

NEW TESTAMENT EVANGELISM

Biblical Studies and Strategies for Sharing and Defending the Gospel

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Part 1: The Priority of Evangelism

The Pressing Need for Instruction in Evangelism

I don't write this book because I want to make a name for myself, or because I think I have anything too special to offer readers. I'm writing this book because the state of evangelism and witness among western believers is deplorable. As a case in point, can you remember when you explicitly and specifically explained the gospel with a non-Christian last week? If you're like most Christians, you'd have to answer that you didn't specifically engage an unbeliever with the gospel. In fact, according to a poll conducted in June of 2025, "about 35% of believers have shared their faith with someone they met in the last week".¹ Although you might argue that over a third of believers is significant, there's no way of knowing what they meant by "shared their faith". The sad reality is that most Christians don't equate sharing your faith with clearly explaining the gospel.

Why is it important that Christians share the gospel? Because this is the means that God has ordained to bring sinners to a saving knowledge of Jesus. As Paul writes in Romans 10:17,

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

In other words, the faithful presentation of the gospel is the primary means that God uses to save the people He's chosen. Remember that He's doing this before He sends Jesus again to judge the world for the final time, sealing everyone's destinies. But most believers would lament that they either don't find opportunities, or don't know how, to share the gospel. And this is unacceptable.

The truth is that every believer has been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, so that he or she can be a living testimony to the mighty deeds of the Lord Jesus. And this testimony isn't to be hidden, but to speak to those who are yet in darkness.

Although sharing the gospel ought to come naturally to believers, we live in a society where people have become inept at having meaningful conversations with strangers. Most people are looking at their phones half the time in places where they would be able to speak to others if they wanted to. And Christians themselves have been pulled into this shameful

muteness and self-centeredness. Compounding such social customs, as I said, is the woeful lack of knowledge believers have for explaining the basic message of salvation with their neighbors.

Much has been written on the subject of evangelism and personal witnessing, but few books in recent years have gotten down to the nitty gritty details of how the Bible explains the proper way to present the gospel. I'd like to give you an overview and explanation of the key Scriptural passages that show us exactly how the first Christians engaged in evangelism, and elucidate how you can use the same words, concepts, and methods in your own efforts at witnessing.

We'll begin by showing how evangelism is simply the natural outflowing of the Holy Spirit's work in us, then outline the main evangelistic models Paul has in the New Testament, and look at three specific biblical examples of preachers sharing the gospel with unbelievers. From these explorations, we should be able to learn both the basics of preaching, and specific strategies we can use in our interactions with unbelievers, to provide them with an understanding of the only message that can save their souls.

By applying these lessons, we'll be better equipped to faithfully share the Way as His first followers did. To end this study, we'll summarize some principles of biblical evangelism, describe a few good ways of preaching, and look at common obstacles and objections to evangelism. These will provide practical and everyday tools to help you learn how the Lord can use *you* to share the gospel with the unsaved – the New Testament way.

1 “Evangelism Statistics.” <https://wifitalents.com/evangelism-statistics/>

Chapter 1: Evangelism is a Fruit of the Spirit

Brother or sister, did you know that one of the purposes for you being saved was so that you would be a flesh and blood sign for the gospel? Yes, you are a member of Christ's body on earth partly so you can share the good news with the perishing sinners around you. This is exactly what the apostle Peter writes in his first letter:

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *GOD'S OWN POSSESSION*, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light . . .” – 1 Pet. 2:9

Here, he's addressing a whole group of believers in a wide area, but this nevertheless applies to individuals. *You* are of the chosen race, a royal priest, a holy citizen, and a possession of God, so that you can *proclaim* His *excellencies*. What are God's excellencies? They are His excellent characteristics that He has put on display through the life, death, and reign of Jesus His Son. We are to proclaim, or *announce*, those virtues and deeds in our everyday lives, as we live as distinct, heavenly, people on earth.

In other words, as we go about our day to day lives, we ought to act so differently from the rest of the world, that we'll *impulsively* imitate and speak of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Likewise, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the Christian's job description when he declares,

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” – 2 Cor. 5:17-19

As a new creation in Christ who has been reconciled to God, you have been given the ministry, or “service,” of reconciliation, so that you can share the *message* about reconciliation to those who are alienated from God.

