



Evangelism – Sunday School

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Last week we spent a fair amount of time on Part 1 of preparation for evangelism, namely, our attitudes. I hope we now better understand why proper attitudes are important to effective evangelism and that we take the proper cultivation of our attitudes seriously as we think forward about our evangelistic endeavors in the future.

Today we are going to look at the second part of “Preparation for Evangelism.”

Part 2: The Content of Evangelism

Imagine a doctor coming to tell a patient about his sickness and what needs to be done to cure him. As the doctor is talking, it becomes apparent to the patient that this doctor does not really understand what he is talking about. As a result, the patient loses confidence in the doctor and chooses not to believe what he says, but instead goes to find another doctor. Sadly, many Christians are no better at explaining the gospel to the lost than that doctor was in explaining to that patient his condition and what he needed to do to be healed.

Knowing what is the correct content we should be conveying to the lost when conducting evangelism is essential if we would have reason to hope that our labors would be effective. In this part of our course, I am going to argue that there are three categories of material commonly associated with the content of evangelism. The first and most important is the content of the gospel. The second is our own personal conversion story. The third is apologetical material. The first is the objective facts of the gospel, while the second is a mixture of the objective facts of the gospel plus our subjective experience of the gospel. The third is the use of logical reasoning based on Scriptural truth to answer questions about our faith and defeat arguments against our faith.

I. The content of the gospel.

For many, the essence of evangelism is “telling others about what Jesus has done **for me.**” This is what I call our “personal conversion story.” Our personal conversion story is certainly important, as we will see next week. However, in many instances, most or all of the content of one’s evangelism is recounting how Christ has impacted that person’s personal life. In other words, most people are more inclined to talk about themselves and their experiences when trying to persuade someone to believe rather than explaining the facts of the gospel.

However, Jesus said it is the truth that sets people free (John 8:31-32). It is basic gospel doctrines that the Holy Spirit uses to make our evangelism powerful so that it can persuade sinners to believe. This is why we read in Acts 2:22-39 that Peter preached about Jesus’ miracles (by which He proved He is

the Christ), His death and resurrection, as well as the people's need to repent of their sins, and in Acts 20:21 that Paul testified to both Greeks and Jews of their need to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. To neglect the clear presentation of the basic doctrines of the gospel in evangelism will leave the people we share with unsure of what to believe and why. This greatly dishonors God and leaves the poor hearer on the path of perdition rather than rescuing him off that path. Therefore, communicating the truths of the gospel to a lost person is the number one priority in all evangelistic efforts.

I assume that you have all already read the book "What is The Gospel." I am guessing that most or all of the content in the book was not new to you, but I hope that reading through the material was helpful in solidifying your grasp of what are the basic doctrines we should cover when sharing the gospel with others. A better grasp of these doctrines will enable our efforts at evangelism to be more faithful to the revelation of Scripture and more powerful in persuading people to believe in Christ.

First, I want to hear what are your answers to the questions I gave you for Gilbert's book?



1. Write a simple overview of the content of the book.
2. Write a couple of key lessons you learned from the book.
3. Note any significant weaknesses found in the book.
4. What are the essential elements of the gospel as he presents them?
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Did you find the helpful?

Below is the outline of what I believe includes the basic content of the gospel plus one. I would like us all to **memorize** this outline, including the Scriptures in parentheses (you may choose different Scriptures if you prefer; just make sure they are connected with the idea being conveyed). You also need to know the **content** taught in the book so you can properly fill in this outline, of course, but I at least want to ensure that everyone is able to explain the basics of the faith as given in this outline whenever we share the gospel with someone. Next time I am going to ask us to quiz each other on this outline. Perhaps you can practice it with each other sometime during the week over a Facetime call or something like that.

