faith Works*, p. 205.

IV. Assurance of salvation is based largely on the evidence, not on a simple profession of faith. Those who have no evidence of salvation can have no assurance. Many who *claim* to be saved are not.

Matthew 7:21–23 *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

Titus 1:15–16 *To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*

1 John 2:4–6 *He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

Decisions and Assurance

Evangelists should invite people to make a decision to repent of sin and believe the Gospel. The problem is that people tend to look back on their decision as the basis of their salvation. Rather than trusting Christ, they trust their decision and/or the experience associated with it. **[E.g., "I had some experience (walked an aisle, signed a card, etc.) at some time in the past, so I *must* be saved."]**

We must not look back on our decision, or any accompanying activity, to give us assurance of salvation. Instead, the basis of our assurance must be our **current** state of *belief* (Am I orthodox in my belief? Am I trusting Jesus Christ alone as my Lord and Savior?), *behavior* (Am I striving to live a Christ-honoring life? Am I growing in the Christian life?), and the *inner witness* of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14-16). Only those who have evidence (fruit) have a basis for assurance.

Conclusion: While we want to see people respond to the Gospel, we dare not stoop to the level of easy-believism. Salvation is free but it's not cheap. Jesus told us to count the costs of following him. It's a misrepresentation to preach an easy, superficial, casual "Gospel."

For Further Discussion:

1. Is it likely that you can lead someone to a saving knowledge of Christ in five minutes? **[It's possible if the person is ready, understands, and is under conviction, but it's not likely to happen regularly.]**

2. Discuss the idea, found often in tracts, that salvation is "simple." **[It's simple in that even a child can understand it. But it's not cheap or easy. And it may require a good deal of explanation. So "simple" is probably not the best word to describe it.]**
3. What are the bases of assurance of salvation? **[Believing the right doctrine, behaving the right way, and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit.]**
4. Should we assure new converts that they are saved immediately after their profession of faith? **[No. Assurance takes time to develop, just like fruit takes time to develop. We should give them hope that they are saved, but tell them that time will tell whether their profession was genuine or false.]**
5. Why is it important to tell people the costs associated with salvation? **[1. Because it's biblical—Jesus told us to; 2. To prevent false professions; 3. To be honest.]**



Lesson 11: Relational (Personal) Evangelism

We finally are at the point where we can discuss the how to's of evangelism. We have the necessary background information to present the Gospel message accurately and appropriately. We now want to focus on the best way of doing so.

Most books on evangelism lay out a certain method that the author believes is most biblical or that has the most potential for success. We've already seen that methods are flexible and not sacred. We must focus more on the message itself than on the methods used to communicate it. Nevertheless, we are now ready to think about a method of evangelism. This lesson will discuss the idea of relational evangelism.

First, a few reminders about God-centered evangelism:

- We are more concerned about making an accurate presentation of the Gospel than we are about conversions. It's our job to preach the Gospel; it's God's job to convert a soul to Christ. Never compromise the content to secure conversions.
- We are more focused on our responsibility than our results (Acts 20:26-27). The question is, "Did I present the message clearly and accurately?" not "Did the person get saved?"
- Our confidence is in God's power through His Word rather than our persuasiveness (2 Cor 4:1-7; 1 Cor 2:1-5). We trust in the power of God's Word to raise the dead to life. Our job is not to defend the Word, but to proclaim it and to give it an opportunity to work.[39]

  Note the Quote: Though it is proper to reason with men, persuade men, beseech men, there will be no response unless God in His grace attends with enabling power the words we speak. Our evangelism must be based on a dependence on the Lord. Our hope of results must be in Him, not in man's will or in any other faculty of our hearer.[40]
- We must commit ourselves to speak when God opens the door. Opportunities for evangelism are God-ordained. We must have a God-centered, Gospel optimism based on the fact that the Gospel is powerful (Rom 1:16-17) and can draw a person to Christ.
- Prayer is the supreme God-ordained method in evangelism. Unless God changes a person's heart, nothing lasting will be achieved.[41] Prayer acknowledges that conversion of souls is God's work, and that we are entirely dependent upon Him to bring a soul to faith. Prayer must precede and accompany all evangelism.

  - It's the Holy Spirit's job, not the evangelist's, to convict the sinner of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-11). God is responsible for bringing a soul to conversion. Believers are an important part of that process, but it's God's responsibility to convince the unbeliever of the truth of the Word.

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[39] Jim Petersen, *Evangelism as a Lifestyle*, p. 124.
[40] Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel*, p. 86.
[41] Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, p. 116.