To put it simply, the whole of God's people on earth now are to continue the work of preaching and teaching that the Lord Jesus began when He was on earth. He said that He had come “to save and to seek that which was lost,” and when He began His public ministry, He “came into Galilee and began to preach, saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is

at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Lk. 19:10; Mk. 1:14-15). And since the body of Christ was established to carry on this work, this is one of the purposes of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who *baptizes* us into Jesus (1 Cor. 12:13).

The Scriptures teach that all believers in Jesus possess the presence of God the Spirit in their hearts. And Jesus Himself said that His Spirit was sent

“... to you from the Father . . . [and] He will testify about Me, and you *will* testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.” – Jn. 15:26-27

This was said to the apostles, but the principle applies to all believers, since they possess the same Spirit. Since the Spirit is living inside of believers to testify to *Jesus*, then it follows that He leads His dwelling places (believers) to do the same. Thus, it can be truly said that one of the fruits, or results, of the Spirit’s indwelling is asserting the claims and deeds of Jesus to unbelievers, so they can be judged according to their response.

The question is, why does the Holy Spirit lead Christians to testify to the deeds of Jesus? There are three main reasons. First, to share what He’s done in His life, death, and ascension is to declare the *most praiseworthy* acts of God. And as we saw to begin, God’s people work together to do this very thing in proclaiming His “excellencies”.

The second part of answering this question has to do with the destinies of those who hear the testimony of believers about the Lord. According to Scripture, there are two main groups of people in history – those who will end up in hell, and those who will go to heaven. Paul in Romans 9:22 refers to the first group as those “prepared for destruction,” and he often refers to the second group as the “elect,” or the “chosen” (Eph. 1; 2 Thess. 2). Thus, when believers share the gospel, they are communicating it to one of these two groups, which affects what its purpose is in their evangelism.

For the reprobate, or those who are destined to suffer the due penalty for their sins, they learn the gospel for at least one main purpose. This is so that God will get the glory for offering them mercy on the day of judgement, even though they have rejected it. On the other hand, the most obvious purpose for which the Spirit discloses the gospel to those who are eventually saved is to *effect* their salvation by giving them faith in Jesus. This is what is often called the Spirit’s “effectual call,” or His call through the gospel that persuades sinners to repent and trust in Jesus.

Whether a believer is speaking to someone who will ultimately reject the gospel, or a chosen sinner, it’s the Spirit who motivates him to share the gospel. And this sharing is

ultimately so that the Lord Jesus will be recognized and praised for His goodness and wondrous deeds. Therefore, sharing the gospel is simply a normal result of walking through the Spirit's power (Gal. 5).

Although evangelism is a natural by-product of being led by the Spirit, I'm obviously writing this book to cultivate, develop, and encourage believers' ability and desire to preach. Which is why Scripture itself contains the ideal models we need to learn how, when, and who to share the gospel with. As a starting point for the best Scriptural models of gospel-preaching, we'll turn to none other than the great apostle to the Gentiles, Paul the preacher.

Reflection Questions

1. What is evangelism?
2. Why is evangelism a fruit, or result, of the Spirit?
3. What are a few of the ultimate purposes for us sharing the gospel with unbelievers?

Part 2: Paul’s Basic Models for Evangelism

Chapter 2: The Basic Message of the Gospel

We begin with the very basics of sharing the gospel, so that we can have a solid foundation for building how the essentials of the message can be explained and applied specifically. What was the message Paul preached when he went about sharing the good news of Jesus? One of the most insightful descriptions of his evangelism is found in the Acts of the Apostles, where he’s being held in custody while he’s tried by Jewish and Roman authorities under false charges from his enemies. During this time after one of his hearings, the governor Felix interviews him with his Jewish wife, and Paul uses the opportunity to witness to him. Luke recounts,

“But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him *speak* about faith in Christ Jesus. But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened . . .” – Acts 24:24–25a

This passage presents us with a helpful description of the kinds of discussions we should be having with unbelievers. Luke begins with the overall topic of this conversation, and then breaks it down into three specific subjects. First, Paul’s main point of discussion was “faith in Christ Jesus”. That is, he was describing what it meant to put one’s faith in literally, “the anointed Jesus”. This is always the end goal of the gospel, since sharing the gospel should usually be done with the intent of showing why a person can put *his* faith in Jesus. And the answers to that question are found in the gospel message.

