

DHBC Winter Core Class

Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult

February 15, 2009

Introduction

- ❖ When I was a youth pastor back in Texas, I remember one evening talking to a group of teenagers about a very sensitive subject for Christians. Talking about it made these kids squirm in their chairs. As I explained the Bible's teaching on this subject, it triggered in them feelings of inadequacy and shame. To tell truth, I was surprised how much guilt they carried around when it came to the issue of...no not sex...evangelism.
- ❖ Next to sex, evangelism is one of the most guilt-inducing subjects to talk about among Christians because most of us don't do it – or at least we don't do it enough. **And the reason why is because we simply don't know what to say.**
 - *What do my non-Christian friends need to understand to be able to respond with saving faith? What are the essentials?*
 - And not only do we worrying about what to say, we wonder how we should say it. *Should I use an illustration or tell a story? Should I quote scripture? If so, which verses?*
 - These kinds of questions simply reflect the uncertainty and apprehension we typically have towards evangelism.
- ❖ Well Barton and I don't stand before you as experts. We're simply pastors who have been called to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:12).
 - **So this evening our goal is to equip you with one tool for your evangelism toolbox.** It's called *Two Ways to Live*. This is not the end all be all to evangelism. This is not the tool of all tools. But both Barton and I have found it helpful, so we want to teach it to you.
 - But before we do that, we want to first lay out six assumptions. **These are six truths that undergird our practical theology on evangelism.** We encourage you to follow along with us in your manuals.

Six Assumptions in Evangelism

ASSUMPTION #1 - Evangelism is for every believer

- ❖ Before we begin discussing the "How" of evangelism, we need to start with the "Who", that is "Who should be doing it?"
 - *Who is responsible for evangelism? Is it the pastors of the church? Or the missionaries? Is it reserved for those with the spiritual gift of evangelism?*
 - Some would argue that for the ordinary Christian to do evangelism is like the ordinary employee trying to do the company's accounting! *Shouldn't we leave that to the professionals?*
- ❖ But Scripture teaches that evangelism is not a responsibility given to an elite few, to those with a formal theological education. It's a responsibility for all Christians. **Our first assumption in evangelism is that it's for every believer.**

- **Every Christian is an evangelist, in one sense.** Yes, there is a spiritual gift of evangelism (Eph 4:11). The Spirit does specially endow certain believers with the ability to share the gospel with greater unction and effectiveness than most. That gifting fell upon men like George Whitefield, DL Moody, and Billy Graham. Not every believer is gifted that way.
 - **But even though evangelism may not be your gift, it is still your duty.** All Christians are called to be **disciple-makers** (Matt 28:18-20). *And what's the first step of disciple-making?* It's introducing lost people to Jesus. That's evangelism. So in one sense, every believer is an evangelist.

ASSUMPTION #2 - Evangelism is a clanging cymbal without love

- ❖ **Our second assumption is that evangelism is a clanging cymbal without love.** In 1 Cor 13, Paul says that if he were to speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, he is but a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
- ❖ Peter makes a similar point in 1 Peter 3:15. Here he commands us to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But in v16, Peter follows by saying to do this with gentleness and respect.
 - **That means, in evangelism, just giving an answer is not enough.** Just memorising a prepared tool and regurgitating it to your non-Christian friends is insufficient. It may very well be truth that you're presenting, but without the right attitude and respect of them as persons (not as projects), your words will only sound to them like a clanging cymbal.
- ❖ **Sadly there is too much evangelism out there that communicates truth without love.** *Have you ever heard of missionary bottle evangelism?* It's a form of evangelism where you take a gospel tract or some Christian literature and place it inside a glass bottle and cork it. Then you drop it off a boat far from shore along some ocean current and pray that God guides it along until someone find this "message in a bottle" washed up on shore one day.
 - Now I'm not going to box God in and say he can't save people that way. But I'm confident that's not his normal means. **That's because evangelism should always be leading lost people into relationship** – into relationship with God and relationship with other believers in the context of a local church.
 - So any form of evangelism divorced from the context of a loving relationship simply will not be effective in leading people towards that end.