Relational Evangelism, or Developing Redemptive Relationships

I. Definition of Relational Evangelism: evangelism within the normal, everyday patterns of life; witnessing to your friends; telling those within your circle of influence; witnessing where you find yourself. Some would call this developing "redemptive relationships." Relational evangelism stands in contrast to a scheduled program of evangelism (like visitation, door-to-door calling, telemarketing, etc.). Rather than waiting for a program, one takes the opportunities to witness as they come up. There is nothing wrong with program-driven evangelism, but one should evangelize more than just as part of a program. Evangelism should be a way of life. **[Thus some people call it "Lifestyle Evangelism.]**

[Some people have the idea that they have discharged their duty for evangelism by participating in a weekly program. Thus, they might speak to many strangers while going door-to-door, but they don't talk to their neighbors about the Gospel.

Some have a wrong idea about "Lifestyle Evangelism." They assert (wrongly) that lifestyle evangelism is witnessing thru your lifestyle/behavior (i.e., being light and salt, but not saying anything). But lifestyle evangelism teaches that one evangelizes (communicates the Gospel) as part of his lifestyle rather than, or in addition to, an evangelistic program.]

II. Biblical Basis for Relational Evangelism

John 1:40-41 *One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ*.

John 1:45 *Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*

John 4:6-7 *Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. . . .*

1 Pet 3:15 *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*

The biblical pattern seems to be that each person is responsible to reach those within his or her sphere of influence. Friends reach friends. One uses the relationships he has to extend redemption to others (hence the term "redemptive" relationships).

III. The Benefits of Relational Evangelism:

- ✔ There is no special program to run or schedule to keep. You evangelize wherever and whenever an opportunity presents itself, not just according to a certain schedule or program.
- ✔ You work within the spheres of influence you already have. Rather than trying to reach absolute strangers, you try to reach those you know or those whom the Lord brings across your path.
- ✔ You bring your influence to bear on those you have the most influence over. Your friends, family, co-workers, and acquaintances are much more apt to listen to you than they would be to listen to a stranger. Research has shown that most people respond to the Gospel under the influence of a familiar person. Your opportunities for successful evangelism are much greater within this group than they are with any other.
- ✔ Opportunities for witnessing arise naturally. You talk about the Lord and salvation as you would talk about any other important topic. Because you know your audience well, you are better able to sense when the best times and places to witness would be.
- ✔ Your audience (friends, family, co-workers) has much more at stake in their relationship with you than with other evangelists. That is, they may never darken the door of a church, listen to a Gospel radio program, or attend an evangelistic campaign, but because of their relationship with you, they may be willing to listen.
- ✔ Redemptive relationships are not difficult to develop. Because it fits into one's normal patterns of life, this method of evangelism is natural and effective.
- ✔ Relational evangelism contradicts the idea that evangelism is done only as part of a program. Evangelism can occur at any time and in any context, not just on a certain schedule.

IV. How to Present the Gospel

As we've said, the message is more important than the method. Nevertheless, one should have a strategy for evangelism when an opportunity occurs.

A. Preparation

1. Know and be able to explain the Gospel message. Know references and have verses memorized. Know it well enough to feel somewhat comfortable explaining it.
2. Prepare what you would say if you had the opportunity.
3. Ask God for opportunities.

B. Directing the Conversation (SCOTT)

Relational evangelism stresses communicating the Gospel as part of a normal conversation. How do you bring a conversation around to the place where the Gospel fits? Begin with common interests and seek to move deeper into values, attitudes, and beliefs.

1. Their Secular Life (family, occupation, interests)
2. Their Church background—do they attend church and where; what tradition do they come from?

   This helps us:

   - ♦ identify if they are involved in a church ministry at a Bible-believing church; and,
   - ♦ understand their presuppositions and present level of knowledge about spiritual things.

3. Our Testimony: Church or personal

   a) Our church

   Do

   Be enthusiastic.

   Suggest there is a difference between yours and others.

   Focus on importance of God's Word.

   Highlight the blessing of fellowship.

   Personalize it. Use your own experience.

   Don't

   Appear proud or arrogant.

   Draw pointed comparisons between your church and theirs (how much better yours is than theirs).

b) Our personal testimony

   Content

   What your life was like before you got saved

   How you received eternal life

   What having eternal life has meant to you

   Do

   Establish the fact that we all need a relationship with God, and that it is available.

   Lay the foundation upon which you will make the presentation--what one is like before salvation, how you were saved, and what that has meant.

   Don't: Sensationalize your testimony

4. Three Questions (Ask, "*May I ask you a question?"* Any of these questions is suitable to bring the person to a point of decision.)

Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you know for certain that if you were to die you would go to heaven?

Suppose you did die today and stand before God and He was to say to you, "Why should I let you into heaven?" What would you say?

The Bible (1 John 5:13) shows us that we can know for certain where we'll spend eternity. May I take a few minutes to show you from the Bible how you can know?

5. Transition

Depending on how the person responds, the evangelist next either transitions into an explanation of the Gospel, or he tries to leave a door open for doing so at a later date. If the person seems uncomfortable discussing spiritual things, don't force the issue. Trying to force a positive response to the Gospel may in fact "inoculate" the one you're trying to reach from further evangelism.

B. Leading a Person to Accept Christ

Assuming the person has responded appropriately to one of the above three questions or has shown some level of interest, you then want to proceed to lead the person to Christ.

Be very careful at this point. How you communicate the Gospel, and the appropriate response to it, is critical. If you preach an easy-believism style invitation, the person may make a false profession. If you attach a physical activity to the response, the person may think he's saved because he participated in some activity (even a prayer). If you put too much pressure on the person, he may respond just to get you off his back. If you add anything to the Gospel, you make it into a works salvation. So be careful and accurate.

1. Explanation: clearly and carefully explain the basics of the Gospel: **[It's very important that you understand these concepts and are able to accurately convey the content of the Gospel and the required response.]**

   a. who God is: the sovereign, holy creator

   b. who man is: the sinful, rebellious creature

   c. who Christ is and what He did:

      1) God the Son, the Lord and Savior

      2) lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death, rose again

   d. what the appropriate response is: **[turn and trust]**

      1. repentance: acknowledging sin, sorrow for it, turning from it

      2. faith: knowledge of, assent to, and trust in the person and work of

Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord

e. what the <u>costs</u> of discipleship are

1) death to self

2) submission to Christ as master

2. Application

Have I made this clear?

Do you understand what repentance and faith are?

Do you understand the costs of discipleship?

Do you have any questions?

3. Invitation

Ask, "Is there anything that would keep you from turning to Christ for salvation?"

Ask, "Would you like to receive Christ as your Lord and Savior?"

4. Reception

Encourage the person to pray, confessing his sin and pleading for God's mercy.

Encourage the person to ask Christ to be his Lord and Savior.

Close in prayer.

What about repeating a prayer?

It's common for the evangelist to encourage his audience to "repeat after me" when praying the sinner's prayer. If possible, it's best to encourage the person to pray in his own words rather than just repeat a prayer. If you encourage someone to repeat after you, the danger exists that the person is just repeating the words without sincerity of heart. However, sometimes it is necessary to lead the person in a "repeat

after me" type prayer.

5. Examination

After the person makes a profession of faith, it's appropriate to ask him if he was truly sincere in his repentance and faith. You may want to repeat the questions from above and see how he answers them. The goal here is to discern whether the person truly understands (to the best of your knowledge).

Some suggest that you should take time now to assure the person that he really is saved. But assurance is based on orthodox belief, godly behavior, and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, not solely on one's profession or decision. Assurance of salvation naturally builds as evidence of conversion begins to display itself in the life of the convert. Such evidence will give the convert assurance.

[When the person gets baptized, starts participating in church, makes changes in his lifestyle/behavior and attitudes, then assurance of salvation is valid. True salvation will always result in such changes. We must avoid prematurely assuring someone he is saved—he may not be.]

Conclusion: Relational evangelism (or redemptive relationships) is probably the best method of evangelism, although it's not a method *per se*. God expects us to reach our friends and neighbors with the Gospel. Work where God has placed you, in the sphere of influence you currently have. Work to expand your redemptive relationships. Always be ready to present the Gospel when God give you an opportunity.



Lesson 12: Character and Communication in Witnessing

1 Thessalonians 2:3-8 *For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the Gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.* (NKJV)

The above passage tells us several important truths about character in evangelizing:

1. Deceit has no place in evangelism. We are not trying to trick anyone into being saved. We must be perfectly honest when presenting the Gospel. We must not use flattering or manipulative words, gimmicks, or tricks when exhorting others to be saved.
2. Our ultimate aim is to please God, not men. From the evangelist's point of view, we are trying to please God by spreading the Gospel. Our real aim in not the conversion of souls, but the approval of God. We evangelize in a way that brings glory to God whether it "works" or not.
3. Our relationship with those we are trying to convert must be as Paul describes it above—gentle, affectionate, and unselfish. We see people as God does, not just as souls to win.

