



## Evangelism – Sunday School

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Preparation for Evangelism

- Attitudes necessary for evangelism
- The content of evangelism
- Strategies for evangelism

### Part 4: Important principles for conducting effective evangelism

After exploring the first three matters related to preparation for evangelism, namely, (1) attitudes, (2) the content, and (3) strategy, we now turn to a fourth matter of preparation: Principles important for conducting effective evangelism.

Most of what is covered below has been or will be touched on in other parts of this course, but I wanted to give some greater depth here for furthering our understanding of how to effectively conduct our evangelism. In particular, I would like us to look at 3 things: (1) We must have contact with the lost, (2) We must separate from the world, and (3) We must contextualize our person and our message.

#### I. Have contact with the lost

**It should be obvious that we are going to have to have contact with the lost in order to evangelize the lost.** Why then even mention this point?

Usually, the longer a person is in the church, the more likely his proportion of friends will shift from mostly non-Christians to mostly Christians. That is, over the passing of time, most Christians are more likely to have an increasing number of Christians with whom they share their lives (which is good), and a decreasing number of non-Christians with whom they are friends and can share the gospel with (which is not good). While the church should become our new family and our closest friendships should be developed with Christians, we must avoid bunkering down and not having any contact with those outside the faith.

Should we really befriend non-Christians? As we will argue at greater length below, in one sense we should. Remember the example of Christ. It was one of the criticisms of Jesus' enemies against Him that He was a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34). So, if we are going to imitate Him, we too should be making friends with the lost. But also remember that His purpose for doing so was especially one – He said plainly that He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).



1. Take a few minutes to think up and write down some settings in which we can engage with the lost for evangelistic purposes.

What did you write down?

Here are some examples of what we can do...

- **Do** eat out with them, eat at their house, or have them to your house to eat.
- **Do** go to a park or museum or some other “safe” place with them where there will be no temptation or allurements to sin.

Hence, my brothers, we need to get out of our church-fortress and into our neighborhoods among the lost. We need to befriend those who are not Christians in order that we might be able to share with them the gospel.

Do not misunderstand. We must pursue holiness. However, Christian holiness is not the avoidance of those who live in the darkness at all costs. Actually, holiness includes going into the darkness, letting our light shine without compromise, and bringing people out of the darkness by the power of the gospel of Christ.

So, the first principle for conducting effective evangelism is that we must have contact with the lost.

## II. Be separate from the world

**While we must have contact with the lost in order to evangelize them, we must also remember our calling to be separate from the world.**

In Leviticus 18:2-4 we read, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God.” Here we are told that God’s people are not to imitate the world around them. We are not to follow their practices. Therefore, as we befriend non-Christians in order to bring them the gospel, we must beware of the real danger that we might begin to imitate them in ways not in keeping with the revealed will of God.

2 Corinthians 6:14-16 tells us not to be unequally yoked with or have a partnership with or fellowship with unbelievers. This does not mean we should have no association with them whatsoever, but only that since we have fellowship with God, **we must not have anything to do with the idolatry of pagans, nor may we adopt their values or practices.**

Hence, I would argue that we are to maintain our distinctiveness as God's people in real ways even when we are trying to find ways to connect with the lost and share the gospel with them.



2. Take a few minutes to think up and write down some settings we should **not** enter into in order to engage with the lost for evangelistic purposes.

What did you write down?

Here is an example from my context...

- **Do not** join family members in the worship of ancestors, as such a practice is idolatry.

Be mindful of these things and do not allow your integrity to be compromised or smudged by wrongly engaging in practices that are offensive to God and contrary to His Word just because you think it will assist your evangelistic efforts.

Of course, **remember there will be some “grey areas” here, that is, things that some may feel free to do that others do not, but either way these things are not sin in and of themselves.**

- Some people will not want to go to the beach, for the sight of the opposite gender in a swimsuit may cause them to stumble.
- Others will not want to drink a glass of wine, for in the past they were an alcoholic and do not want to face the possibility that they might fall back into that sin.

With respect to these kinds of practices, we are free to act according to our consciences. But with respect to anything that would jeopardize our integrity and throw us off the pathway of holiness, we must refuse to participate, even if it means we will not be able to spend time with an unbeliever we had been hoping to share the gospel with.

