

Evangelism

Evangelism is declaring the “good news,” the “glad tidings,” that the promised one has come. Only Christians can evangelize, because only Christians carry this good news. Believing that “the promised one has come” requires that a minimum body of truth be known before someone can subscribe to it. Who was promised? Why was he promised? What did he do? How am I to respond? What is the impact of believing? What do I do next? Anyone can testify to what they know or believe. Anyone can proselytize their beliefs. But to evangelize, we need to be able to convey a specific body of truth to others. And to be good at it, we need to be able to convey it logically, clearly, simply, and dramatically.

The truth we proclaim is what distinguishes Christianity from every other belief system. I can believe that the sky is green. It can be my personal truth, even if it’s objectively false. It isn’t a danger to someone if I believe it. I can even try to persuade others to believe the sky is green. That’s not what we are doing when we evangelize. We’re not trying to get others to believe what we believe. Christianity isn’t defined by our insight, opinion, or way of life. Christianity is defined by the truth of the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are objective and historical facts. They are dangerous facts. Whether we believe them or not will determine if we spend eternity in heaven or in hell. We’re not trying to persuade people to wear imaginary clothes. We have been entrusted with the truth of the Gospel. We must earn that trust by learning what that truth is, how best to teach it, and why it is essential to proclaim it to the world.

Evangelism and Ignorance

You don’t have to know everything to be saved; but you must know enough. Reflecting back on my own conversion, I’m startled by how little there was in the gospel that made me hand my life to Christ. I couldn’t explain the Trinity (but I knew Jesus was God). I didn’t understand the nature or process of justification (but I knew I was sinner, and his death saved me from hell). I couldn’t pronounce sanctification, or define my eternal rewards (but I knew I’d have to repent if I was to have eternal life). I knew these things, but my overwhelming *need* for God is what drove me to him, through Christ. I felt, heard, and experienced God’s call on my life. That goes against much of what I have heard and read over the last 25 years. I simply knew that if I remained in control of my life, there would be no peace, no purpose, no passion, and no contentment in my soul. There were no other viable alternatives around which to order my life: not politics, not law, not philosophy, money, religious practices, humanism, fame, family, career – nothing. It would all pass away. It was all meaningless apart from God; just smoke and mirrors. I wanted desperately to be changed in the core of my being, in my heart of hearts, not just in my head. I felt empty inside, hollow. And I knew of no other way to fill that void than by coming to Christ. I was driven into his arms. I was hounded there. And I found my delight there.

It was only afterwards that I began to understand the wonder and the mystery of God’s grace and sovereignty. All I needed to come to Christ was to obey this verse: *If you confess with your lips that Jesus Christ is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (a fair paraphrase from the Greek - Rom. 10:9). Even the concept of Lordship wasn’t fully formed in my mind. How Christ could be both God and Man was a mystery that I could not fully grasp. What part the Holy Spirit played in all this was unknown to me. I couldn’t

even articulate the gospel that I had heard, if indeed I heard it at all. All I knew was that I was lost, and Christ was found; and in finding Christ, I was no longer lost. I had found my headship, my destiny, my identity, and my calling. He was leading me to the Father who had loved me with an everlasting love. I was coming home to the kingdom of my Creator. And I was welcome there. Nothing else mattered. Nothing. I wasn't reasoned into the kingdom. I didn't *choose* Christ. I didn't subscribe to any "gospel offer." I responded to *him*, and acknowledged *him*, and embraced *him*, and submitted to *him*.

The call is very simple. It is understood by anyone whom God has been beckoning. The children of God are already convicted of their sin, already longing for peace, already searching for their Source and their Completion. What we do when we evangelize is to confirm what their condition is apart from Christ, and then we unveil for them what they have been searching for. We reveal to them their eternal identity in Christ, an identity written on their foreheads before the foundations of the world, a name written in the Book of Life for redemption by Christ, and engraved on the walls of heaven in mansions reserved for them. Grace, grace, it is all of grace. Thanks be to the God and Father of us all.

