

## THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM

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### What is evangelism?

The word comes directly from the Greek (*euangelion*) and means "good news," or "gospel." In 1 Cor. 15:3-5 the components of the essential message are listed: (1. "Christ died for our sins. . . he was buried" (NIV) (2. "he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures" (3. "and. . . he appeared" to individuals and groups as large as 500 persons, verifying the resurrection. Paul wrote in verse 2, "By This gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you." The gospel, when truly believed, can indeed lead to salvation. In Rom. 10:9 Paul wrote, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is lord,' [that he *is* resurrected and reigning] and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, [the sign Jesus gave that he was the Messiah, Matt. 12:39-40] you will be saved." Evangelism is communicating the Gospel so that hearers can understand it.

### What is salvation?

Being "born again" (John 3:3) is the equivalent of entering into this salvation. The riches of this salvation, extending into eternity, cannot ever be wildly conceived (1 Cor. 2:9). But it begins when the Gospel is received and believed (1 Cor. 15:1-2). God then makes a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) out of one formerly "dead in . . . sins (Eph. 2:1). The Father, Son and Holy Spirit indwell in the mere human (John 14:17, 23--some believe that only the Spirit indwells and that the Father and Son indwell through the Spirit). The person is transferred out of the "dominion of darkness. . . into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col. 1:13). Not merely as subjects, but as sons (John 1:12), with the Father becoming our heavenly Father (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

As our Father, we have peace with Him (Rom. 5:1) and the invitation to give Him all our burdens (1 Pet. 5:7). He promises to provide for all the needs of life (Matt. 6:25-34). The Spirit comes into the believer's life as the guarantor of eternal life (Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:13-14). He will increasingly produce the character of Christ within (Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Cor. 3:18). The Son will never leave or forsake us, and will produce good fruit, in union with Him (Heb. 13:5; John 15:1-17). This description of salvation is not complete.

The reality of the second birth (and in hard "fields," we may seriously wonder if *anyone* can be saved) is seen in the birth of the NT church (Acts 2:37-41, 47), by the Gadarene demoniac (Luke 8:26-39), by Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-9) and notably by Paul himself (Acts 9:22, among many others. But only a comparative few will be saved (Matt. 7:13-14).

Evangelism is not equivalent to salvation, since someone may understand the gospel and fail to obey it, and remain unsaved. When the gospel is preached, a decision for or against God is required (2 Cor. 5:6:2). While salvation is instantaneous once it occurs, it usually is a process (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 1:18). Paul described the process in 1 Cor. 3:6 as one planting, another watering, while God gives the growth (Jesus called the "message of the kingdom" "seed" (Matt 13:18-19).

### Why should a Christian evangelize?

- a. Certainly we want to share this great salvation with others unless we are selfish. Four Israelite lepers found the camp of the invading Arameans deserted, and began to feast and hoard riches. Then they realized that it was not right to keep the good news to themselves, so they spread the message of deliverance (2 Kings 7:3-10).
- b. Evangelism is not an option for a Christian, however. The Great Commission includes the expectation that Christians will evangelize and disciple some from every ethnic group. Historically, this has meant leaving the familiar and entering into foreign cultures (Matt. 28:18-20). In Acts 1:8, Jesus said that after the Holy Spirit came upon Christians, they would witness of Him at home, in somewhat foreign contexts and in totally foreign environments. Jesus promised Peter and Andrew that He would make them "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). Fishermen do not

normally wait for fish to come to them, but go searching for them with bait. Another biblical analogy describes Christians as "ambassadors," whose work is peacemaking--between God and individuals (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Normally non-Christians do not seek out Christians in order to find God. When we see someone who is headed for hell, we cannot pretend before God that we did not perceive this. Instead, we form a rescue party, including intercessors (Prov. 24:11-12).

- c. God has given every Christian a priesthood, not after Aaron or Levi of the Old Testament. Ours is a "royal priesthood" and our ministry is to reconcile a righteous and holy God to unrighteous and profane people—people exactly like us before we became children of God. Our priestly function is to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Pet. 2:9).

