



Evangelism – Sunday School

Start the audio recording

Introduction

I want to begin with a couple of questions: The purpose of these questions is to help us assess our situation with respect to evangelism and hopefully to increase in us a sense of need for the study of this kind of material.



1. What is your personal experience with evangelism over the last year? Your church (this is NOT to be critical of yourself or the church but is simply asking you to share your experience and observations)?

What is your understanding of the practice of evangelism among Reformed Churches?

What are your answers to these questions? PLEASE KEEP YOUR ANSWERS BRIEF.

It is undeniable that, in many places around the world, reformed churches have a reputation for not being concerned about or at least not actually practicing evangelism.

- In part this reputation is due to a couple of major **wrong** assumptions of some who are outside the reformed camp, and
- In part this reputation is due to real failures from those who are within the reformed camp.

Wrong assumptions of some outside the reformed camp

One reason people outside the reformed camp wrongly assume Reformed Christians are not concerned about evangelism is linked back to the early leaders of the reformation, particularly Calvin, whose teaching is said by many to **destroy** all motivation for evangelism.

For instance, one man wrote:

Calvinism is and always has been the death knell of biblical evangelism. I know, I know, there are hyper-Calvinists and there are more “moderate” Calvinists, but at its best, Calvinism casts a chill on biblical evangelism and, at its worst, it absolutely kills biblical evangelism. In its most “hyper” form, it really borders on “another gospel.” It very nearly killed Baptist churches and missions in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹

Is this criticism valid? **We do not have time to look at all that we could look at in response to this criticism, but consider with me at the following brief response.**

First, contrary to many rumors, Calvin, along with most other key reformed figures, was decidedly evangelistic. He promoted the evangelism of the lost. Let us look, for example, at a quote from his book expounding the doctrine of predestination:

“since we do not know who belongs to the number of the predestined and who does not, it befits us so to feel as to wish that all be saved. So it will come about that, whoever we come across, we shall study to make him a sharer of peace... even severe rebuke will be administered like medicine, lest they should perish or cause others to perish. But it will be for God to make it effective in those whom He foreknew and predestined.”²

Calvin states that it “befits” Christians to **desire** that **all** be saved, and that this desire should compel us to try to persuade “whoever we come across” to believe. Moreover, Christians are to use even “severe rebuke” if necessary to try to prevent the lost from ignoring the gospel and perishing. Clearly Calvin believed that Christians should engage in and even exert effort in evangelism, in order that the elect might hear the gospel, believe and be saved. So, Calvin asserts, while on the one hand we know salvation is of the Lord, that He has chosen whom He will save from before the creation of the world and has done so solely based on His good pleasure, on the other hand we are to do all we can to evangelize everyone, even hoping all will be saved. Note: Calvin’s understanding of the doctrine of predestination ...

- did **not** in his mind nullify the necessity of preaching of the gospel,
- did **not** extinguish a desire to see **all** saved.

In spite of Calvin’s stated position, many say the system of Calvinism cannot but kill all incentive to evangelize the lost. As one man wrote: “Now, I don’t care what any Calvinist has to say about it. Calvinism, as a doctrinal commitment, has always had the effect of being a drag, to put it the best way, kindest way, a drag on missions and evangelism.”³

If such were the case, surely we would then expect the Puritans, who for the most part were Calvinists, to have had no passion for evangelism.

However, as J.I. Packer has noted,⁴ though many have thought that the Puritans put little emphasis on evangelism, the Puritans, in fact, viewed it as **one of their major concerns**. Historical records include numerous statements like the following: Hugh Clark⁵ “begat many Sons and Daughters unto God.” Vast numbers of sermons contain appeals to the lost to forsake their sins and flee to Christ for forgiveness.

¹ <https://preachkjb.wordpress.com/2011/11/23/calvinism-the-death-knell-of-evangelism/>.

² John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J.K.S. Reid (London: James Clarke and Co., Limited, 1961), 138.

³ As quoted at <http://founders.org/fj45/calvinism-evangelism-founders-ministries/>.