Character in Evangelism

Jesus instructs us to "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Who we are is almost as important as what we say. If we come across to our audience as hypocritical, holier-than-thou, or insincere, our efforts will be fruitless. Our life must correspond to our message. We must back up what we say by how we live. We must live in such a way that people see the truth of the Gospel in us. An individual with a good testimony is one who models the character of God. He spreads life and hope rather than despair, conflict and death. He's like salt and light, a singular exception in a disoriented world.[42] Several characteristics should be true of witnesses:

1. Holiness. Holiness is not only moral uprightness; it is distinctiveness. The evangelist should be distinctive in his behavior and attitudes. Holiness compels us to make a break with the pagan value system of our society. We are calling people to embrace something radically different from what the world has to offer. If our audience sees nothing special in us, it will have no reason to consider our message seriously.
2. Compassion. The Gospels repeatedly show Jesus' compassionate care for people. Compassion for the lost should drive us to share the Gospel with them. We should present the Gospel in a way that is sensitive and kind. We must treat people with respect, dignity, and honor.

[42] Jim Petersen, *Evangelism as a Lifestyle*, p. 66-67, 71.

3. Patience. Dealing with unsaved people requires patience. We may have to cover the same ground repeatedly. The one we are witnessing to may show great interest one day and apathy the next. Even when the results don't seem to come, we must patiently wait, pray, plant the seed, water it, and wait on God for the harvest.

4. Honesty. As we've already seen, some people compromise the message in order to gain a wider acceptance. We dare not do so. We must proclaim the Gospel in all its fullness, not failing to include both the benefits and the costs of salvation. Integrity must mark our lives. Such behavior will stand in stark contrast in a dark world full of dishonesty.

5. Truth. Our society has rejected truth, and is thus adrift on a sea of uncertainty. Christians, on the other hand, know truth—both God (John 14:6) and the Word (John 17:17). Believers have a reference point to start from and guidance along the way, which allows them to chart the right course. They also have solid answers to the toughest of man's questions. As they live in the light of God and the Gospel, Christians are a statement from God to the world that He has the answers.[43]

6. Love. Someone once said, "90% of evangelism is love."[44] People are not objects to be won like trophies; they are real people who need our compassion. Evangelism is loving other people to Christ.

   1 Thessalonians 2:8 *So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.*

Whether we like it or not, those we seek to reach will decide either to accept or reject Christ based in part on what they see in our lives. It's not uncommon for converts to say that the reason they came to Christ was the exemplary life of a Christian friend. On the other hand, it's quite common for those who reject the Gospel to do so because of the lack of Christlikeness in professing believers. If your life is characterized by the above attributes, your witness will be attractive and natural. You'll find plenty of opportunities to talk with others about Christ if you model Christlike character. You'll automatically be a light in a dark world.

Introducing unbelievers into a community of believers (a church, Bible study, fellowship group, etc.) who model Christlike character is an important part of the evangelistic process. Unbelievers should see an obvious difference in the lives of Christians. Unbelievers may not even be willing to take you seriously until they've seen genuine Christlikeness in you and in other believers.

Communication in Evangelism

As we've seen, a godly lifestyle can be an effective tool in evangelism. But we must go beyond simply being a good example. An essential part of evangelism is a verbal witness—we must tell others the Gospel and exhort them to make the appropriate response to the message. God's ordained method of evangelism is proclaiming the message verbally (Rom 10:14-15; 1 Cor 1:18-21).

We communicate differently with different people. Our interaction with a neighbor is different from that with a boss or government official. Some people we see occasionally for a minute or

[43] Petersen, p. 74.
[44] Bob Smith, in Petersen, p. 107.

two; others we see daily for extended periods. We all understand that different relationships call for different styles of communication.

Jesus gives us many examples of this truth. He made friends with sinners and witnessed to them (e.g., Zaccheus), but he boldly confronted religious people (e.g., Nicodemus). He spoke with the woman at the well in one way (John 4) and with the rich young ruler in a different way (Mark 10).

The point is that we have to discern how best to communicate the Gospel with different audiences. Let's consider various common types of unbelievers and suggest possible ways to reach them.