- There is only one true God. He is the Creator of all things (Gen 1:1). He is holy (Ps 99:5), the just judge of all humans (Ps 96:13), as well as a loving and kind provider of all the things we enjoy (Acts 14:17).
- We are all sinners (Rom 3:10, 23) and under condemnation (Rom 3:19-20), and hence separated from God (Isa 59:2) and justly sentenced to hell forever (Matt 25:41).
- There is nothing we can do to save ourselves from this predicament (Rom 3:19-20; Gal 2:16).
- God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to solve this problem for us (John 3:16). To accomplish this, Jesus died on the cross (Rom 5:8), bearing the punishment we deserved. He then was raised from the dead on the third day (Acts 10:39-40), guaranteeing that all who believe in Him will also receive eternal life (John 3:36).
- To receive the blessings of forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God and eternal life, we must repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 13:38-39; John 3:36). There is no other way to be saved but through trusting in Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12) **Make sure when you evangelize that you do not stop with simply presenting the facts. Exhort people to make a response (that is the apostolic pattern), seeking to persuade them to repent and believe. We know that ultimately it is God who does the convicting and wooing, but He often uses His people's appeals as His instrument to do this.**
- All who trust in Christ become children of God (John 1:12). They have new life and are changed into a people who now live for God and not for sin (1 John 3:9-10). Positionally and experientially.

Here I would like to make a few exhortations:

First, you cannot help others to clearly understand something you do not yourself clearly understand. If you would wish to be clear in sharing the basics of the gospel with others, **make sure you are clear about what you believe and why you believe it.** That is to say, you need a good grasp of basic gospel doctrines before you can effectively evangelize! Otherwise you will not know who the Jesus is that you are trying to persuade them to believe in, or you will not understand why they need to believe in Him. The obvious result is that you will not be able to proclaim to them the true Christ or what He really accomplished on the cross, and hence you will mislead them to believe in a false Christ or a false gospel. Therefore, you are going to have to take time to rehearse through these 6 points and meditate on them.

Warning: When you do so, please do not do it only to “get the outline right,” but do it to better know your God and what He has done to save you so that your heart would be warmed as you rehearse and meditate, in this way stirring up your heart to share with others out of joy and real conviction.

Second, I suggest that you **use lots of Scripture** when preaching the gospel to someone, for it is the power of God by which a person is born again (1 Pet 1:23). But, please be careful to make sure that the passages you choose to share are **relevant** to the topic you are discussing at that moment. Do not recite Scripture just to recite Scripture, treating it like some magic incantation. Each text must be carefully selected so as to ensure it is appropriate to the particular issue under discussion, otherwise it will not support your point and thus not have the powerful effect you are hoping it will make upon the person.

Third, do not forget that **the goal is not simply to take a person point by point through this outline.** You should avoid preaching the gospel this way:

“First, you must understand there is only one God. He is holy and hates sin. He is judge of all and will judge everyone in the last day. Second, we are all sinners. We have all

broken God's commandments..."

No, if we but look at Jesus' talk with the Samaritan woman in John 4 or with the rich young ruler in Mark 10, we will find He did not do that. Following His example, then, our aim should be that we understand the content of the gospel so well that we are able to naturally work from it when sharing the gospel in just about any situation. For example, with an atheist we will want to first emphasize the existence of God, for without their acknowledgement of this point we really cannot go any further in the discussion. However, if we are talking with a Muslim, he will already acknowledge there is but one God and even that we are all sinners. The place to begin with him may be that we are unable to do anything to save ourselves from our predicament, or the person and work of Christ. And if we are talking with a prostitute, she may be quick to admit she is a sinner and not need a lot of time covering this material, while if talking with a regular church goer who is self-righteous, he may need us to spend lots of time explaining the law so that he can begin to see himself more clearly as a sinner. So, we will need to be flexible according to the person we are speaking with and his background. In other words, do not let this outline straightjacket you. What I am hoping for is that we will all initially get the basics down pat so that in the future we always know the essentials of what we should be sharing and these truths will just flow out naturally as is appropriate to each situation.