ASSUMPTION #3 - Evangelism is telling news

- ❖ But having just stressed the importance of attitude and loving relationships, please don't interpret me as downplaying the importance of the words you share. Communicating the truth verbally matters! **That because our third assumption is this: evangelism is telling news.**
 - Let me take a minute to clearly distinguish evangelism from other activities that are closely related but are not evangelism per se.

- ❖ First, let's consider **your personal testimony**. A personal testimony **can greatly contribute to the task of evangelism**, but it by itself is not evangelism. If all you communicate to your non-Christian friend is how God has changed your life, they are still left uncertain as to how God can change theirs. They need to hear the good news, so they can understand where true change comes from.
 - Now you can include the gospel within a prepared testimony and told as a whole, this could be evangelism. But I hope you see the distinction.

- ❖ Second, consider **social action**. Now addressing poverty, feeding the hungry, fighting injustice, caring for creation, these are all important endeavours for Christians to get involved in. All these actions **can definitely commend the gospel**, and they themselves are clear implications of the gospel rightly understood. But social action by itself is not evangelism.
 - If you address a person's physical condition but not their spiritual condition, then they may enjoy temporary comfort on earth **but they still are estranged from God**. They are still enemies with God. They need to hear good news about what God has done to reconcile them to himself.

- ❖ Third, consider **apologetics**. Apologetics is, by definition, a rational defence of the faith. It is answering questions and objections people may have about God, Jesus, the Bible. It is often **needed to pave the way for evangelism**.
 - Until we address their scepticism, most people are simply not open to receiving the good news of the gospel. So apologetics is necessary, but if you answer all their questions but still leave the most important question unanswered, that being, "How can a sinner be reconciled to God?" – then you still haven't done evangelism.

- ❖ Lastly, consider **building relationships**. I just said that evangelism divorced from the context of loving relationships is ineffective. But though it **is necessary for evangelism**, building a relationship in itself is not evangelism.
 - If you develop a friendship with a non-Christian and present a strong Christian witness with your life but never say a word about the good news, then you have yet to evangelize to them.

- ❖ **The biblical portrait of evangelism is of one person telling another news**, specifically the "evangel", the *eu-an-ge-li-on*, the good news of what God has accomplished in history over 2000 years ago to reconcile sinners to himself through one person, namely Jesus the Christ.
 - **News is only news because it is meant to be communicated**. It can be told with your mouth or your pen or your keyboard. Regardless, news must be communicated with words. That is fundamentally what evangelism is all about.

ASSUMPTION #4 – Evangelism is ultimately a work of God

- ❖ II Corinthians 4 says, "**by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience...³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that**

they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord... For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

- ❖ Notice two things here: first notice that sinners are totally unable to see Jesus in order to believe in him. Why is that? **READ 4.**
 - The reason people do not believe is because Satan is blinding them.
- ❖ But watch secondly what God does. **READ 6.** In other words it is God who enables a person to Jesus. The beginning of the verse reminds us that God said, ***"Let light shine out of darkness."*** That is a reference to Genesis 1 and the miracle of creation. This same God who brought light into the world at creation now shines light into our hearts to enable us to see Jesus. In other words, for people to recognize that Jesus is God, God must perform a miracle.
 - People do not become Christians just because we share the gospel with them. God must shine his light in people's hearts so that they recognize and respond to the truths of the gospel.¹
- ❖ Sinners are always presented in the Bible as unable to save themselves. Sinners are described as blind, deaf, and unborn. In Ephesians 2 we are said to be "dead in our sins." A dead man cannot make himself live. He can only live if an outside force acts on him.
 - This is what God does. Ephesians 2 says God makes us alive. In Ezekiel He breathes on dry bones and they live. He unstops deaf ears. He opens blind eyes. He grants new birth.
 - This is why evangelism ultimately comes down to God. If anyone is going to believe in Jesus and be saved God must do grant them spiritual life. It is ultimately a work of God.