Evangelizing vs. Witnessing

But I was incapable of evangelizing in such a state of ignorance. I could *witness*. I could *testify* to my condition, and my need. I could testify to what I was told, and what I understood at the time. But I could not explain the Gospel, the person of Jesus Christ, or God's eternal decree. Here is Spurgeon's description of me as a new believer. He writes,

There have been many men in the world who have not been at all adapted for this work; and, first, let me say that AN IGNORAMUS IS NOT LIKELY TO BE MUCH OF A SOULWINNER. A man who only knows that he is a sinner, and that Christ is a Savior, may be very useful to others in the same condition as himself, and it is his duty to do the best he can with what little knowledge he possesses; but, on the whole, I should not expect such a man to be very largely used in the service of God. If he had enjoyed a wider and deeper experience of the things of God, if he had been in the highest sense a learned man because taught of God, he could have used his knowledge for the good of others; but being to a great extent ignorant of the things of God himself, I do not see how he can make them known to other people. Truly, there must be some light in that candle which is to lighten men's darkness, and there must be some information in that man who is to be a teacher of his fellows. The man who is almost or altogether ignorant, whatever will he has to do good, must be left out of the race of great soul-winners; he is disqualified from even entering the lists, and therefore, let us all ask, brethren, that we may be well instructed in the truth of God, that we may be able to teach others also.¹

We see here that evangelizing, as distinct from witnessing, requires some minimal knowledge of the truths of the bible. The burden of evangelizing is placed on the one speaking the gospel, not on the one hearing the gospel. The hearer doesn't need to know as much as the speaker. He only needs to know enough to understand his dilemma, and what to do about it. And so, as the Gospel is presented, the hearer is going to have questions. The speaker must be prepared to give an answer for the hope he has.²

¹ Spurgeon, Charles, **Soul Winner** (Christian Digital Library Foundation <http://www.cdlf.org>), Chapter 3.

² **1 Peter 3:15-16** Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. NIV

Evangelists are Teachers

Evangelists are first and foremost *teachers*. It is only logical that teachers must know more than their students, or they cannot teach. They have not only read the bible, and applied its truths to the way they live; they have also organized, summarized, and memorized its teachings. That way they can present its truths to a novice in a way that helps the hearer grasp the import of what is being taught. And what is being taught is doctrine. Doctrine simply means “teachings.” The person who says that church doctrine or doxology (spoken praise) is man-made, is ignorant and should not be allowed to teach, or to evangelize. Spurgeon writes,

It is ours, then, to give men something worth their hearing; in fact, to instruct them. We are sent to evangelize, or to preach the gospel to every creature; and that is not done unless we teach them the great truths of revelation. The gospel is good news. To listen to some preachers, you would imagine that the gospel was a pinch of sacred snuff to make them wake up, or a bottle of ardent spirits to excite their brains. It is nothing of the kind; it is news, there is information in it, there is instruction in it concerning matters which men need to know, and statements in it calculated to bless those who hear it. It is not a magical incantation, or a charm, whose force consists in a collection of sounds; it is a revelation of facts and truths which require knowledge and belief. The gospel is a reasonable system, and it appeals to men's understanding; it is a matter for thought and consideration, and it appeals to the conscience and the reflecting powers.

Hence, if we do not teach men something, we may shout, "BELIEVE! BELIEVE! BELIEVE!" but what are they to believe? Each exhortation requires a corresponding instruction, or it will mean nothing. "ESCAPE!" From what? This requires for its answer the doctrine of the punishment of sin. "FLY!" But where to? Then you must preach Christ, and His wounds; yes, and the clear doctrine of atonement by sacrifice. "REPENT!" Of what? Here you must answer such questions as, What is sin? What is the evil of sin? What are the consequences of sin? "BE CONVERTED!" But what is it to be converted? By what power can we be converted? What from? What to? The field of instruction is wide if men are to be made to know the truth which saves. "That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good," and it is ours as the Lord's instruments to make men so to know the truth that they may believe it, and feel its power. We are not to try and save men in the dark, but in the power of the Holy Ghost we are to seek to turn them from darkness to light.³

Facts Are Not Enough

The task of the evangelist is to present the facts without being cold, indifferent, or argumentative. He cannot intellectually persuade a non-believer, for reasons we've already established in this course. And yet he is obligated to address any intellectual barriers that block a person from recognizing his current condition, or from believing that Christ has changed his condition. “Teach gospel doctrines clearly, affectionately, simply, and plainly, and especially those truths which have a present and practical bearing upon man's condition and God's grace.”⁴

Emotion is Not Enough

An evangelist is not to press the hearer into making an emotional decision that ignores or pushes past the critical issues. We don't use argumentation, music, art, or vivid imagery to force a decision that the mind has not embraced. It's a waste of our time and theirs. **Matthew 13:20-21**

³ Spurgeon, Charles, *Soul Winner* (Christian Digital Library Foundation <http://www.cdlf.org>), Chapter 1. He quotes Prov. 19:2 here.