So, the second principle for conducting effective evangelism is that we must be separate from the world.

### III. Contextualize our person and our message

**We must understand our audience and **their** world, and adjust the way we conduct evangelism so as to try to best connect with where they are at.**

This kind of connection or contextualization involves two parts: our person and our message.

## A. Our person

We are Christ's ambassadors, and as such we are to go into all the world and implore people to be reconciled to God through Christ. What does this require of the ambassador? In short, **we should be willing to adopt the ways and practices of our target audience insofar as it assists the communication of the gospel while not in any way violating the principle of separation from the world.**

Consider with me what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. <sup>19</sup> For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." While free and not belonging to any human, Paul made himself like a slave to others for the purpose of winning them to Christ. Paul sought to remove all unnecessary stumbling blocks in order to make the gospel more clearly understood by those to whom he was preaching. He did not hold on to his Christian liberties when they might offend or confuse his audience. He did not serve his Jewish guests ham, or require his Gentile guests to be circumcised before he would welcome them into his home. **Aside from sin, Paul was willing to adopt any practice or set aside any practice in order to bridge the gap between himself and those who was seeking to reach.** In doing this, Paul was simply imitating Christ's incarnation, by which Christ took on human flesh in order to save us fallen humans.

Again, please remember to pursue integrity in this matter. Nowhere did Paul say he became an idolater to the idolaters. In other words, he did not sin in order to reach sinners. While he was willing to adopt many of the practices of the people and give up many of his own preferences all for the sake of winning more to Christ, he did not abandon the truth and adopt error. In fact, the phrase "for the sake of the gospel" in verse 23 confirms that Paul is not advocating relativism but instead relevance.

So, contextualization in evangelism first involves our person.



3. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions.

Are you willing to adopt the non-sinful cultural characteristics of those you seek to evangelize in order to win more of them to Christ?

What would that involve in your life? Please give some specific examples.

Can you think of some examples of mistakes you or your church have made in

this area? Please explain. What could have been done different?

What are your answers to these questions?

Let us turn our attention to the second part of contextualization: our message.

## **B. Our message**

The gospel is the power of God for the saving of those who believe (Rom 1:16-17), and thus we must never change the content of the gospel in order to try to better attract a person to “believe,” lest we make our message impotent and leave our hearers unable to understand what they must believe in order to be saved.

For example, if we remove the unpleasant call to repent, many more may be willing to come and “believe,” all because there is no call to put away their idols and turn away from their other sins, but in the end they will perish, for as Jesus taught, if a person does not repent, he will perish (Luke 13:1-5). Such a distortion or watering-down of the gospel is always heinous, for though it may attract more people to “believe,” it leaves them blind to the true way of salvation, and hence is worthy of an anathema (Gal 1:6-9). We should never change or dilute the content of the gospel.

But presenting the gospel content accurately is not the only thing we must consider about our message when conducting evangelism. We must also give careful consideration to how we can best connect the message to our hearers or “contextualize” it. There are at least two important factors that we should especially pay attention to.

### **1. We should consider the cultural/historical background of the person we are speaking with and their exposure to the message of the Bible.**

We see in the case of Paul, for example, that when speaking with Jews, he was able to speak about the history of Israel revealed in the Old Testament, for they were familiar with it and could understand (Acts 13:13-42). But when speaking with pagans in Athens (Acts 17), who had little to no exposure to the message of the Bible, Paul began with a contact point in **their** culture, in this case an altar with the inscription “to the unknown god” he found among their objects of worship (v.23). He also began with a universal contact point, namely, creation (v.24). He did not make the mistake many make today: speaking first about things totally disconnected with the people’s cultural background, causing them to have no idea what he was talking about. Instead he began with something they could understand and identify with. Of course, he eventually proceeded to the heart of the gospel, something many among them found foolish and hard to understand, but he moved there from things they could relate to with the hope that they would be able to better see the connection the gospel has with their lives.

So, we must pray that God will give us wisdom, but must also do some research like Paul did so as to know where to begin in our evangelistic efforts, that we would do so in a way that connects with our hearers and takes into consideration their cultural background and exposure to the Bible. At the same time, we must make sure that we eventually get to the gospel by which alone they can be saved.



