



## Evangelism – Sunday School

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### Start the audio recording

Often I am asked a question at this point of the course: What are we to do in those situations where we are sharing with a person who has questions that are related not to our personal conversion story but to some essential element of our faith, questions that are often challenging to answer? That brings us to the third category of material we need to be prepared to share if we would hope to be effective in evangelism.

### III. Apologetical material.

To round out our preparation for sharing the gospel with others, it is critical that we not overlook the importance of apologetics (which is why we had Dana teach on the subject for one-whole hour). While not all Christians are called to receive rigorous training in apologetics so as to engage in debates with atheists or others as a regular part of their ministries, all Christians should prepare themselves for answering some of the hard questions we often face when sharing the gospel.

**Close notebooks for a moment.** Can you think of an example of the kind of difficult questions we sometimes face when sharing the gospel?

A couple of examples of such questions include: “How do you know Jesus rose from the dead?” Or, “How do you know the Bible is inspired?” Lack of preparation for answering such questions will often leave our hearers feeling either like they have convincingly proven our faith wrong or like our faith is so shallow and unconvincing that it is not worthy to be believed. What should we then do to prepare?

I know that Dana covered some of this in his lecture and thus there will be some overlap, but I hope you still find it beneficial.

A. We should first prepare as best we can to respond to such questions with **intelligent, biblically sound answers**. When Peter commands us to be ready to make a “defense” (1 Pet 3:15), he means we are to be ready to use arguments that sufficiently support what we believe, making those who oppose our faith unable to prove us wrong. We should aim to explicate, affirm, and vindicate our faith in the face of uncertainty and skepticism. We should put forth sound, reasoned arguments that confirm the things we believe to be true, that answer the questions raised so as to clear away the confusion and show more clearly the reasonableness of our faith. This is part of the reason why Luke collected the materials he used to write his gospel account, namely, because he believed that eyewitness testimony and careful historiography would help persuade the recipient of his letter, Theophilus, to know for sure these things were true and hence to be believed (Luke 1:1-4).

B. We should second prepare to answer those questions we do not know how to answer with

**humility and honesty.** We have to face the fact that we are not omniscient, and thus none of us is always able to answer every question in the best way. Even when we put in much effort and hard work to prepare, there will still sometimes be questions we do not know how to answer. In such cases many experienced apologists and mature Christians agree that the best answer is to admit our uncertainty about how to answer the question and to tell the person that we will search for an answer and get back to him/her. Humble honesty is always more attractive than pretend omniscience birthed in pride, and it certainly more honors the Lord. I know that my proud efforts to look like I know the answer to a question I did not have never won someone to believe in Christ, and often have just made my faith look stupid too.

Let me quickly mention two more things that are important to remember under this point.

- First, you are going to make mistakes in your arguments – we all do. Do not allow this to so discourage you that you give up. Instead be motivated by failure to study up to become an even better apologist for Christ.
- Second, many people will not think your arguments are convincing, no matter how logical and true they are. You must remember that we are fighting not only with false arguments, but that there is also a spiritual veil covering their eyes so that they cannot understand. So, make sure to pray that God would remove that veil so that the person or persons you share with will be able to understand the reasonableness of our faith and will believe.

C. We should thirdly prepare to answer not just with words but also as those who have **hope**. Please look with me at 1 Peter 3:15. There we read, “but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” We are to prepare to apologetically respond to those who ask questions about our faith by explaining to them the **hope** we have in Christ. The implication is that unbelievers will notice by the way we respond to difficulties that our hope is in Christ and not in pleasant earthly circumstances.

Notice that Peter wrote that the hope is “in” us. The apostles did not teach a separation of the inner life and outer life. If there is hope in us, it will be externally manifest and unbelievers will see it and ask for an explanation. Is the hope we profess to have in Christ so manifest in our lives that people see it and ask about it?

Remember: One of the most powerful testimonies to those who oppose our faith /// is our hope. Not just a hope spoken of but a hope that resides in the heart and flows out in our actions and words. In other words, we explain the “reason” for our hope, but it should be that they already see this hope in our lives.

