



Evangelism – Sunday School

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For the last several weeks we have been looking at the large section of this class covering Preparation for Evangelism. We have discussed...

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

Part 5: Common mistakes made during evangelism

Knowing what you should talk about and not talk about, what you should do and not do when entering certain situations is often helpful. When growing up, my parents would take time to talk with me before we did anything new, to tell me how I should and should not speak to the others present, and what I should and should not do in that particular situation. It might be that we went to watch a tennis tournament, or that we had people over to our house for a meal, but whatever the case, they always wanted to make sure I had a good understanding of what was correct speech and practice.

In a similar manner, I would like for us to further our preparation for effective evangelism by looking at some common mistakes people make when they do evangelize. Some of these matters have been touched upon elsewhere, but I want us to take a more focused look at them here to impress upon us that these mistakes can harm to our evangelistic efforts and hence must be avoided as much as possible.

First, I am curious: Have any of you made mistakes in evangelism? What are some mistakes you have made in evangelism?

Here are some examples of mistakes I have seen or done.

- A. Sometimes we assume non-Christians already know what we are talking about.** When engaged in a discussion with a non-Christian involving the gospel, we sometimes use words or phrases they do not understand, or that they understand differently than we do. We need to be aware of this and take the time to briefly explain our usage of the word or phrase; or, it may be best not to use the word or phrase at all but instead to use a simple phrase to explain the idea. Otherwise, we can easily confuse the non-Christian and hence lose the whole discussion.

Can you think of a word or phrase commonly used when evangelizing that should either not be used or should be explained and not assumed as understood?

Here is an example: Christ

What do most people in China today understand the word “Christ” to mean?

According to the Bible, “Christ” is the Greek term for the Hebrew term “Messiah,” which means “anointed one,” set apart to fulfill an important service in the purposes of God; the Christ is the one whom God promised He would send to save His people.

How would a misunderstanding of this word affect a lost person’s understanding of the gospel?
He would not be able to believe in the true Christ and hence could not be saved.

And when we use even more difficult theological terms like “imputation,” the problem of failed communication only increases.

So beware of assuming non-Christians will know what you are talking about if you use “Christian” language when you talk with them about the gospel.



1. Think about these words.

- Sinner
- Savior
- Eternal life

First write down how each term would be understood among non-Christians.

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Then try to simply define each term in a way that is true to the biblical meaning and yet understandable to a non-Christian.

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How did you find the exercise? Difficult or simple? Why?

- B. Sometimes we try to say too much when it is not the right time.** We become excited about an opportunity to share with a person about Christ and forget to consider timing. We do not notice that the situation is not appropriate or the person himself does not have time.

Example 1: Perhaps we are at a wedding and someone has just said something that provoked us to want to respond with a simple gospel answer. However, we forget what is going on and begin to talk more and more about the gospel, all the while the person is not listening because he wants to pay attention to the next part of the wedding program.

Example 2: Perhaps a coworker is in the middle of writing a report for work and just smiled when we said something about enjoying the sermon last Sunday. We then mistake this for a time to settle down and talk, and interrupt his work with a long presentation of the gospel, all the while he is thinking about the report he needs to finish writing.

Can you think of another example?

What should we do when such a situation arises?

Perhaps we could tell the person we would love to sit down with them sometime and talk more about such things, and even try to set a time.

- C. Sometimes we try to appear enthusiastic when we are not really so, and sometimes we are so dull that our lack of passion is plainly seen in our deportment.** Some people put on a show. They do not really care about the person's soul, do not really rejoice in the truths they are sharing, but they nevertheless try to make it appear they do. For others, they do not even try to put on a show. They share the gospel but are totally dead in their presentation. EE

The ugliness of the first case is that we are presenting a mere act to our audience. Love is not compelling us but some other motive. This is not pleasing to God. And if our hearers are clever and notice our façade, it will severely affect their view of the integrity of the gospel and their response to it. Who wants to believe something which we only pretend is precious to us.

The ugliness of the second case is the same as the first, the only difference being we have not hidden this heart behind some façade but have let it hang out for all to see.

What should we do in such a case? Repent of putting on a sham and plead with God to warm our hearts to the needs of the person we are sharing with **before** we begin sharing and during the sharing. Even more, make sure that our hearts are always warm towards God and the truths of the gospel so that when the opportunity comes, even if we are not prepared, our presentation will be real and passionate.

- D. Sometimes we hide the authority of our message so as to make it less threatening.** Some who

teach evangelism argue that we should talk “as learners, not authorities. You will seem less threatening, and it will take the pressure off of you.”¹ Of course, we must not act as if we ourselves have some inherent authority when speaking with the lost about Christ. By nature we are like all others, mere creatures. And we too were lost sinners before God saved us through Christ. But as Christians, we are ambassadors of the King of kings (2 Cor 5:20), and so we have a delegated authority when we share the gospel. And with that authority we, on behalf of Christ, call people to submit to Christ and His message. Therefore, our goal is not to avoid appearing “threatening,” for our message is exactly that to the powers and authorities of this world, as well as to those who desire to live according to their own ways and not submit to the will of God. Instead, our goal is to make sure, by the help of the Spirit, that we are faithful in our communication of the King’s message.