⁴ These thoughts come from J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, “The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life,” Chapter XVIII, as found on <http://www.the-highway.com/articleJune09.html>

⁵ Hugh Clark (1563-1634) was a Puritan minister who served in Northamptonshire and Warwickshire, England. He was known to be a person of great learning and piety, an excellent and useful preacher, and an acute and powerful apologist for the faith.

Furthermore, the Puritans were the ones who invented evangelistic literature, with such pioneering classics as *A Call to the Unconverted* by Richard Baxter and *An Alarm to the Unconverted* by Joseph Alleine.

While all this is true, it must be admitted that many or most Puritans viewed evangelism as primarily or solely the work of the pastor. Thomas Boston, for example, wrote a book called “The Art of Manfishing: A Puritan’s View of Evangelism,” (have any of you read that book?) but the whole book addresses evangelism as a part of the pastor’s ministry. So on the one hand, the Puritans were committed to evangelism, but on the other hand, their methodology may not have been as comprehensively biblical as most reformed and evangelical churches today. Not that I mean in any way to deride the Puritans. They made great strides in departing from the errors of the Roman Catholic Church of their day, and we are simply standing on the shoulders of their accomplishments and moving forward into a fuller understanding of God’s Word in some areas, including the area of evangelism.

No one would question Spurgeon’s commitment to the doctrines of grace (that is, Calvinism), and yet His sermons and writings, as well as his reputation, all indicate that he was passionate about evangelism. For example, he wrote:

I am as firm a believer in the doctrines of grace as any man living, and a true Calvinist after the order of John Calvin himself; but if it be thought an evil thing to bid the sinner lay hold of eternal life, I will yet be more evil in this respect, and herein imitate my Lord and his apostles, who, though they taught that salvation is of grace, and grace alone, feared not to speak to men as rational beings and responsible agents.... Beloved, cling to the great truth of electing love and divine sovereignty, but let not these bind you in fetters when, in the power of the Holy Ghost, you become fishers of men.⁶

Spurgeon did not allow his confidence in the doctrines of grace to suffocate a proper, biblical passion for evangelism.

Now, there is much more we could say here, but for the sake of time, we will move on. And so, to sum this point up here, this criticism from outside the reformed camp that Calvinism destroys all motivation for evangelism is not valid.⁷

Second, it is also true that this reputation among reformed churches is due in large measure to our own failures.

Failures from within the reformed camp

⁶ Eric Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon: Spurgeon “Speaks for Himself”* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1973) 73.

⁷ Reformed Christians must beware of the hypocrisy of saying they follow in the footsteps of the likes of Calvin or Spurgeon while in fact they do not practice what those men taught and practiced, such as in the case of not leading their church to be earnestly engaged in the work of evangelism.



3. What do you think is perhaps the biggest reason Reformed Christians, by and large, have been weak or have failed in the area of evangelism? Please take 2-3 minutes to write your answer below.

What is your answer to this question? PLEASE KEEP YOUR ANSWERS BRIEF.

From my observations both here and in China, as well as my reading of various books and articles, it seems to me that...

One of the largest reasons Reformed Christians have failed in the area of evangelism is that we have often been **more** concerned with not repeating the errors of Evangelical Christians in evangelism than with seeing lost sinners repent and trust in Christ. As a result, we are very good at discussing why and how Evangelicals are wrong in the way they evangelize, but are very poor at discussing why and how we ought to evangelize, and even **worse** at getting out and actually evangelizing the lost. Yes, it is easier to find Reformed Christians today who are criticizing others for doing evangelism wrongly than it is to find Reformed Christians who are actually **doing** evangelism.

In sum, I believe that while there are wrong assumptions that have led people outside the reformed camp to making some wrong judgments about Reformed Christians and evangelism, there is nevertheless just cause for criticism of Reformed Christians for not being responsibly engaged in evangelizing the lost. This, I believe, is not due to the teachings of Scripture, but is due to our sin, for which we need to repent. In fact, I would argue that **no church is truly biblically reformed if it is not actively engaged in evangelistic activity**, for a church that fails to promote and practice evangelism fails to obey the clear teaching of the Bible on the responsibility of God's people to make evangelism a priority in the life of the church.