Fourth, I understand that in the course of a conversation **it will be rare that you will be able to get through every point of this outline**. In most situations the conversation will wind around into other matters or into issues not central to the gospel. In the case where the person you are speaking with has gotten off course, do not be rude or hasty to get on track, but do try your best to find a way to graciously get back to the main topic – the gospel. If you find the person is intentionally trying to change the subject, you will need to pray in your heart for wisdom, for sometimes you may want to go back to the gospel and say something else you think important but that you had not yet mentioned, and sometimes you will just have to leave the matter for another day. You will need the help of the Spirit to discern when to just let it go and when to steer it back to the gospel. But whatever the case, you should not fret if you do not get through every point covered in the outline, but pray that God will use what was communicated to draw the person to Christ. **Remember, it is more common that we will only be able to say one or two simple truths than the whole gospel shpleal, and that is sometimes all the person we are sharing with is able to process at that point.** So, relax.

As an aside, one big concern I wish to point out here is **our own** tendency to ramble all over the place rather than sticking with the core of the message. For example, on one occasion my wife was with a older sister visiting a woman who had been hit by a car. My wife had asked the sister to share the gospel, but the sister instead mostly babbled on and on about her own sins and never got to Christ's death and resurrection. The poor woman they were visiting became impatient with the rambling and did not want to listen any more. Sadly, on that occasion she was left without knowing anything about Christ, but only about this sister's sinful past. We all have this tendency, sometimes rambling about a biblical doctrine that is true but not central to the matter at hand, sometimes rambling about ourselves, and sometimes just rambling aimlessly. Whatever, we should be on the alert for this, and when it happens, we should be quick to get ourselves back on the right track.

Returning to our main point of this section, let us close by looking at a common suggestion about how to make the gospel message more acceptable to the lost. Some assert: "But, would we not perhaps get more people to believe if we just made the message a little less offensive? After all, the most important thing is that we get as many into heaven as we can."



2. Take a couple of minutes to write down how you would respond to this.

What is your response to this comment?

My response includes the following.

First, in Galatians 1:6-9 we read: “⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

Paul here stresses the necessity of believing the true gospel. It is not OK to be a bit off about what you believe concerning the content of the gospel. Adding something like circumcision just to make it a little more acceptable to some does not cut it. A person’s eternal destiny depends on “getting it right.”

Second, in 2 Corinthians 5:20 we read, “Therefore, we are **ambassadors** for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” Paul notes that he is Christ’s ambassador. Of course, Paul was an apostle and so was an ambassador in a unique way, but whenever we call someone to be reconciled to God through Christ, we are acting as an ambassador for Christ as well. Now, an ambassador represents someone and his job is to accurately deliver the message of the one who sent him. He does not have freedom to in any way tweak or change the message he was sent to deliver. In like manner, we are to correctly communicate the gospel message when we share it with others and may not in any way alter it. We may not change anything to better fit what we think should be said. We may not be casual and just sort of get the message right. We are to pay careful attention to what the message is and then make sure we faithfully and responsibly communicate it to those we seek to communicate it to, so that we fulfill the will of the One who has given us this message to share with the lost.

Therefore, we must not be careless in our study of the gospel or our communication of the gospel. If we understand it wrong, we cannot communicate it correctly. And even if we understand it correctly, if we are sloppy or unclear when we communicate it, our hearers may not have any possibility of understanding it correctly. Either way, those listening will be unable to believe and be saved. So again, make understanding the content of the gospel a top priority for your life!

Horton provides us with a helpful exhortation for balance:

The same thing can happen with the Great Commission. We think it doesn’t really matter if we don’t get all the details right, as long as we are zealous. It is easy to subordinate the

message to the mission, the evangel to evangelism, as if being busy with outreach could trump the content of what we have been given to communicate. Of course, it can work the other way too. We can be preoccupied with getting the message right without actually getting it out. The evangelist D. L. Moody once quipped to a critic of his methods, “I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.” If “zeal without knowledge” is deadly (see Rom. 10:2–3), then knowledge without zeal is dead. The Great Commission doesn’t give any quarter to either of these extremes.¹

So, by all means, brethren, lets get out! But first, let us make sure that we accurately understand the gospel so that we can communicate it correctly to those with whom we share it.

To close our time together, first answer the question in the box below. Then take some time to talk about your team evangelism plan or things related to your plan. Finally, pray together.



2. What is something helpful you learned in the lesson today that is related to evangelism? Please take a few minutes to write your answer below.

¹ Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples*, Baker Publishing Group, 23. Kindle Edition.