But what does this message consist of? In Paul’s “discussion” with Felix and his wife, he emphasized three topics which should always have some part to play in our gospel conversations. These three are *righteousness*, *self-control*, and *the coming judgment*. Let’s expand on all three of these.

Righteousness

This is arguably *the* chief concern of the gospel, since Paul states that “in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17). However, in our western culture, the word “righteousness” has become almost exclusively a word for Bible-believing Christians, and is virtually non-existent in everyday vocabulary. It’s a very simple word, but it

carries one of the most important meanings we can understand. The Greek noun that we get it from can also be translated “justice,” or “equity.” But these two terms limit the multifaceted connotations it has. I like to think of the word as a made-up word called “right-ness”. This means that righteousness is something that is *right* in God’s sight. And the gospel talks about two main *types* of righteousness.

First, as Romans 1:17 tells us, the gospel describes *God’s* righteousness. This is God’s *justice* or good behavior in sending His Son to die for our sins and rise again so that He could *justify* believers. The fact is, *everything* that God does is righteous. And this is the beginning of the problem that the gospel solves.

Because we are image-bearers of God, our purpose is to *imitate* God on the earth, and therefore act *like* Him. This is the objective standard of living that He has given to all mankind. Just as He loves Himself perfectly (in the Trinity), and cares for people perfectly, so should we. The problem is, we do the exact *opposite* of what God would do, and therefore we’re guilty of disobeying Him, and *misrepresenting* His image. We naturally, because of our sinful nature, defy our Creator’s law for us that we innately know through conscience.

What’s worst of all, because God is righteous, He *hates* anything – including us – that is unrighteous, or contrary to His character. And because we’re moral agents with the power to choose right and wrong, He’s moved to give us the due consequences for our evil – the deprivation of the good that comes from goodness. This is why He condemns those who persist in their unrighteousness to eternal hellfire.

The second type of righteousness that the gospel addresses is the righteousness that rebellious sinners *need* from God, in order to be eternally satisfied. This is the righteousness that Paul says is obtained “on the basis of faith” (Phil. 3:9). Although we fail to live up to God’s *inherent* righteousness, He’s graciously provided an *alien* and *forensic* righteousness that satisfies His just and holy requirements for us. This righteousness is the one that Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, as he writes,

“He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

This is “the righteousness of God” that’s only to be had “in Christ”. And this verse succinctly elucidates what it is. It’s the very parallel of God making “Him who knew no sin *to be* sin”. This is saying that God the Father *treated* Jesus as if He was sin *itself* when He was on the cross. That is, He *punished* Jesus by forsaking Him because He was “imputing” or “counting” *our*

sins against Him. In the same way, those who believe in Jesus *become* “the righteousness of God in Him” because God *treats* them as if they are as righteous as He. This is a forensic transaction that God does by His grace and mercy, and through the death and ascension of His Son.

To sum up this wonderful kind of righteousness, it is that status or standing of *innocence* and *goodness* that is given to believers by God because He’s treating them as if they *are* the righteous Man, Jesus. This is simply a different way of describing how God *forgives* all the sins of believers through their faith in Jesus.

So, going back to Paul’s discussion with Felix, he prioritized the explanation of the perfect righteousness of God in His nature, and also His own gracious *provision* of righteousness for those who depend on the death and ascension of Jesus to save them from eternal justice.

Self-Control Needed

This subject of discussion isn’t an *essential* aspect of presenting the gospel, but it is an implication when defining righteousness and sin. Self-control is actually one of the most important features of Paul’s definition of human righteousness, since it’s one of the inherent abilities God has given man to fulfill his moral obligations. That’s why a part of the Spirit’s fruit in our lives is self-control, the last of the list in Galatians 5. And that’s also why one of the descriptors of the men causing “difficult times” is “without self-control” (2 Tim. 3:1, 3). So Paul’s talk of this virtue with Felix wasn’t a tangential issue, but part of the problem that faith in Jesus solves.

Although self-control isn’t at the root of our sinfulness, it’s still close to the heart of it. Because whenever we’re tempted to sin, and know that the temptation has come, we *should* have the control of our minds and bodies to *abstain* from sinning. However, because man is naturally *enslaved* to “various lusts and passions,” and indulges “the desires of the flesh and of the mind,” the control needed to do what’s right isn’t used, and sin takes over instead (Tit. 3:3; Eph. 2:3). Thus, our natural lack of self-control is proof that we aren’t just *kind of* bad, a little flawed, or make “mistakes,” but that we’re naturally *radically* evil, wicked, and hostile to our Creator.