May the Lord be pleased to use this SS class on evangelism to help this church make progress in making evangelism a priority in the life of the church.

Section 1

A Biblical Theology of Evangelism

In this section of our course I want us to look at a few foundational questions that link evangelism with biblical theology: Where did evangelism come from? Is it something that started after Christ issued the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20? Or, did it begin sometime before then, and if so, when? And why do we do evangelism, anyway? The goal of this section is to answer such questions.

This section of our course will be brief. I do not feel a need to wax eloquent here, running on and on about how each aspect of biblical theology connects with evangelism. Instead, I simply want us to orient our thinking so we can see how evangelism fits into the big picture of biblical theology, from which I hope we will better understand what evangelism is and how it fits into the overall sweep of history.

In order to accomplish this goal, I am going to follow the pattern many others and I often use when studying a specific biblical topic: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

First look with me at...

I. Creation and Evangelism

When God created man, man was in a state of innocence and without sin. He was living in such a way as to consistently glorify God through his words and life. Hence, he was **not** condemned by the Law, **not** an object of God's wrath, and not separated from fellowship with God. He was happy and holy and enjoyed peace with his Creator. At such a time there was no need for evangelism, for there was nothing from which man needed to be saved.

II. The Fall and Evangelism

When man trespassed God's command, he became guilty of sin and hence was condemned as deserving the judgment of death. He became an object of God's wrath and was separated from God's favor. In such a state, man was doomed to spend eternity in darkness experiencing the full vent of God's righteous anger.

Furthermore, man became a prisoner of his own devices and a slave to sin. He could no longer choose to love and serve God, but could only do the bidding of his new master, sin. And he did not want to love and serve God, because he now was at enmity with God and preferred to follow gods of his own making. In short, his whole being was corrupt.

This predicament was not limited to Adam and Eve alone. Since all humans are the offspring of Adam, they all share in both his guilt and his corruption.

- They share in his guilt through imputation, meaning that his guilt is counted as the guilt of all who are represented by him, which is the entire human race.
- They share in his corruption through being his biological offspring, which means that each and every person is born with a sinful nature.

Because of all this, all humans are in themselves without hope. There is neither anything in us that could merit deliverance from our situation, nor do we in our fallen nature have any desire to be saved out of our sin. For sure, humans, as in the case of Cain, do not want to have to experience the

punishment due our sin, but neither do we want to be reconciled with God and to love and worship Him alone.

From the moment of the Fall, evangelism became necessary.

Man needed a Savior to deliver him from his awful predicament – this being done through the work of Christ in His death and resurrection, and ...

...man needed to be told what he must do in order to be saved – this being done through the work of evangelism.

In addition, evangelism became universally necessary. Since all humans are the offspring of Adam, and hence are born with guilt and a corrupt nature, all alike need to hear the gospel that they might know how to be saved.

So, while evangelism was not needed after man was created, for man was created sinless and in peace with God, after the Fall everything changed, and man became a creature in need of Christ's salvation, which God determined to make known through the means of evangelism.

III. Redemption and Evangelism



1. Who preached the first evangelistic message recorded in the Bible? Where is that message recorded in the Bible? Please take a couple of minutes to write your answer below.

What are your answers to these questions? PLEASE KEEP YOUR ANSWERS BRIEF.

The very first evangelistic message preached was by God Himself. This message is found in Genesis 3:15. There we read: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." These words were spoken by God to Adam and Eve immediately after their fall into sin. God was telling them that He was going to send a Deliverer who would crush the head of their enemy. In the process of defeating our foe, our Deliverer would Himself suffer the "bruising of his heel."

This gospel message is looking ahead to the coming of Christ. Christ suffered death on the cross, but through it He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14-15). Hence, through Christ's victory we are freed from the dominion of the devil so that we might serve God (Acts 26:18). Through this first gospel message, God Himself connects redemption and evangelism and even exemplifies the role of evangelism; that is, in order for one to be saved, he must hear the message of God's salvation through a Deliverer, and **the tool given by God for conveying this message is evangelism.**

An important question appears here: From this point forward, did evangelism continue to take place? Or does it not appear again until the NT era? In other words, are there other instances of evangelism in the OT era, or was this just a type of what was to come in the NT era and we have to wait all the way to the NT era before we see any more evangelism?