- E. Sometimes we lose the balance between conveying the truth and touching the emotions.** It is not unusual to find Christians sharing the gospel in a “lopsided” sense. We forget that their whole humanity needs to be addressed with the gospel and mistakenly only emphasize one part.

For example, perhaps we only appeal to the emotions but fail to explain the basic facts of the gospel. We think that the content of the gospel is too rational and might actually suffocate a person’s emotional move to trust in Christ. Thus, we appeal to them with tears to believe lest they perish but fail to clearly explain what Christ has done on the cross to save sinners. As a rebuttal to this approach, Stott wrote: “Our rationality is part of the divine image.... To deny our rationality is therefore to deny our humanity, to become less than human beings. Scripture forbids us to behave like horses or mules which are ‘without understanding’ and commands us instead in our understanding to be ‘mature.’ Faith can only arise and grow within us by the use of our minds. ‘Those who know thy name put their trust in thee’; their trust springs from their knowledge of the trustworthiness of God’s character.”² In short, we must not fail to address the mind of the lost when we are sharing the gospel with them.

Or, perhaps we only tell the facts of the gospel but do not aim to stir up the emotions of our hearer. We ourselves are emotionally dull in the area of spiritual matters, and it sadly is expressed when we share the gospel. As a result, we share in a cold, matter-of-fact way, as if we were simply telling someone about the weather report. It is mechanical and impersonal. There is no pleading with them to trust in Christ. Remember: Truth is the foundation of our emotions, to be sure, but the truth should affect our emotions, and this should be evident when we talk about Jesus and what He has done to save sinners. Indeed, the truth should set our hearts on fire. As a result, our evangelism should be warm and passionate.

Either way we are imbalanced and fail to reach the whole person.

What is the key? They must understand the facts to believe and be saved, and their emotions must be moved in order to be willing to turn and believe with their whole heart. We must not neglect either aspect of their humanity, lest we leave them either in the dark about what to believe and why, or leave them unmoved about their personal need to actually act upon that knowledge and believe.

- F. Sometimes we do not press them to do something but just present the information.** Some groups believe it is wrong to make an appeal to people to respond to the gospel message. They argue that we are simply to set the truths of the gospel before non-believers and God will work

¹ Go “Why do Christians find evangelism so difficult,”

² John Stott, ???

through that to draw the elect.

Paul did not do that. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that he “implored” the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. He pressed them to do something, namely, to respond to his message. Jesus did the same. In Luke 13:23-25 Jesus tells this parable, “And someone said to him, ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’ And he said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’”” Jesus was urging someone who was curious about the number of those saved to instead think about his own soul. And the phrase He chooses to use is “strive to enter.” He commands the man to do something, to respond appropriately to the message and make great effort to “get in.” He tells him that after the door is shut, no one more is allowed in, and those on the outside will have to fully bear the consequences of not responding rightly. Thus, Jesus is in effect saying, “Do not wait! And do not approach this matter half-heartedly. Seek now and seek with all you have!” We should do the same in our evangelism. We should press people with the urgency of the matter and appeal to them to seek with all their heart.

Of course, we cannot “coerce” people to become Christians. We cannot put a gun to their head and say, “Either you believe or you die.” Such use of force may create a lot of false professions, but it will not change the heart and persuade the person of the loveliness of Christ and His gospel. However, we can and should implore and persuade, seeking to make them feel their need for Christ and the danger of not trusting in Him.

Do you press those you share the gospel with to trust in Christ?

G. Sometimes we take the side of the non-Christian who complains about being hurt in the past by a church or another Christian. When talking with a non-Christian about the gospel, they will sometimes share with us about a Christian in the past who they think mistreated them in some way. They may be speaking out of anger or may be trying to show why they think Christians are hypocrites and not to be believed, but whatever, we need to be prepared for this possibility.

How would you recommend we handle such a situation?

I would encourage us to strive for balance in our sensitivity – if the non-Christian had a bad previous experience in church, try to remember two things.

First, be understanding and compassionate! Listen to their story and sympathize. Mistreatment is never a pleasant experience.

Second, at the same time, do not take the side of a non-Christian against Christians. It may be that they misunderstood the Christians, or that they are evaluating the Christians by a non-biblical standard. And even if they are right in their evaluation of what happened in the past, remember that the Christians, if true Christians, are our brethren, and we should honor Christ by presenting a bond of unity while not condoning their bad behavior.

But whatever the case, do try to get back to the gospel. Show that, while all Christians may fail, Christ never does.

These 7 common mistakes in evangelism often have a seriously detrimental impact upon our

As we saw previously, when we evangelize the lost, few things are more important than having the right attitudes. Thus, we are in need of having the Spirit of God arrest us so that we would responsibly subdue our remaining corruptions and be mindful of the glory of God and the predicament of the perishing while we prepare for and engage in evangelism, and prayer (whether our own or others for us) is a key means by which God regulates our attitudes so that we can enter into this task better prepared.