⁴ Spurgeon, *Ibid.*

“The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time.” We want to get those roots embedded in the soil. That means taking the time to plainly describe what makes the Gospel “good news.” Revivalism has led to the habit of getting “decisions for Christ” with no foundation in fact or doctrine. The seeker is placed in an environment that is conducive to emotional or sentimental compliance, without reasoned consideration of the deeper issues of sin and salvation. They “accept Jesus into their heart” without any inkling of what that means. I’m not sure I know what that means either. Such converts become half-hearted in their devotion and repentance. Typically they fall away within the year.

That’s what happens when an evangelist fails to impart to his hearers the foundations of the faith, the quality of faith required, and the object on which to place their faith. Those who are converted by persuasive power alone have no idea what they are getting into. An evangelist is obligated to make full disclosure of the identity of Jesus Christ, the nature of his sacrifice, and the purpose of his righteousness. The Church doesn’t need “decisions” – it needs *commitments*. And commitment requires conviction about the veracity of the truth upon which the Church is built. That’s what we’re studying in the bible. That’s what we’re organizing in our heads. And that’s what we’re memorizing so that we’re prepared when the need arises. We are not all given to be evangelists (Eph. 4:11), but we’re all called to proclaim the Gospel (Mk. 16:15).

Establishing a Dialogue

What’s the worst that can happen when we evangelize? There are only three responses we’ll ever get: yes, no, or not now. The “not now” response means they need additional information, or else it is a polite “no.” We don’t have the right to make the “not now” choice for them by moving the crucial question to another day. That is their choice to make. And so we ask, “Is there any reason why you wouldn’t want to come to Christ right now?” Whoa! Wait a minute. That’s a salesman’s device. That’s *pressuring* them to buy what we’re selling! No, it isn’t. It all depends on the tone of your voice.⁵ You sincerely want to know if there is something keeping them from Christ. Let them tell you what it is. If you prefer, ask it this way: “Is there something about what I’ve shared with you that you don’t understand, or that you’re uncomfortable with?” Let them tell you. You might be shocked to hear that most of those who say “not now” actually do want to get more information before they commit to Christ. They are delightfully impressed that someone with conviction has taken the time to talk to them about the deeper things of life. Hopefully, you’ve been gracious, generous, and kind in what you’ve said. You’ve been sincere and loving, asking them questions that matter, and answering with the kind of information that excites and intrigues. Hopefully, you’ve engaged in a dialogue and not a lecture.

⁵ The problem is not that we sound like salesmen, but that salesmen sound like us. Some of the best how-to sales books on the market make no bones about lifting their techniques from the pages of Scripture. Many of them even quote bible verses. What makes us different, is that we’re not selling anything for profit. We’re not judged or paid by the number of sales we make. We’re not comparing our product against someone else’s. We’re not trying to create a market for our product. That means we’re not pushing the advantages of Christianity as a way to have a better and easier life. It’s not a way to gain friends, fame, and fortune. Christianity is not a better mousetrap in need of advertising and promotion. We’re proclaiming truth and life over lies and death. The Gospel speaks for itself. It has a pre-determined market. We’re looking for lookers. They are heirs to the kingdom, and we’re the messengers with the good news. They’ll recognize the call when they hear it. They will respond according to God’s will. We don’t sweat the outcome, because we can’t control it. We’re providing enough information for the elect to make an informed decision, moved by the Holy Spirit, and then we’re walking them over the bridge.

If your approach has been to establish a dialogue, then you will receive back from this person exactly what you demonstrated to him or her: honesty, sincerity, openness, and loving concern. If you were careful not to offend them by your behavior, so that they could only be offended by the message, then you have done your job. They will be careful not to offend you in return. If you are ruled by fear as you present the Gospel, it will be blatantly obvious. Not only will you be uncomfortable, but you will make them uncomfortable as well. Keep this in mind: should they say “No,” they won’t be rejecting you. They will be rejecting Christ. You’re only the messenger. But we need to ensure they are indeed rejecting the message, and not the messenger. We need to be careful not to draw attention to ourselves, or else they may reject *Christ* because of *us*. What does that mean? For a start, be sure your breath is fresh, your hair is combed, and your body is clean.

Setting the Stage

If this is a stranger, give them your name and then ask for theirs. Don’t forget the person’s name! Ask them to spell it. Repeat it right away. Visualize spelling it in your mind. Associate it with something to help you remember it. A person’s name is the most precious thing they have. Use their first name as you speak to them. Maintain eye contact, but don’t be intense about it. Relax. Smile. Enjoy the time. You aren’t shaking hands because they’re your project for today. You’re shaking hands because you are genuinely interested in them. You have a precious gift to give to them, and you need to know if this person is looking for that gift.