Living in hope is a critical part of our apologetical witness to the lost.

- It tells them that the God we believe in has given us great treasures in heaven that far surpass the value of the treasures of this world.
- It tells them that God is with us always and that His love is better than life itself.

In short, when we live in hope, our explanation of our hope will have a much more powerful impact upon those listening.

In sum, three important steps for preparing to deal with apologetical questions include: (1) Prepare to respond with intelligent, biblically sound answers, (2) be ready to humbly and honestly admit you are unable to answer a question if you do not know the answer, but then also go and try to find an answer,

and (3) be ready to answer as those who have hope.

I do not plan to cover more on this aspect of evangelism here, as Dana has already done a good job in his lecture on Apologetics during the first week of class. If you are interested in reading more on the subject, there is a good book in Chinese that introduces this subject called “Every Thought Captive” by Richard Pratt. You will also have a whole course on Apologetics at some point in your studies at this school.

Because people we seek to evangelize often have questions that fall into this realm, a failure to be well prepared to grapple with such questions will in some cases cause a person to be unwilling to talk further with us about the gospel. Thus, an ability to provide a reasoned response to questions concerning our faith is an important skill all Christians should learn to some degree if they would wish to more effectively engage in many of the evangelism situations God will grant.

A final question for this section: How do we know at which time we should use which of the three categories of material we have looked at in relation to our evangelism? I am referring here to 1. The Content of the Gospel, 2. Our PCS, and 3. Apologetical material. Again, the situation will clue us into // what element is most needed for that time.

- When the person is arguing against the existence of God, what would you recommend? your conversion story will not prove persuasive.
- For someone who already believes God exists but is yearning to know Him personally, what would you recommend? apologetical arguments for God’s existence would be superfluous.
- And in some situations you will find yourself using two or even all three categories, with one category leading into another, as, for example, “apologetical” arguments often open someone up to be willing to listen to our conversion story.

We must learn to rely on the Spirit’s leading and seek to responsibly use the thinking skills God has given us to understand what is going on in each situation and to respond appropriately. **But ultimately, we must aim to convey the content of the gospel, because it is only by understanding and believing the gospel that one can be saved.**



**1. Take some time to answer each question below.**

- What is the most difficult question you have been asked when sharing the gospel?
- How did you answer it at that time?
- How would you change your answer if someone were to ask you that question today?

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Excursus:

What do we do when we are faced with a potentially explosive situation, where the person we are talking with is obviously seeking to catch us in a wrong answer and is not really interested in pursuing the truth? Sometimes we can use questions to answer questions.

Have you read the section in Newman's book about asking questions – Part 1?

Let us take a couple of minutes to discuss the book. The questions I want us to discuss include the following.

- A simple overview of the content of the book

Evangelism involves...

- Declaring
- Defending
- Dialoging – this involves asking questions

Answering questions with questions is a useful tool for assisting in the work of evangelism.

- Key lessons you learned from the book

- Any weaknesses found in the book

Thank you for your answers. I hope you found the book helpful.

Some have rightly noted that Jesus often answered questions from others with questions. One example would be Luke 20:1-8, where the chief priest and some scribes and elders asked Jesus by what authority he was doing the things He was doing. Jesus answered them in verses 3-4, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me: Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?"

Newman writes of an experience he had of using a question to answer a question.

Once a team of skeptics confronted me. It was during a weekly Bible study for freshmen guys that we held in a student's dorm room. The host of the study, in whose room we were meeting, had been telling us for weeks of his roommate's antagonistic questions. This week, the roommate showed up—along with a handful of likeminded friends. The frequently asked question of exclusivity arose, more an attack than a sincere inquiry. "So, I suppose you think all those sincere followers of other religions are going to hell!" "Do you believe in hell?" I responded. He appeared as if he'd never seriously considered the possibility. He looked so puzzled, perhaps because he was being challenged when he thought that he was doing the challenging. After a long silence, he said, "No. I don't believe in hell. I think it's ridiculous." Echoing his word choice, I said, "Well, then why are you asking me such a ridiculous question?" I wasn't trying to be a wise guy. I simply wanted him to honestly examine the assumptions behind his own question. His face indicated that I had a good point, and that he was considering the issues of judgment, eternal damnation, and God's righteousness for the first time in his life. The silence was broken by another questioner, who chimed in, "Well, I do believe in hell. Do you think everyone who

