

Personal Evangelism Course

13 January 2007

How Should We do Personal Evangelism?

Prayer: Spend a few moments praying with those around you for the three people you wrote down during our first lesson. (If you were not here, we began this series by writing out the names of three individuals we're going to commit to praying for and sharing our faith with, as the Lord provides the opportunity. If you were not here, do this now.) Pray that the Lord would give you an opportunity to tell them of what Jesus has done and that they'd put their faith in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.¹

Introduction: After considering what evangelism is, the relationship between evangelism and personal holiness, and the basics the message we proclaim, and the essence of true saving faith, today we will consider how we should go about doing personal evangelism. Misunderstanding this crucial aspect of personal evangelism can lead to unnecessary guilt, distorted methodology, missed opportunities, and even false conversions. Consequently, understanding your role in evangelism is vital.

Discussion:

- I. Two or three people summarize the Gospel in one minute or less.
- II. Someone define saving faith. What Bible passage supports this definition of faith?
- III. Has anyone here ever worked a job with poorly defined job responsibilities? Is so, how did you feel working that job? How was your efficiency impacted?

Study:

- I. Confusing who is responsible for what in personal evangelism can be disastrous. On the other hand, understanding exactly what our responsibilities are and who is responsible for what in personal evangelism can be both freeing and encouraging. Pastor Mark Dever says,

"The Christian call to evangelism is a call not simply to persuade people to make decisions but rather to proclaim to them the Good News of salvation in Christ, to call them to repentance, and to give God the glory for regeneration and conversion. We don't fail in evangelism if we faithfully present the Gospel and yet the person is not converted; we fail only if we don't faithfully present the Gospel at all."²

II. Your Role:

A. Be Bold:

1. Boldness is obviously necessary in personal evangelism. This is especially true when you take the initiative to speak of Christ. Even in contexts where someone comes up to you and asks you, "What must I do to be saved?," you still must step out in courage and tell them of what Jesus has done.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, *English Standard Version*, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles.

² *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 137

2. Realize that fear is a natural human response to bringing up potentially controversial topics.³ Yet part of the process of following Jesus is submitting our fears to His Lordship. Ultimately, the question is a matter of “who do you fear more: man or God?”⁴
 3. Even the Apostle Paul, who many consider the greatest missionary ever, apparently faced the temptation to be ashamed of the Gospel:
 - a. Ephesians 6:18-20 – Praying at all times in the Spirit...and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.
 - b. Romans 1:16 – For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
 - c. According to these verses, what is Paul’s remedy for fear of man?
 4. Realize that being bold does not mean being obnoxious. Use common sense, use tact, and be sensitive to the listener’s current situation (i.e., at the funeral of an unbelieving relative, don’t ask them to imagine how hot their relative must be in hell). Don’t push the topic if your listener is clearly not interested. Yet at the end of the day, more of us struggle with being excessively timid in sharing Christ than excessively bold.
 5. As you do personal evangelism, your fear of man may diminish somewhat through experience. But realize that it will never disappear completely. This is simply a hurdle we must learn to conquer.
- B. Be Clear:
1. Clarity in our personal evangelism is essential. How effective would a foreign missionary be who does not know the language of the people group he is trying to reach? So also confusing, unclear, excessively technical presentations of the Gospel can be disastrous.
 2. Some suggestions for clarity:
 - a. Be sure you understand the Gospel clearly in your own mind. If the significance of Christ and His work are misty to you, they will be mud in the minds of your listeners.
 - b. Work at summarizing the Gospel in a concise but accurate form. Perhaps trying writing out a summary of the Gospel in one paragraph or distilling it into a 60-second explanation.
 - c. Minimize technical terms as much as possible.⁵ Realize that Christian terms you know well may be unfamiliar to unbelievers. Even terms such as “sin,” “God,” and “saved” will probably need to be defined. Don’t avoid difficult concepts but explain them in simple language. Go to handout on page 26.
 - d. As you share the Gospel, ask clarifying questions of your hearer. Ask questions such as:
 - i. Who do you understand God (or Jesus) to be?
 - ii. Have you ever heard the word “salvation” before?
 - iii. When you hear the word “sin,” what do you think of?
 - iv. Does that make sense?

³ Fear of man is an issue that can impact many areas of your Christian life. Confronting a brother or sister in sin, taking a stand for righteousness in a sinful world, or even speaking a sincere word of encouragement can be contexts where you will need to overcome fear and speak the truth in love.

⁴ Jesus’ words in Luke 9:26 are piercingly convicting in this regard. In Luke 9:26 He said: “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”

⁵ To use an absurd example, if someone asks you, “Why is your life different from everybody else?”, don’t say, “To begin with, we must consider the infralapsarian nature of the propitiatory *victima* and the indefatigable omnipotence of the covenant-head.”