2. How would you answer the following question: Are there other instances of evangelism in the OT era, or was this just a type of what was to come in the NT era and we have to wait all the way to the NT era before we see any more evangelism? Please take a few minutes to write your answer below.

What are your answers to these questions? PLEASE KEEP YOUR ANSWERS BRIEF.

Some assert that evangelism did not take place in the strict sense of the word in the OT era. There was no one “telling others about how to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ.” While this is true, as the name Jesus was not known before He came, yet I believe that there was evangelism of a sort during the OT era. Allow me to give several examples.

First, there are situations in which the gospel is communicated through **verbal proclamation**.

- First, we read of Abraham in Galatians 3:8, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the **gospel** beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’” God Himself declared the gospel to Abraham when He called him and made him the father of all who believe. It may not have been as clear or full in detail as we see in the NT, but it is without question that God here announced the gospel to Abraham in seed form. Thus, we see another example of God Himself engaging in evangelism.
- Second, in Psalm 51 we read of David’s repentance after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder that followed. Quoting from Jeremy Walker’s book, David’s “profound awareness of his sin matched by his grasp of the saving mercies of a holy God, the degree to which sin offends God, his desperate need of the cleansing that only God can provide, his soul-wrenching pleas to be brought back to the favor of God...,”⁸ are followed by a promise in verse 13: “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.” Even in the OT era, those who had received God’s forgiveness felt a conscious sense of duty and desire to share the gospel with the lost, that sinners might return to God.
- Third, in Psalm 96:3-5 we read: “³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ⁴ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.” Evangelism was to extend beyond their borders and pour over into the nations. This, of course, is what we call missions and is a discussion for another course. But this passage confirms that the people of God were to engage in evangelism during the OT era.
- Fourth, we read that parents were to instruct their children concerning the things of the Lord that they might know Him (Ps 78:4-7). That is to say, parents had a responsibility to teach their children about God and His great works, especially of His work of delivering them out of Egypt, which is the main OT type of Christ’s work of redemption. Therefore, parents were to share the gospel with their children, again understanding that it was done in seed form.

⁸ Jeremy Walker, *The Brokenhearted Evangelist*, 10.

These examples, then, show that evangelism was done in the OT through verbal proclamation.

Second, evangelism took place through **types and shadows**. Many of the sacrifices pointed to the reality of sin and the need for atonement in order to receive forgiveness. Judgments like the death of the first born in Egypt testified that God is the true God and that one must take refuge in Him if one is going to be saved from His wrath. Types like Joseph “saving the world” through the provision of grain during a famine hinted at God raising up one greater than Joseph to provide bread from heaven by which to save the world. These and other types and shadows were in some way and in some measure speaking to both Israel and the nations about God’s provision of a Savior. Each of these served as an evangelistic tool for declaring something of God’s gospel.

Third, evangelism took place through **prophecy**. For example, in Isaiah 9:6-7 we are told that God will raise up a king from the line of David. His kingdom will consist of peace and righteousness and will endure forever. Or, in Ezekiel 34 we read that God will come to rescue His sheep, not only from their enemies but also from the worthless and wicked shepherds in Israel. These and other prophecies in some measure speak of God’s provision of a Savior, and hence they too served as an evangelistic tool for declaring something of God’s gospel.

Fourth, evangelism was assisted through the **blessings God poured out upon Israel when they walked in His ways**. Think of Solomon. When visited by the Queen of Sheba, she was amazed at the degree of wisdom Solomon had and of the wealth Israel enjoyed. She admitted that all this goodness was from the Lord, the God of Israel (1 Kings 10:9). Such assistance in evangelism through the receiving of God’s blessing is confirmed through the psalmist’s prayer to God in Psalm 67:1-2: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.” God intended to bless Israel so that through Israel the whole earth would know Him and His salvation.

The whole sum of the message through these different means was that God alone is the Lord, and that He will destroy all those who do not humbly come to Him for forgiveness and seek refuge in His promises, these promises finding their fulfillment in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 1:20). Though Israel largely failed in carrying out her mission, the large number of Gentile God-fearers at the beginning of the NT era shows that God’s evangelistic efforts through these different means were not entirely in vain. So, in a real sense, evangelism was a part of the OT era.