disagrees with you is going there?” I asked, “Do you think anyone goes there? Is Hitler in hell?” (Hitler has turned out to be a helpful, if unlikely, ally in such discussions.) “Of course, Hitler’s in hell.” “How do you think God decides who goes to heaven and who goes to hell? Does He grade on a curve?” From there, the discussion became civil for the first time, and serious interaction about God’s holiness, people’s sinfulness, and Jesus’ atoning work ensued. Answering questions with questions turned out to be a more effective, albeit indirect, way to share the gospel.... When I asked my dormitory interrogators if they believed in hell, I paved the way for the concept of divine judgment. Many ideas that are central to our gospel message—God’s holiness, people’s sinfulness, Christ’s atoning work on the cross, and people’s responsibility—are alien today for many people. Questions bring these concepts into clearer focus for consideration and even acceptance.<sup>1</sup>

Answering questions with questions is not the only way, and a direct answer is in many occasions preferable. Jesus did so with the question “Which commandment is the most important of all?” (Mark 12:28-31) But using questions to answer questions can help us turn the situation from one of attack to one of discussion. It often exposes the questioner’s assumptions and puts him on the defensive.

This, then, wraps up our material for Part 2 of Section 3, the Content of Evangelism. We have looked at the Content of the Gospel, our Personal Conversion Story, and Apologetical Material.

Are there any questions at this point?

### Part 3: Strategies for evangelism

There once was a pastor who knew what the goals of his church were to be but did not have a strategy for how to reach those goals. He had carefully studied through Ephesians 4 and understood that the church was to aim for all the members to attain to the unity of the faith and to become mature in Christ (v.13). However, what actions should the church take to reach those goals? He had no clue. Or perhaps his problem was that he thought planning was “unspiritual.” Whatever was the case, no one in the church knew what to do to achieve those goals, and so no one was able to contribute in any meaningful way to see those goals reached.

Now, that story was just made up. Surely there could not be anyone so out-of-touch with reality as to think that having goals without a strategy to reach those goals is going to accomplish what is hoped for. Strangely, many of our churches today approach evangelism like this. We know what the goals are to be, but we have no strategy in place for reaching those goals. As a result, we do not reach our goals. And should that be a surprise? Remember, without a strategy you will not accomplish much of anything.

Having looked at the content of evangelism, a next important step of preparation is to think through how best to strategize the church’s evangelism outreach. When speaking of strategies for evangelism, I am referring generally to ...

- setting goals,
- determining actions to achieve those goals, and then
- mobilizing resources to execute those actions.

While the details are unique to each church and each church’s leadership should prayerfully work this out together and with their congregation, yet the church and especially its leadership should keep in mind that

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<sup>1</sup> Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism*, Kregel Publications, Locations 321-382, Kindle Edition.

it has a responsibility to strategize for evangelism. This should involve a two-pronged approach:

- (1) The church should intentionally plan to evangelize, and
- (2) The church should encourage spontaneous evangelism.

### **I. The church should intentionally plan to evangelize.**

It is easy to allow our schedules to get so filled that we never have time to evangelize. But as we have seen, evangelism is something all Christians have a responsibility to participate in, and so if we are “too busy,” we need to take some time to reevaluate our schedules and see if there might be some way to rearrange things so as to give some time to this work. I am sure, if we are thoughtful in our rescheduling, that many of us can find some time.

Strangely, some Christians think that making plans for evangelism is to usurp God’s sovereignty. It is working in the flesh rather than walking in the Spirit. But as we have argued elsewhere, planning is a God-like skill given to humans at the time of creation. It is good when used to accomplish God’s will, and thus when used in the area of evangelism it is most certainly a means to glorify God.