The good news, which Paul could have told Felix, is that our lack of self-control can be remedied if we simply *trust* in the Lord Jesus to save us from our sins. But likely he emphasized that Felix’s and Drusilla’s lack of self-control proved that they were displeasing to God, and condemned. Which brings us to his last point, which is largely neglected in contemporary witnessing.

The Coming Judgment

According to Luke, Paul concluded his discussion of the gospel with the subject of “the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). And note that he terms it *the* judgment, not *a* judgment. According to the New Testament, there is only one final judgment that will determine the eternal fate of every human soul. And this is the judgment that Paul was insistent that Felix prepare for.

We’ll cover the final judgment in a later look at Paul’s preaching to the Athenians, so I’ll only say a few words. The first thing to underscore is that the final judgment *is* an essential part of the gospel message, since it’s the event that will ultimately seal our eternal destinies. The teachings of Jesus and the writings of Paul repeatedly tell us that every person will be judged “according to his deeds, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). And God’s final judgment will be perfect, just, and without mercy to the unrighteous. Further, it won’t just be God the *Father* judging, but Him judging through *Jesus*. Hence, there will be absolutely no excuses on that day when the Man who was tempted in every point as we will evaluate how we responded to *our* temptations. Finally, the Scriptures are clear that at the judgment of mankind, all unbelievers will receive an eternal sentence for their sins, since all they did was without love for God. Eternal torment in the lake of fire will be the horrific condition for all who are judged without their faith in the Savior Jesus. This is why God has sent His children to speak to people about “righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come”.

We’ve already shown that Paul included the desperate need for salvation in his evangelism, but it’s necessary to emphasize that sharing the gospel shouldn’t only be intended to comfort, but to indict sinners for their sins.

The Basic Message’s Condemnation of Sin

We aren’t only to announce the message of good news for sinners, but also the message that reveals their *sin* to them. Paul explicitly instructs believers to engage in this kind of confrontational witnessing when he charges the Ephesians:

“Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.”

– Eph. 5:11-13

In these verses, he’s saying that the truth of God’s message always has an *exposing* effect on the darkness of sin. This is because the gospel clearly shows us that God *hates* sin, and that

He went to the extent of punishing His beloved *Son* to save humanity from His condemnation of it.

We've already seen an example of the exposure of sin with Paul's discussion with Felix, where he exposes his lack of self-control, proving that he's under God's wrath. But in this passage from Ephesians, Paul is talking about darkness that is even *worse* than neglecting self-control. He refers to things that are done "by them in secret," which would be shameful even to "speak of" (v. 12) Thus, we see from these words that preaching the gospel often brings to sinners' attentions even sins that they attempt to hide from people. But it's clear that such sins, which are the worst sins, must be exposed by sharing the gospel, so that the sinner can acknowledge them, agree with God about them, and give them up in exchange for God's full forgiveness and peace. The point here is that in order for people to see the goodness of the gospel, they must first be convinced that all their sins will be judged by God at the end, and that their only hope is in the gracious redemption of Christ's death.

Having seen that sharing the gospel has to do with righteousness, sin, judgment, and revealing people's sinfulness to them, we'll now conclude with the most succinct definition of the gospel message in Paul's writings, which must be presented in some form to call our message the gospel.

The Essential Facts of the Gospel

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he has to address the historical reality of Jesus's resurrection, and he does so by reminding them of the basic truths he first delivered to them: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

– 1 Cor. 15:3-5

In these three verses, Paul gives us three historical facts that we usually must make sure our hearers understand to allow them to put their faith in Jesus. The first fact is that "Christ died for our sins" (v. 3). Here, he's simply referring to Jesus by His title of "Messiah," or "anointed one," which means that He's God's divine and human King-Savior of a remnant of mankind. So, to start out, we must impress on unbelievers' minds that Jesus is God in the flesh, and specially appointed to save and rule a special people. But next, the cross is central. The most important thing Jesus did to rescue us from God's righteousness was to "die for our sins." This is to say that Jesus died *because of* our sins, or as the due penalty for our sins. We earned

death, eternal death, through our sinning, and Jesus paid the *price* demanded by God through His suffering.