1. The Ignorant and Indifferent: This is the largest class of unbelievers. They need to be surprised and challenged to see the folly of their paganism. Such people must be confronted and warned about the consequences of their sin. Passages such as the rich young ruler (Luke 12:13-21) and the woman at the well (John 4) exemplify an appropriate model of communication with this type of audience.
2. The Self-Righteous: Like the Pharisees, such people are involved in organized religion and think highly of themselves, but are not saved. They are basing their salvation on good works. They need to see that they are not as virtuous as they think they are. A good place to start with such people is the Ten Commandments. Show them how everyone has broken all of the commandments. Also see James 2:10, which asserts that if we've broken even one commandment, we've broken them all. Show such people that many who *claim* to be saved are really lost (Matt 7:21-23).
3. False Christians: With the prevalence of easy-believism and false theology, it is common to find people who claim to be saved but show evidence of the opposite. Such people need to understand the true content of the Gospel, the requirements for salvation, and the evidence that follows salvation. Texts like Titus 1:15-16 and 1 John 2:3-6 reveal the true spiritual state of those who profess salvation but who do not possess it.
4. Deliberate Atheists: These people reject the whole notion of God, sin, and salvation. Often, such people reject God because of His moral requirements. They are frequently hostile toward believers and toward organized religion. If such people will listen, we should simply communicate the Gospel to them. If they have honest questions, we should seek to answer them.
5. Seekers: Some people we talk with may be awakened to their need of salvation because God is in the process of bringing them to faith. We must point such people to Christ and remind them of the correct response to the Gospel. Isaiah 53, Psalm 51, and John 3 are good passages to direct them to.[45]
6. Cultists: Cults are growing very quickly all around the world. Because cultists are actively seeking converts, we will likely have many opportunities to speak with them. We may find them knocking on the door at our homes. Recognize that such people are not true believers—they are far from the truth, false prophets, and guilty of leading others astray. When interacting with cultists, be brief, firm, and to the point. Don't be drawn into an argument over secondary issues. Emphasize salvation by grace alone through faith alone and

[45] The only true seekers are those under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, no one truly seeks after God (Rom 3:11).

the deity of Jesus Christ. Confront the cultist with his false theology and assure him that he is not a genuine Christian.

No matter whom we are dealing with, we want to communicate the Gospel in a natural and sensitive manner. Few appreciate bluntness and abrasiveness. Nor do people respond well to a sales pitch. You want to introduce the Gospel, but in a way that is most likely to be taken seriously. Almost any conversation can be turned toward a discussion of the Gospel.

Believers must take the initiative in establishing redemptive relationships. Become aware of people around you. Be friendly and outgoing—greet them, say, "Hello." Seek interaction. Look for common interests or needs. Love people unconditionally. Seek the good of others regardless of their response. Introduce them to your Christian friends.

The following table from Metzger's book *Tell the Truth* is helpful.

Situation: Someone complains about tragic world events or the violence of certain people. **Response**: "Why do you think people do such terrible things? What do you think God thinks of that?"
Situation: Someone you have helped thanks you. **Response**: "You're welcome. I want to help people. My perspective on life was really changed when I became a Christian."
Situation: Someone helps you. **Response**: "I really appreciate your help. Why are you so compassionate? Are you a Christian?"
Situation: You receive a compliment for something you've done. **Response**: "Why, thank you. I've gotten a new perspective on this since Jesus came into my life. I appreciate the world around me more, knowing who made it."
Situation: Someone is telling of their good fortune or luck in a matter. **Response**: "Do you think God has a reason for allowing you to experience this good thing? How do you account for the good things that have happened to you?"
Situation: You're given too much change after a purchase. **Response**: "You know. At one time I would have kept the money, but Jesus Christ has turned my life around. Do you know Christ?"

Other points to turn to conversation toward the Gospel:

- Casual references to God's involvement in our lives
- The basis of our value system or political views
- The importance of our church

- Current events or social problems and a Christian response to them
- References to well-known Christians
- Conversations about other faiths (e.g., Islam)

Conclusion: Verbal and non-verbal witnessing must come together in evangelism. A verbal witness without a loving relationship tends to be impersonal. And a non-verbal witness may attract attention, but it does not communicate the Gospel. Thus, the best personal evangelism occurs through creating and maintaining redemptive relationships—being a Christlike friend to the lost and using that friendship to communicate the Gospel. And when you add the influence of a group of Christlike people to verbal and non-verbal witnessing, the result is a powerful and appealing evangelistic outreach.

For Further Discussion:

1. What happens when our verbal witness is not backed up by our lifestyle? **[In this case, our words have no weight. Hypocrisy is obvious.]**
2. Is non-verbal witnessing really witnessing? **[No. There is no such thing as a silent witness. The value of a non-verbal witness is that it attracts attention and is appealing. It gives the believer a basis for communicating the Gospel.]**
3. Why is it important to introduce a prospective convert to a community of believers? **[To give that person an opportunity to see what being a Christian is like.]**