ASSUMPTION #5 – Evangelism is not measured by results

- ❖ There is a great Peanuts cartoon that depicts a conversation between Lucy and Linus. Looking out the window Lucy wonders, ***"Boy, look at it rain...what if it floods the whole world?"*** ***"It will never do that"***, says Linus. ***"In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow"***. ***"You've taken a great load of my mind,"*** replies Lucy. Linus says, ***"Sound theology has a way of doing that."***
- ❖ One of the greatest ways to take relieve yourself of the stress of evangelism is to learn the sound theology of assumption #4. You see once you realize that only God can bring life to dead sinners, you can give up trying to be God. You understand that your job is to faithfully proclaim the gospel but that you are speaking in a morgue and only God can raise the dead and bring results.

¹ Material from *Christian Explored – Study Guide Leader's Edition*, pg 16.

- I had a friend once who worked for a major Christian organization. Every week his boss would go around the room and say, ***“How many people did you convert this week?”*** That is not only bad theology it is terribly discouraging. It would be fine to ask, ***“How many people did you share the gospel with this week?”*** but conversion is God’s job. Our job is to faithfully share the message and let God take care of the results. How freeing!
- ❖ So Mark Dever defines our part, ***“We don’t fail in our evangelism if we faithfully tell the gospel to someone who is not converted; we fail only if we don’t faithfully tell the gospel at all. Evangelism itself isn’t converting people; it’s telling them that they need to be converted and telling them how they can be.”***
 - We must not confuse our role with God’s. As Bruce Metzger says, ***“Our task is to present faithfully the gospel message by our lives and our lips. Any definition of our task that includes results is confusing our responsibility with God’s prerogative, which is regeneration.”***

ASSUMPTION #6 - Evangelism requires honesty, urgency, and joy

- ❖ In Mark Dever’s book (which is great and short read) called *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism*, he suggest that evangelism requires these three things: honesty, urgency and joy. Too often our approach to evangelism is unbalanced and possibly damaging because we only hold to one (or at best two) of these aspects rather than all three.
- ❖ First, evangelism requires **honesty**. That means resisting any temptation to only present the positives of the gospel and hide the negatives. We should definitely talk about God’s love, his free grace and the joys of discipleship.
 - But we mustn’t be afraid to talk about unwelcomed subjects like sin, judgement, condemnation, the cost of discipleship, etc. If we keep in mind that evangelism is ultimately a work of God saving sinners, then it will help us to resist the temptation to make our gospel presentation more attractive for non-Christians.
- ❖ But along with honesty, evangelism also requires **urgency**. What I mean is that we must not be afraid to stress the urgency of a decision for Christ. There is no point in waiting for a better deal around the corner. There is no better offer out there for the forgiveness of sins.
 - Tell them, if they repent and believe today, they will be saved. But there will come a day when it will be too late. Jesus said in Luke 13:24, ***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”***
 - We live in an age of mercy where there is still time to enter the kingdom. But, there will come a time (either in our death or in Christ’s return) when it is too late. Then many will try to enter the kingdom but will not be able to.
- ❖ And thirdly, evangelism requires **joy**. That means we should make it a point to joyfully express the gain of the cross even in light of the sacrifice. Don’t hide the cost of discipleship, but there is no reason to downplay the joy of following Jesus.

- Help your non-Christian friends see that Christianity is not a joyless, duty-bound, guilt-manipulating religion. Jesus is our greatest joy and treasure, so make sure that comes across in your evangelism.
- ❖ Now remember we need to hold all three of these aspects equally. There must be balance. For, as Dever puts it, **honesty and urgency with no joy** gives us a grim determination. **Honestly and joy with no urgency** gives us a carelessness about time. **Urgency and joy with no honesty** leads us into distorted claims about immediate benefits of the gospel.