What I’m saying is this: you must have conviction, but you also need sincerity. Ask more than you say. Listen more than you talk. Who is this person? What are his needs? What are his motivations? We need to obtain his permission to ask personal questions. There’s a way to do that. We call it FORM: family, occupation, recreation, and message. We ask him about his family, what he does for a living, and what he enjoys as a hobby or does for fun. These are not perfunctory questions. We’re obtaining the information we need to tailor our presentation to who he is as a person. He has an identity. We need to find out what it is. What currently defines him in his own mind? And as we ask, we listen for the message that is inevitably given to us: what is important to him, or what is on his heart today? And then we’re going to introduce him to Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all things. And we’re going to share with him what Christ intends for him, personally and particularly.

The Greatest Story Ever Told

In essence, and at heart, the evangelist is a *story-teller*. The story has plot, rhythm, voice, characters, tension, movement, conflict, and resolution. *We need to learn to tell a good story*. When presenting the gospel, there are three common mistakes we make in telling the tale:

1. We turn Christ’s story into our story by substituting our testimony for the gospel; it isn’t about our experience of the truth; it’s about truth itself.
2. We try to cast Christ as a victim in order to evoke sympathy or guilt on the part of the seeker; thus we turn the gospel into an emotional appeal, instead of a call to believe.

3. We try to force a decision without getting sufficient information about the listener, or giving sufficient information about Christ; either they don't know where they fit into the story, or they don't know where Christ fits into it.

Number three is the key. You see, there are always *two stories* being told to the listener in any gospel presentation: their story and Christ's. As ambassadors, as storytellers, our job is to show each person how these two stories are related – interwoven – and what this person's role is in the greater story. We need their testimony to use as evidence to convict them of their need for Christ. We can't tell them directly that they need Christ. It's not only rude and presumptuous to do that, it's also ineffective. We need them to tell us that they are looking, before we can tell them we have what they've been looking for. We must uncover their conflict before we can provide them with its resolution. They are lost sheep. We are leading them to the Shepherd.

First Approach: The General Story

In broadcast evangelism, such as an evangelistic crusade, there is a general story that is told to evoke an internal conflict in the audience. The evangelist often gives a very emotional and detailed description of everyone's need for meaning, purpose, acceptance, and love. Enough descriptions are given to ensure the audience will identify with at least one of them. If you've listened to Billy Graham or Luis Palau, you will hear a familiar litany of appeals. "Perhaps you're like this; maybe you're like that..." This is followed by Christ's sufficiency to meet all those needs. Then comes an altar call, accompanied by the choir singing "Just As I Am" – some cynically refer to this appeal as the "cattle-call." It works because the Holy Spirit has prepared these folks for a lifetime. We're not necessarily preparing soil, planting seeds, watering, and feeding when we broadcast evangelize, although sometimes that's what we do. We may simply be gathering up the fruit of someone else's labor: the harvest is already ripe for picking.

Second Approach: The Tailored Story

One-on-one evangelizing is the more difficult of the two approaches, for both the listener and the evangelist. There is no stadium in which to hide, no faceless crowd to preach to. This is very personal. It is face to face, and eye to eye. Every one-on-one gospel presentation begins as a mystery. Therefore, it requires an investigation into this particular person's life and condition. We need to ask probing but not offensive questions to help us gather information. We want to create an accurate picture of who this person is, and whether God has laid hold of him. We're going to do some active listening. In response to what we find out, we're going to respond in one of three ways:

1. we're going to scatter new seed, or
2. we're going to water and feed established seed, or
3. we're going to harvest.⁶

We are *not* going to prepare the soil! That's the job of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 13:6-9). We need to acknowledge our role. We cannot turn goats into sheep, or rock into soil. That's God's role.

⁶ This is not referring to the harvest at the end of the age (Mt. 13:30-39). It is referring to gathering up the sheaves (Mt. 9:37).

Five-Point Outline of the Gospel – fill in your favorite verses for each.

Memory Verses

1. God's Love and Justice	
2. Man's Rebellion - Sin	
3. Law of Sin and Death – Punishment/Judgment	
4. Christ our Intercessor, God in the flesh	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross – His death for our debt 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurrection – His righteousness for our sin 	
5. Salvation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by Grace alone, not by works 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • through Faith alone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ belief (the facts presented are true) 	Explain this in very simple terms such as 1+1=2, or the sky is blue. Faith is not an emotion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ trust (demonstrating our belief) 	Give an example of Christ as the object of your own faith, and how that impacts your behavior.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in Christ alone (not Christ plus...) 	