### How do we prepare to evangelize?

- a. Abide in Christ. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5. The way we abide is through obedience to His words. The best ministry preparation we can have is to draw close to Christ and live in obedience and dependence upon Him. He alone makes ministry worth the effort.
- b. We aren't personally competent to evangelize. Paul wrote: "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." 2 Cor. 3:5-6. He also wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13).
- c. We must draw upon the Spirit: "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing." We can and should make the Gospel clear, so that people can love God with their minds, as well as with their heart, soul and strength. God uses instruments to evangelize (Romans 10:14-15). But we cannot save anyone. Perhaps the greatest difficulty you will encounter while witnessing is indifference. Without the conviction of sin, people will not sense a need for God or for any personal remedy. "When he [Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." (John 16:9).

### Evangelism is introducing a person to Jesus Christ

- a. We are introducing people to a Person. We are not introducing people to a plan of salvation, or to an evangelistic program, or to a church or even to us-- but to the Person of God. Who would you like to introduce to Christ?
- b. The heart of ministry is relationships. This is how God relates to us, and how we are to relate to others. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." (1 Cor. 13:1). We may only have 60 seconds or less to build a relationship, but we must try, by our body language and obvious love.
- c. A personal, genuine relationship with Christ is the criteria for whether or not we have eternal life. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:12, NIV). "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matt. 7:22-23). This word "knew" means a personal, experiential knowledge, not a simple knowledge about something.

### God's Effective Call

- a. Before discussing the work of God in evangelism--His call and election--as with other practical elements of Christian living, an interplay exists between God's sovereignty and our activity. From a human perspective, if there is universalism (all are saved) or pluralism (many ways exist to salvation), then evangelism is not good news at all, nor urgent nor crucial, and positively wasteful. A survey of evangelical college and seminary students showed that 32 percent and 31 percent, respectively, did not believe that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone (reported in J.D. Hunter *Evangelicalism: The coming generation*, 1987, pp. 35-40). Some, such as Clark Pinnock, believe that the Untold will have an opportunity to receive Christ after death, based on 1 Pet. 3:18-22. Pinnock makes "the reasonable assumption that God would not reject the perishing sinners who he loves without ever knowing what their response to his grace would be. One doesn't need many texts to figure that one out." ("Toward an evangelical theology of religions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33/3 (1990), p. 368, quoted in W. Gary Phillips' unpublished essay, "Evangelical and pluralism: Current options", p. 9). Phillips maintains that Pinnock is not a universalist. Others hold that people will be annihilated in hell, not suffer punishment (Phillips cites these persons as having adopted, or tentatively adopted this position: C. Pinnock, J. Wenham, J. Stott, p. 11).
- b. The psalmist wrote, "For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens." (Ps. 96:5). Jesus perceived himself to be the only way to salvation, and we have no warrant to believe otherwise. He said that, "**No one** comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6). He asserted that, "All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers." (John 10:8); thus covering religions before him. Hinduism (ca 1500 BC), Zoroastrians (ca 660 BC), Taoism (ca 600 BC), Buddhism (ca 563 BC), Confucianism (ca. 551 BC), and the Jains antedated Christ (*Eerdman's handbook to the world's religions*, Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982, p. 47; dates from *The compact guide to world religions*, Dean C. Halverson, ed., ISBN: 1556617046). Also, Shintoism preceded Christ (ca. 660 BC). He warned that after His departure, "Many will come in my name claiming 'I am he,' deceiving many." (Mark 13:6), thus dealing with false messiahs after Himself.
- c. We are closed in to Christ. "I am the gate;" he said, "whoever enters through me will be saved." (John 10:9). Paul preached, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (John 10:9). Paul preached, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). Truth may be spoken by non-Christians (cf. Titus 1:12-13). God, in common grace, has given some truth to all, along with a measure of intelligence (Rom. 1:18-20). But he claimed to be one with the Father (John 10:30), in contrast to religious leaders such as Confucious, Mahavira, Buddha, Guru Nanak and Mohammed, who did not claim to be God. Jesus confessed to that precise position (Luke 22:70)--those men did not.
- d. Apart from Jesus' assertions and the witness of His disciples, we have the evidence of the resurrection, which was the chief sign He left us to verify His deity (Matt. 12:39-41; 16:21; 1 Cor. 15:4). No one has ever (1. Predicted the time of his return after dying (2. Actually returned as predicted, as verified by over 500 individuals in one post-resurrection appearance. We also have to explain the new lives that His disciples displayed after seeing the risen Christ. For instance, Peter turned from fear to fearlessness (Matt. 26:69-74; Acts 4).
- e. From a theological perspective, Jesus was the only human being not to have inherited the sin of Adam, by which all others have sinned (Rom. 5:12). Jesus, the Word of God, had no beginning (John 1:1-2; Col. 1:16-17). His physical birth was the beginning of his humanity, not His existence (Phil. 2:6-11). Even that birth issued from the Father and Spirit, not from the will of man (e.g. John 1:14; Luke 1:35). Jesus went on to live the only life without sin (Rom. 3:23; 1 Peter 2:22). He qualified, then, to be the spotless sacrifice, the Lamb of God, to atone for our sin (John 1:29; Rom. 3:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). He became the only possible ransom to