To reinforce this point, briefly consider with me Matthew 10:5-15.

<sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. <sup>9</sup> Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, <sup>10</sup> no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. <sup>11</sup> And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. <sup>12</sup> As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup> And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup> And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. <sup>15</sup> Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

In this passage we see that Jesus has a plan BEFORE His disciples encountered anyone. That plan included instructing them and then intentionally sending them out to share the gospel. Jesus obviously did not view pre-planning as quenching the Spirit (as some do today), and neither should we. In short, if churches are going to imitate Christ, they should do likewise and make real, concrete plans for evangelism.

Please note: If something is found to be ineffective, do not give up, and do not think God is displeased with your efforts to evangelize. Simply pray for wisdom and make some adjustments so that you can hopefully see more effectiveness in your efforts. But also remember that there are seasons of planting as well as reaping, and a recent lack of response may mean you are in a season of planting. So keep at it with the hope that at the time of reaping there will be a larger harvest.

#### CSantiago’s example

Whitney says, “Unless we discipline ourselves for evangelism, it is very easy to excuse ourselves from ever sharing the gospel with anyone.”<sup>2</sup> Whitney believes that the key to actually doing evangelism is to plan for it—for Christians to actually put it into their schedule rather than just wait around for opportunities to come to us.

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 108.

## II. The church should encourage spontaneous evangelism.

Often opportunities for evangelism are unplanned but just come and sit right next to us. Perhaps we are on a bus to go see a friend and a person sits by our side who obviously wants to talk. Perhaps our coworker calls us for some advice on how to handle a difficult situation. The possibilities are numerous, but we often either fail to see the opportunity, or wrongly believe ourselves exempt because we are already tired or think the time inconvenient.

Consider the following letter from a man named Steve, who comments on how he began to learn how to practice spontaneous evangelism:

As I read your words, I couldn't help but remember a guy I met in Boston just 4 weeks ago. I was there for a Christian conference but he was there because his job was to shine shoes in the hotel lobby. I, and hundreds of others, walked past him several times my first day there without a thought. Finally, I decided to stop. He said his name is Charlie and he is from Uganda. I sat down, not for a shoeshine, but to show a genuine interest in this guy that nobody seemed to notice. I probably talked with Charlie for 30-45 minutes that day and I learned a lot about what it was like growing up in Uganda during the reign of Idi Amin. I felt the pain of a man who saw his mom get shot and killed when he was but a boy, and who saw the same thing happen with his dad just a few years later. He told me how he stayed in the woods with his dad's body for three days hoping that he would come back from death, and how he then grew up orphaned and homeless. And I listened to this man ask me a question that he's been asking himself, and God, all of his life, "Why am I still alive?" A door to share the gospel had opened up, an opportunity I would not have had if I had continued to ignore Charlie that day. From this experience I have come to realize that our lives are full of "Charlies" ... like Narender who worked at our corner convenience store (he's been to our house a couple of times and came to our Christmas Eve service), or Jared at the local OfficeMax (we've gone to lunch, during which he opened up to me about his life and I was able to share with him how Christ had changed my life), or Aaron at Costco (I walked out of the store with him during his lunch break and ended up praying with him while sitting on the curb near the parking lot), or ... You see, they're everywhere.<sup>3</sup>

We need to repent of our lack of love for our neighbor and take advantage of these opportunities by reaching out to those around us. We need to be praying about and looking for unexpected occasions God providentially gives. We need to be strategizing even for these evangelistic situations we have no way to predict or plan.

In sum, if the church is going to fulfill the commission Christ has given us to evangelize the lost, we must use strategy to intentionally and spontaneously reach out to those around us who do not know Christ.

First, answer the question in the box.

Please rehearse the Gospel Outline together with each other.

Take time to talk about opportunities from this past week, struggles, joys, and about opportunities for this coming week.

Pray together.

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<sup>3</sup> Erik Raymond, "Why I don't Evangelize," <http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/erikraymond/2007/02/28/why-i-dont-evangelize/>



**3. Take some time to answer each question below.**

- What has been the most helpful point of this section for you?
  
- Why?