3. Consider Paul's prayer in Colossians 4:3-4 – Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.
4. Realize that clarity will often result in the listener being offended. If you clearly communicate the idea that someone is a rebellious, condemned sinner and their only hope is Christ, they will likely be less than thrilled. Mark Dever reminds us: "A gospel that in no way offends the sinner has not been understood."⁶

C. Be Honest:

1. Fear of man can lead us to soften, alter, or compromise the Gospel to make it more appealing to unbelievers. We must beware of and counter this temptation. If we compromise the Gospel for the sake of "winning converts," we may actually sell them on a false gospel. As J. I. Packer famously said, "a half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth."⁷
2. Two passages to consider in this regard:
 - a. Galatians 1:8-10 – But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.
 - b. Matthew 7:21-23 – Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'
 - c. According to these verses, what are the results of winning someone to a diluted, compromised message?
3. Remind yourself that honestly presenting the Gospel is more important than simply seeing someone pray a prayer. You are not responsible for your hearer's decision but simply to speak the truth in love. Furthermore, your honest presentation of Christ may plant the seed that results in a conversion many years down the line.
4. Three matters to be honest about:
 - a. First, the decision to follow Christ is costly, and therefore must be carefully considered:
 - i. Matthew 16:24-25 – Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."
 - ii. Luke 9:62 – Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."
 - iii. What are some potential costs an unbeliever may have to pay in following Christ? [Think especially of an overseas context.]
 - b. Second, the decision is urgent and therefore must be made: 2 Corinthians 6:2 – Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

⁶ *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 64.

⁷ Introductory Essay to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2002), 2.

- c. Third, the decision is worth it and therefore should be made: John 10:10 – The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

D. Be Urgent:

1. If Christ is the only way to reconciliation with God and rescue from His wrath, how could a Christian not be urgent in his appeal to sinners? If you don't feel affections of urgency and compassion about those without Christ, that probably indicates your walk with the Lord is unhealthy (or worse).
2. An urgent appeal to trust Christ is modeled in biblical evangelism:
 - a. 2 Corinthians 5:20 – Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
 - b. Hebrews 4:7 – "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."
 - c. 2 Corinthians 6:2 – Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.
3. The manner in which you communicate the truths of the Gospel reveals how sincerely you believe the truths themselves (cf. conversations you've had with telemarketers who didn't believe in their product). Consequently, communicating a sense of urgency highlights the gravity and truthfulness of the claims of Christ.
4. Communicate the idea that people should not wait until a better offer comes along. Christianity is the only religion which offers full and complete forgiveness and the possibility of assurance of salvation.
5. Downplaying the consequences of failing to trust Christ can actually deceive your hearers. Don't communicate the idea that rejecting Christ is no big deal or that the consequences are tolerable or imaginary.

E. Be Joyful:

1. The Gospel is a message of "good news." God loves rebels and desires to be reconciled to them. Not only that, God has done everything necessary for reconciliation. This news should be received with joy.
2. One of the Apostle Paul's main ministry motivators was joy:
 - a. 2 Corinthians 1:24 – Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.
 - b. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 – For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.
 - c. 2 Timothy 1:4 – As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.
 - d. Philippians 1:25 – Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.
3. The Bible is clear that joy in God is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, an evidence that you have the life of God within your soul (Psalm 16:11; John 15:11; 17:13; Galatians 5:22; etc.). If Christ has brought us joy, we should communicate joyfully that others should be reconciled to God. What can/should a Christian do if they lack joy in their walk with the Lord?
4. Guilt-driven, artificial, joyless presentations of the Gospel actually distort the truth of the Gospel. Grim evangelists communicate a grim Gospel which doesn't seem like *good* news at all.

5. Even as we honestly communicate the costs of following Christ, we communicate the idea that it is worth it. As Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

F. Pray:

1. The Bible frequently links prayer and evangelistic effectiveness. Consider what is the person asking for in the following verses (underline the request):
 - a. Ephesians 6:18-19 – Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.
 - b. Matthew 9:37-38 – He said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'
 - c. Romans 10:1 – Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.
 - d. Colossians 4:3-4 – At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.
2. Based upon these above verses, what might be some biblical evangelism prayer requests we should pray? Summarize the requests in two or three words.
3. Praying for unsaved friends and family is also one of the most effective means of increasing your burden to share Christ. Can anyone here testify to prayer being a means of increasing your compassion for the lost?

Conclusion:

- I. Someone explain one of our responsibilities in evangelism. How could this responsibility be practically implemented?
- II. What are some potential dangers that might arise if we confuse our responsibility in evangelism? What might we attempt to do if we thought that someone's conversion were dependant upon our persuasiveness or eloquence?
- III. How many of the above responsibilities are related to your personal holiness? Pick one and explain the relationship.
- IV. What one point from this lesson most stood out to you and why?

Language Barriers⁸

Explain the following terms in your own words, as if you were talking with someone who had no biblical background. Do not use any of the words listed in your explanations. Use synonyms where possible or a short phrase; no long sentences.

1. Grace: _____
2. Lost: _____
3. Saved: _____
4. Born again: _____
5. Repent: _____
6. Justified: _____
7. Atonement: _____
8. Propitiation: _____
9. Spiritual: _____
10. Holy: _____
11. Sin: _____
12. Salvation: _____
13. Saving Faith: _____
14. Redemption: _____
15. Believe: _____
16. God: _____
17. Trinity: _____
18. Gospel: _____
19. The finished work of Christ on the Cross: _____
20. Bible: _____

⁸ This handout comes from *Evangelism Core Seminar Teacher Notes* developed for Capitol Hill Baptist Church, available at www.9Marks.org.