satisfy (propitiate) God's anger against our sins, thus becoming the *only possible* mediator between God and us (1 Tim. 2:5-6). So if someone rejects Jesus, the only sacrifice, atonement, mediator and way, there simply *is* no other way under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

- f. "This claim for the unique salvation in Christ has the ring of sounding narrow, unkind, and arrogant: Is there really only one way to God? Would not God allow for other faiths to find Him? This could not be *loving*! Oh, but it is. The most loving thing God could do. Yes, there are other gods, but, no, they do not deliver. They are false gods and offer fake salvations. Like the lure of cheap credit cards, they seduce, they promise, they dazzle. And then they fleece. They demand, they dehumanize, and then they discard with payment of all that we count precious. More is at stake than theological issues surrounding the uniqueness of Christ. Pastoral implications of deep dimensions are closely connected. The Psalmist knew this and wrote, 'Those who pursue other gods multiply their sorrows.' (Ps. 16:3). The most compassionate thing we can do is to expose the powerlessness of other gods and turn people away from their false claims. The kindest thing we can do is hold up the One who takes away the sins of the world. Our most pastoral response is to point them to the source of true hope and abundant life." (E.A. DeBordename, in *Out of Sight*, the newsletter of Anglican Frontier Missions, April & May, 1999).
- g. Steve Brown says that if pagans don't get angry at us, either they haven't *understood* what we're saying, or we haven't given the message clearly.

#### What becomes of those who finally insist upon rejecting Jesus Christ?

They will suffer God's wrathful judgment, resulting in conscious, eternal torment away from God's presence (Matt. 13:49-50; 25:41; Luke 16:19-26; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 20:10-15).

"Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? . . . It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb. 10:28-29, 31, NIV).

Those who never hear: Natural Revelation: But what if someone never consciously rejected or even heard Christ's name? Is that one to suffer the punishment of hell? Every person sins (Rom. 3:23), so everyone needs Christ's substitutionary sacrifice to atone for that sin. So corrupted by sin are we that God declared that not even *one* of us seeks after Him (Rom. 3:11-12). God has left us signposts to Himself, called *natural revelation*. Both God's power and supernatural character can be easily seen in His creation (e.g. the atom, the ant, the red-tailed hawk, the brain, the eyeball, the rainbow trout, trees, the order of the heavenly bodies, the beauty of wild flowers, etc.). People must *consciously* suppress the knowledge of God that should be perceived from nature (Rom. 1:18-20). We do not even take advantage of that limited knowledge of God available to us, so we cannot fault God for not giving us more. In addition, there are today relatively few places on earth so remote that someone seriously seeking God could not find the Gospel, if only by radio. But those places do exist.

Those who do not have an inkling of God's written word still have the natural revelation of what is right and wrong embedded upon their consciences. They still believe, when pressed, that some things are right and others wrong, even if they profess no moral absolutes. In practice they would not approve of their own money being stolen, or their children abused. However few their moral taboos, eventually they will violate one of their *own* laws and become their own accuser (Rom. 2:14-16). So they stand guilty before God by codes of their own making. A single sin suffices to condemn them. Despite the renaissance of eastern religions (philosophies), and the virtually limitless opportunity to improve upon (or destroy) one's spiritual position, God says that we travel

through life but once, then comes death and then comes judgment (Heb. 9:27). "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men." (2 Cor. 5:11).

If everyone is saved without hearing of Christ, then the most effective and best stewardship of resources would be to withdraw missionaries everywhere to *increase* the number who have never heard, so that they would be saved (D. James Kennedy).