The Call –

Having presented the facts and truth of the gospel in a relevant manner, we ask the same question that Christ asked of his disciples, “Who do you say I am?” A decision must be made, and now is as good a time as any to ask our seeker for one. The answer will be yes, no, or not now. If it is *yes*, then his confession of Christ will be a point by point response to the gospel. This is what we refer to as the *Sinner's Prayer*. The sinner will respond with five points:

- An admission of his guilt under the Law
- A confession of Christ, acknowledging that he is his God, and his Savior
- A declaration that he repents of his sin by turning from them
- An agreement to publicly identify with Christ through baptism
- A commitment to do what is right in God's sight, by the power of his Spirit (This is a good place to repeat that this is not what saves him – it is a thankful response to what Christ has already done on his behalf, a demonstration that he belongs to him, and that he desires to honor Christ by his obedience.)

Why the call? In parliamentary procedure, we posit a question, we have a discussion, and then we call for the question. In other words, we end the discussion, and demand an up or down vote on the question. That call is what we often leave out when making a Gospel presentation. It demands that the listener respond to what has been said. It calls for a commitment one way or the other. Many believers avoid the call for just that reason: it is *confrontational*. We leave it for another day. We continue an endless “process” of tire-kicking and negotiation.⁷ Presenting the gospel is more than having an interesting philosophical conversation. We aren’t displaying our knowledge of Scripture, or bandying the finer points of theology. It’s not an exercise in verbal eloquence, reasoning, argumentation, or accommodation. This person’s very soul is in peril. He may die in a car accident after leaving our discussion and be unable to respond. She may be called away to another city, and we’ll never see her again. They may never have another opportunity to come to Christ. This is our opportunity, right now, in this moment. We must not shirk our duty. This is what we have prepared for. This is what we have prayed for. God has brought together our preparedness with this opportunity, and we need to take advantage of it.

Leading them in Prayer –

They don’t know what to say, or how to confess these five points, and so we lead them in prayer. First we list the five points very briefly so they know what’s about to happen, and what they are confessing to. We ask them, “Do you understand and accept these things?” If they answer no, then we ask what it is that’s troubling them. Remember, this is a dialogue. If they are satisfied, we explain to them that we are about to lead them in prayer. “I’m going to lead you in prayer right now. This is kind of like a wedding ceremony. I’ll say it first, and you repeat after me. OK?” They usually say OK because they’re really grateful that they don’t have to figure this out on their own. And so we begin to pray as if we were them. Use short and simple phrases. Pause and wait for them to repeat each one. When they have done that (perhaps with some help), then we go on to the next one. When we’re all done, we say, “Amen! Welcome to the kingdom of God my brother (or sister) in Christ! You have received the Spirit of God in all his power.” Now we give them a big hug or a handshake.

What Next?

I find that this is one of the toughest points of evangelism. I have a new believer that needs to be discipled. Do I hand him over to some new believer’s program at church and wish him well? Do I tell him to go home and read the bible and call me with any questions he may have? Do I invite him over for dinner and work on a personal relationship with him? I could do all of these things and still fail him. The last person I brought to Christ asked me, “What next?” With a twinkle in my eye and a mischievous smile, I said, “This is the great part! You get to sit on a hard wooden pew and listen to a floor show, a stand up comic, and a book review every Sunday for the next thirty years! Isn’t that exciting?” He hesitated because he didn’t know if I was serious or not – it must have sounded like his worst fears were being realized.

⁷ Please don’t misunderstand. We can’t force the question. They may have legitimate issues that they’re wrestling with, as I mentioned earlier (see page 4). If you haven’t read *The Sacred Dance* yet (Lesson 16a), this would be a good time to do that. I’m only saying that there is a point at which this person needs to be moved off the mark. They may be waiting for us to help them do that. Even if they don’t say it out loud, they want to know, “What do I do next?” We need to recognize when the moment is right, and tell them what to do.

I sighed, smiled, and looked him straight in the eyes. I gave him the truth that I wish every evangelist would share with a new convert. “You are about to embark on the greatest adventure of your life. The Lord of the Universe has called you into his service. You are now an ambassador of Jesus Christ, a minister of the gospel, and a member of the greatest jail-break team to ever grace the planet! We’ve got to get you fed and equipped so you’re prepared for the fight. Are you ready for that?” A big grin broke out on his face as he realized with relief that the Christian faith is anything but boring, anything but bland, and anything but sedate. He wanted to know how quickly we could get started. I said, “Today. Right now. And I’ll be with you every step of the way.” But that’s another story.