4. What cultural/historical background would you recommend American Christians pay attention to when addressing American non-Christians with the gospel? Take some time to write down what suggestions you would have for someone who is trying to share the gospel to each of the following types of people. **I want you to write down cultural/historical background by which to connect the gospel to their understanding of life, not write down the gospel itself.**

- A middle-aged business person indifferent about religion
- A Catholic lay person
- A Marxist college student

What did you write down?

**2. We should consider relevant current cultural contact points and events that help us connect the gospel with the world in which the person lives.**

In Luke 13:1-5, there were some people who told Jesus about the blood of some Galileans Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus then expanded upon this and spoke of the tower in Siloam that fell and killed 18 people. He then uses these two recent events to issue a call to repentance. He was not averse to using things that were happening in the world in which the people lived in order to make contact points for sharing the gospel with them.

If we are going to effectively evangelize, we must also consider the world in which the person lives and events happening within his world, and see if there are any useful contact points that can help form a bridge over which we can better connect the gospel with the person to whom we are speaking.

Consider the following story from a church planter working in a hard-to-reach area of the world.

I went to a tea party the week Obama won the election (in 2012), and I knew the topic would come up. I did some homework about Mormonism and Islam. There is a whole Wikipedia entry devoted to comparisons between the two sects. Sure enough, at the tea party one friend brought up Romney and Mormonism. I explained the basics – that Joseph Smith said he got a special message from an angel from God even though no one else saw the angel, that he said the [New Testament] had been changed and only the Book of Mormon was correct, that many people followed him, that Christians fought against him, and that he had strange ideas like polygamy. I got to share the message twice, each time only one woman listened – both were lawyer’s wives. They each said, ‘That’s just like Islam,’ very early on in my explanation. I explained that Joseph Smith did no miracles to prove that his message was really

from God. I asked, ‘If I told you I had seen an angel and got a book from God, would you believe me?’ They said no. I asked, ‘If I turned this water into wine, would you believe me?’ ‘Maybe.’ ‘What if I healed Ibrahim Tatlises (partially paralyzed pop singer from Turkey)?’ ‘Maybe.’ ‘What if I raised Baris Mancho (popular Turkish singer who died in 1999) from the dead? Would you believe me?’ ‘Yes!’ So I said, ‘Jesus did all these things. He brought a message from God. He turned water into wine. He healed the sick. He raised the dead. This is why I believe Jesus.’ Alas, there was no outward sign of an inward change. I have been praying every day for Beth and Jazzy.<sup>1</sup>

Here is a Christian who considered a current major world event (the U.S. election) and its religious dimensions, did a little homework to prepare, and then went into a social gathering using this event as a springboard to evangelize some people who are lost. He was wisely practicing the principle of using relevant current cultural contact points and events to assist him in the task of sharing the gospel.

5. What would you recommend as **current** cultural contact points and events that American Christians can utilize when sharing the gospel with American non-Christians? Again, take some time to write down what suggestions you would have for someone who is trying to preach the gospel to each of the following types of people. **I want you to write down current cultural contact points and events by which to connect the gospel to their understanding of life, not write down the gospel itself.**

- A middle-aged business person indifferent about religion
- A Catholic lay person
- A Marxist college student

What are your answers to these questions?

In sum, if we are going to carry out effective evangelism, we must prepare ourselves by carefully thinking about how we are communicating the gospel message.

- We must firstly consider the cultural/historical background of the person and his exposure to the message of the Bible.
- We must secondly consider relevant current cultural contact points and events.

Wrapping up this section on contextualization, we have argued that in order to effectively prepare for evangelism, we must give due attention to (1) our person and (2) our message. We want our person to be faithful to walk in holiness and our message to be true to biblical revelation, but we also want to remove unnecessary obstacles that in any way hinder our communication of the gospel to the lost.

This then concludes Part 4 of Preparation for Evangelism. Up to this point we have looked at...

- Attitudes Necessary for Evangelism

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<sup>1</sup> “Praying for Evangelists and to Be a Better One Myself;”

- The Content of Evangelism
- Strategies for Evangelism, and
- Important Principles for Conducting Effective Evangelism



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

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

First, answer the question in the box and then share your answer with each other.

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.