How is a person "born again?" If anyone will be saved, it will be because of the mercy of the triune God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16). "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10). "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing." (John 6:63).

How we are not saved: People are not saved by family connections, nor by the desire of others to see them saved (John 1:12-13; Ps. 49:7-8). We cannot save ourselves by amassing good deeds (church attendance, religious acts, praying, giving, good intentions, acts of mercy), which would hopefully outweigh the bad. Scripture is emphatic that we cannot save ourselves (Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:10-12). The lost cannot save themselves by obeying the Old Testament Law, which is obsolete for salvation, nor by a combination of Law and Grace (Heb. 8:13; Rom. 3:19-28; Gal. 3:10-13; James 2:10). No, if anyone will be saved, it will be because of God's mercy (Lamentations 3:22). When praying for the unsaved, God has revealed that He doesn't want *any* to die in their sins (2 Pet. 3:9). We also have grounds to believe that God's mercy extends itself in a special way to children if even one of their parents is saved (1 Cor. 7:14).

How we are saved: The Father saves by choosing the redeemed before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). This is unflattering, because no account is taken of any personal performance. He draws people to come to Jesus Christ, which is why any actually *do* seek for God (John 6:44, 65; 17:2). Is God unjust to choose some over others? No (Rom. 9:14-20)! We *all* deserve to go to hell, frankly, for our sin/s (Is. 53:6; Rom. 3:23; 6:23). In fact, without personal sin, the imputed sin of Adam to us would be sufficient to condemn us (1 Cor. 15:22). Only because of God's mercy is *anyone* redeemed (1 Pet. 2:10). God commands repentance, but also gives it (Acts 17:30; 11:18).

Jesus came looking for sinners in order to save them, while despising the shame of hanging on the cross for us (Luke 19:10; Heb. 12:2). He accomplished that most important task by offering His body as a payment for our sin (Mark 10:45; Heb. 10:5-10; 1 Pet. 2:24). The Father sent the Holy Spirit to us at the request of Jesus (John 14:16, 26; 15:26).

The Spirit alone gives life to the lost (John 6:63). He convicts the lost of their need for Christ and of the alternative consequence of hell (John 16:8). He uses the Word of God to convict of sin (Ps. 119:9; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:3).

Since salvation is so heavily dependent upon the triune God, then "soul winning" must depend heavily upon praying to God to have mercy upon lost people with names. We can pray to the Lord of the harvest (the Holy Spirit, presumably, Acts 13:2) to field workers (Luke 10:2).

### How is Christianity Different from Other Religions?

1. Our God has no limit, yet is personal.
  - a. He is a "Father" to believers (Ps. 139:7-18; Rom. 8:15-16; Luke 11:2)
  - b. He is not just a Creator who has walked away, or a tribal god.