One example of this is found in Ephesians 6:19-20, where Paul asks for the Ephesian Christians to pray that he would be bold. Even an apostle needed prayer for proper attitudes in evangelism. In fact, Paul's request for prayer for boldness intimates that he knew himself vulnerable to the temptation of timidity and fear of men. He knew that without the Holy Spirit working holy courage in him, he might shrink back from evangelism or think of excuses why not to preach the gospel to the lost. In short, Paul had a holy self-awareness, and this enabled him to properly assess himself and see his weaknesses. Only then could he correctly pray for himself and ask others to pray for him. In like manner, we must first plead for God to open our eyes to see ourselves correctly so that we can see attitudes related to evangelism that are unbiblical, and then pray for ourselves correctly.

Incidentally, Paul's request for prayer also reveals his humility. He was not afraid to admit he needed more of God's grace and that he was not yet perfect. On the contrary, he honestly exposed himself to others, sharing his real needs so that he could better do God's work. His goal was not to look heroic in the eyes of others but that God be honored and sinners saved through his efforts of evangelism. And so he humbled himself by exposing an area of weakness that needed prayer. Do we have such humility?

So, pray about your attitudes, and humbly ask others to pray for you in this area as well.

II. We should pray for wisdom in what to say and do.

As mentioned in previously, when evangelizing the lost, there is need to beware of having no contextualization at all, or of going too far in our contextualization. And then there is the tendency to speak in the flesh, saying things that unnecessarily offend, that are totally incomprehensible because they are filled with theological jargon, or that do not in any real way connect with our hearers. Thus we must pray that God would grant wisdom that we would not offend by our own foolishness, that we would be clear and understandable in what we say, and that we would connect the gospel to those with whom we are speaking.

In Colossians 4:3-4 we read, "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." On this occasion, Paul is asking the Colossian Christians to pray that he would speak "clearly" when sharing the gospel with others. He needed wisdom to avoid speaking in a manner that would confuse his hearers, or that would leave them unsure of what he was talking about.

We too need the Lord's wisdom to know what to say and how. Therefore, we too need pray about such things.

III. We should pray for opportunities to share the gospel.

We looked at the importance of strategizing in a previous lesson. While we ...

- should plan how to bring out the gospel evangelistically in our sermons,

- should plan how to reach as many people in our area as possible with the gospel, and
- should plan personally to ask our coworker to lunch or our neighbor to go with us to the park so as to share the gospel with them,

...we must not forget to pray that the Holy Spirit would actually guide us in all the planning and would open doors so that we can accomplish what we are hoping to do.

Again in Colossians 4:3 we see that Paul says: “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...” While we should try to arrange opportunities to share with others, we should first be praying that God would give us wisdom as we make our plans. We should also be asking Him to give us opportunities we would otherwise not have anticipated. In short, pray for both the intentional and the spontaneous elements of your evangelism strategy.

IV. We should pray that God would grant success on our efforts so that the people with whom we share would believe.

While we should diligently engage in all the elements of preparation covered previously, we ultimately must not trust in our own efforts. Perhaps no one has been more diligent in the work of preaching the gospel than Paul, and yet in Romans 10:1 we read the following: “Brothers, my heart's desire and **prayer to God for them** is that they may be saved.” Paul knew that in the end, even with all his hard work, salvation is of the Lord.

Remember:

- First, no man comes to Christ unless the Father draws him (John 6:44).
- Second, the devil has blinded the eyes of the lost so that they cannot see the glory of Christ in the gospel (2 Cor 4:4).

Only God has the power to make our preaching of the gospel successful by pulling off that veil so they can see and believe, and then drawing the person to Himself. Therefore, we should be constant in prayer, pleading with God to so bless our efforts of evangelism that those with whom we share the gospel will be saved.

Beware of conducting evangelism as if detailed strategy, or careful contextualization, with just a routine prayer sprinkled on top, is going to be blessed of God. We need to pray fervently about all areas of our preparation for evangelism, and for God to work through our efforts to save sinners. God is pleased when we regularly remember and admit our own impotence and need for Him to work through our efforts for good to result.

I want here issue a challenge. Most Christians I know readily admit the importance of prayer in relation to evangelism, but when it comes to practicing prayer for evangelism few actually do it, or if they do it, they do it with little earnestness or regularity. One reason why so much of our evangelism is ineffective is because we fail to spend time pleading to God for blessing through prayer. Let me urge you then, brethren, **to be diligent in prayer for evangelism.**

In this third section of our course we have considered several important issues related to preparation for evangelism. We have looked at...

- the correct attitudes necessary for evangelism,
- the content of evangelism,
- strategies for evangelism,
- important principles for effective evangelism,

- common mistakes made during evangelism, and
- prayer.

Lord willing, in the next section we will examine the practice of evangelism.



3. Take some time now to plead with God about this matter of evangelism. I want you to include in your prayers all the things we just covered in this section.

Closing words:

First pray

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