3. In the NT era, did evangelism change? If so, in what ways? Please take a few minutes to write your answer below.

What are your answers to these questions? PLEASE KEEP YOUR ANSWERS BRIEF.

On the one hand, it should be clear even to the casual reader that evangelism has changed somewhat once we get to the NT era.

In the first place, evangelism is not primarily that the nations come to us, as in the case of the Queen of Sheba or Naaman the Syrian. Instead, we go to the nations (Matt 28:18-20) – that is, of course, looking at missions as a subcategory of evangelism. We should have the general disposition of going to the lost and not waiting for them to come to us. There will be, of course, times when they do come to us, but we should make “going” to them a general pattern of our evangelism.

Second, we no longer have the types and shadows (though we can use them in our evangelistic presentations), but we have the fulfillment of Christ to point to (2 Cor 1:20), and hence our message is clearer and fuller.

On the other hand, there are some consistencies between the evangelism of the NT era and the evangelism of the OT era. For example...

First, evangelism in the NT era communicates the same gospel. Paul makes it plain in Galatians 3:8 that the message he is preaching is the same as God declared to Abraham. And in Romans 4 Paul again asserts that his message of justification by faith is the same as believed by Abraham and David in the OT era.

Second, evangelism in the NT era is connected to what we say. We are to declare to the world that God has provided a Savior as well as explain to all mankind what His message of salvation is.

Third, evangelism in the NT era is assisted by how we live our lives. When we walk in God’s ways, He will bless us (though in this age such blessing is especially spiritual and not necessarily temporal), and through this He will speak to the lost around us about the glories of His salvation in Christ. **The story of AZhen.**

Therefore, while there are some differences in the way evangelism is carried out between the OT era and the NT era, there are also consistencies.

IV. Restoration and Evangelism

When Christ returns and restores all things, believers will be made complete and enter into glory. At that time, we who are justified and reconciled to God will be totally free from the presence of sin and will be unable to ever sin again. At the same time, we will forever sing praises to the Lamb who was slain for our redemption.

As for the lost, there will be no more opportunity for them to repent as they will all be sentenced to eternal perdition. The day of salvation will have passed and they will never hear an evangelistic message again.

In conclusion, in this section we have looked at evangelism from the angle of biblical theology. We have seen that at the time of creation there was no need for evangelism, for there was no one in need of being saved out of some kind of horrible situation. We then considered what effect the Fall had upon the matter of evangelism. Because of the Fall, humans became guilty and corrupt before God, and hence were condemned as deserving judgment. As a result, we argued that the Fall made evangelism necessary if anyone was going to be saved out of this predicament. We next noted that God was the first one to conduct evangelism, this immediately after the Fall. Afterwards, evangelism was a tool God gave to humans by which sinners could hear the good news that God has provided a Deliverer to deliver us from the consequences of our sin. Evangelism in the OT era and NT era has some differences and some consistencies, the most important consistency being that the content has not changed, though it is now

clearer and fuller. Finally, we briefly noted that at the time of the restoration, evangelism will no longer be a tool used in God's purposes, for the elect and the damned will all be sealed in their eternal state.



4. What is one key point you learned in the lesson today that is related to evangelism?
Please take 2-3 minutes to write your answer below.

What is your answer to this question? (If not a lot of time, break into two groups so everyone can have an opportunity to answer.) PLEASE KEEP YOUR ANSWERS BRIEF.

To conclude our class for today, I would like to do two things.

First, I want to remind you of...the HW you will need to have done by next Lord's Day. This will include...

- There will be no mp3 file to listen to this week.
- Read the books assigned and take notes related to the questions on the syllabus so you are ready when it is time to discuss the books. We will discuss the book by Greg Gilbert during the fourth week (of my lessons, so our fifth week in this class), so read that one first. As you read through Gilbert's book, take down notes of the essential elements of the gospel. We will discuss Newman's book either the 5th or 6th week.

Second, let's take a few minutes to pray, breaking into two small groups.