- c. The Lord "stoops to look on the heavens and the earth . . . [yet] He raises the poor from the dust . . ." (Ps. 113: 4-9).
2. Our God is free from sin.
- a. God is holy (Isaiah 6:3), not a super man, complete with faults, as with some Hindu gods and goddesses (Kali), and many religions which worship spirits (animism).
3. Our God is One--a Tri-unity
- a. He is not a god above other gods (henotheism), or one god among many (polytheism), nor on the level of spirits or demons (animism).
- b. These scriptures affirm the Trinity: Gen. 1:26; Isaiah 6:8; Matthew 3:13-17; 28:19; Luke 1:35; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; Romans 15:16; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Thess. 5:18-19; 1 Tim. 3:15-16; Hebrews 9:14; Revelation 22:16-18).
4. Jesus Christ is the only God-man in the world (John 1:1-3)
- a. He is the prophet who also claimed to be God (Luke 24:19; John 10:30). Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, and Mahavira (Jainism) didn't, and are dead.
- b. Jesus calmly said that he was the *only* way to get to the Father (John 14:6). Religions increasingly teach that many ways exist to God (Baha'i, Hinduism [New Age]), or combine elements of various religions (Seventh Day Adventism appears to combine elements of the Law with Christianity). Mormonism combines Christianity with humanism (we can become gods, but will be under the first god [henotheism]). Christian Science combines parts of Christianity with Hinduism and Sikhism combines Islam with Hinduism.
- c. As G. Campbell Morgan has shown, Jesus is the only religious teacher who actually lives in his followers. Others receive teachings--Christians receive Christ (John 1:12), and become His ongoing life on earth (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Revell, 1924, p. 31; John 14:20).
- d. Many religions are controlled by a priesthood. Jesus is the Christian's High Priest, and Christians are themselves a "royal priesthood" (Hebrews 5:1-10; 1 Pet. 2:9).
5. Good Deeds: Other religions require some kind of good deeds to find acceptance with "God." Jesus paid to the Father the full debt which our sin created, by giving His life (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus' work of seeking and saving the lost was completed on the cross (John 19:30; Hebrews 10:5-10). Jesus was once asked, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29, NIV). We are saved by faith in Christ, plus nothing. Faith that saves will be accompanied by good deeds (James 2:17).
6. The Holy Spirit is a person, not simply a "force."
- a. The Jehovah-Witnesses and New Agers teach an impersonal Spirit. But the Spirit can be lied to and grieved (Acts 5:3; Romans 8:26-27; Eph. 4:30).
- b. His power is not used for the Devil, as is "white and "black" magic, and other demonic forces.
7. Our holy book, the Bible, is unique.
- a. It contains predictive prophecy, many written hundreds of years before fulfillment. Prophecies concerning details of the birth, life and death of Christ have been fulfilled in detail (Micah 5:2; Isaiah 40:3; 35:5-6; 50:6; 53:2-10; Psalm 22:16-18; 16:10; 68:18; Zechariah 14:4).
- b. Prophecies concerning cities and nations such as Tyre, Edom, and Israel have been fulfilled (Ezekiel 26:1-14; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 37:1-14). God, who controls the future, isn't reluctant to speak of it, which is an unanswerable test to the truth of the Bible.

1. Packer notes two proofs for *our* belief in God's sovereignty in salvation. First. We thank God for saving us. Second, we pray for others to be saved (pp. 12-15). "I think that what you do is to pray in categorical terms that God will, quite simply and decisively, save them: that He will open the eyes of their understanding, soften their hard hearts, renew their natures, and move their wills to receive the Saviour. You ask God to work in them everything necessary for their salvation.
2. The balance between sovereignty of God and personal responsibility. "You would not dream of making it a point in your prayer that you are not asking God actually to bring them to faith, because you recognize that that is something He cannot do." (p 15).
  - a. "The root cause [of denying God's sovereignty] is the same as in most cases of error in the Church--the intruding of rationalistic speculations, the passion for systematic consistency, a reluctance to recognize the existence of mystery and to let God be wiser than men, and a consequent subjecting of Scripture to the supposed demands of human logic. . . . They are not content to let the two truths [man's responsibility and God's sovereignty] live side by side, as they do in the Scriptures, but jump to the conclusion that, in order to uphold the biblical truth of human responsibility, they are bound to reject the equally biblical and equally true doctrine of divine sovereignty, and to explain away the great number of texts that teach it." (p. 16).
  - b. "Scripture teaches that, as King, He orders and controls all things, human actions among them, in accordance with His own eternal purpose [Gen. 45:8; 50:20; Prov. 16:9; 21:1; Matt. 10:29; Acts 4:27-27; Rom 9:20-24; Eph. 1:11, etc.]. Scripture also teaches that, as Judge, He holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the courses of action he pursues [Matt. 25; Rom. 2:1-16; Rev. 20:11-13, etc.] (p. 22).
  - c. "We are all under orders to devote ourselves to spreading the good news, and to use all our ingenuity and enterprise to bring it to the notice of the whole world. The Christian, therefore, must constantly be searching his conscience, asking himself if he is doing all that he might be doing in this field. For this is a responsibility that cannot be shrugged off." (pp. 26-27). "If we regarded it as our job, not simply to present Christ, but actually to produce converts--to evangelize, not only faithfully, but also successfully--our approach to evangelism would become pragmatic and calculating." (p. 27). "It is not right when we regard ourselves as responsible for securing converts, and look to our own enterprise and techniques to accomplish what only God can accomplish. To do that is to intrude ourselves into the office of the Holy Ghost, and to exalt ourselves as the agents of the new birth."
  - d. The sovereignty extreme is illustrated by the response of a minister to William Carey, the "father of the modern missionary movement," when Carey tried to persuade them to evangelize the lost, "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine [cir.1792]." (Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, ISBN: 0310459311, p. 115).