Secondly, our gospel presentation must include the historical fact of Jesus's resurrection, which is evidenced by His burial in a tomb. The fact that Paul specifically explained that Jesus "was raised on the third day" shows us that he was using great detail when he recounted the works of Jesus. And this fact that He rose on the *third* day should leave no doubt that Jesus had truly died, and His corpse had been genuinely secured in a tomb. But finally, Paul ends the facts of the gospel with empirical (or observational) proof that Jesus had come back to life. He says that Jesus "appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve [apostles]" (v. 5). So, Paul backed up his claims about the resurrection by pointing to living men who had steadfastly maintained that they had seen the crucified Jesus alive. And those eyewitness accounts are now recorded for us in the New Testament, which is a full and verifiable testimony of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.

So what does this mean for your and my witnessing today? It means that we can *boldly* and *confidently declare* that Jesus died for our sins, and then rose from the dead to ascend into heaven!

Based on what we've already covered, we know that these bare facts about Jesus are insufficient to teach a person how he can be saved, but all that's left to add is the *call* of the gospel, which is the obligation to put one's *faith* in Christ Jesus. This call of the gospel, as well as its basis in the nature of the true God and our relationship to Him, is the concern of our next look at Paul's preaching. In order to learn how to explain to unbelievers who God is, and what our obligations are to Him, we turn now to Paul's epic speech to the professional philosophers in Athens. In this account, we'll see the landmark example of how to provide a solid testimony of God's supremacy, our culpability, and His righteous demand for all to *repent* and believe.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways is righteousness the main topic of the gospel message?
2. Why would we ever discuss self-control with an unbeliever?
3. Why is it important to describe God's coming judgment to unbelievers?
4. What is the negative use of the gospel for unbelievers?
5. What are the basic historical facts of the gospel?

Chapter 3: Describing the Creator God of the Gospel and His Demand

We live in a culture much like that in which the 1st century Christians did. Although most westerners used to give some recognition to the basic attributes of God, most have been brainwashed into believing in fake gods of man's imagination. Speaking from my experience, it seems that most Americans subscribe to the possibility that virtually any type of deity could exist, which is the definition of agnosticism produced by a radical skepticism. Since western culture has resorted to the authority of the subjective self as the determiner of truth and morality, people usually adopt the concept of god that appeals most to their selfish and prideful aspirations. Obviously, the true God isn't one that offers himself as one of many different possible options. And Paul was insistent to the non-Christians he preached to that God wouldn't be ignored, but was the most obvious Reality in existence. And this is where we often need to start when we're seeking to share the gospel with modern-day people.

In Acts, Luke includes an instructive account of Paul's discourse to the elite philosophers of his day, who still lived in Athens. He's brought to their city council, called "the Areopagus," and is asked to explain the message about Jesus that he's been teaching to people in their marketplace. What he says in his reply is one of the most instructive sermon excerpts for evangelism found in the Bible. Let's start off by reading the account in full, and then pull out the ways we can imitate Paul in our own witnessing:

"And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.' . . . so Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since he Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though he is not far from each

one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' Being then the children of god, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Let's start our analysis by noting that the Athenians were encountering the story of Jesus as a "new teaching," which contained "strange things." So we know that they had no Christian background, and had never heard of Jesus before. Thus, what Paul says is clearly suitable for people who haven't ever learned the Bible's descriptions of the nature and work of God. And that's why Paul begins with the Athenians' beliefs about the Creator.

To introduce his proclamation of God's nature, he first explains that he recognizes his hearers as "very religious in all respects" (v. 22). So, although they're ignorant about God, they're still *worshipful*. This highlights an essential principle in all our evangelism – *everyone*, including the most isolated tribe in the outermost regions of the earth, is a *worshiper*. Paul explains this in Romans 1:18 and following, where he traces the gradual degradation of human societies through their made-up worship. He begins this passage by showing that all people by nature have a direct knowledge of the basic attributes of God, since He has revealed Himself through His creation. However, people in their pride and folly deliberately ignore this knowledge, and attempt to replace it with conceptions of God in their own making. And this is precisely what the Athenians had done. Although they had an intuitive awareness of God's true nature, they had smothered it with various unrealistic ideas about God, and attempted to win God's favor by offering some pitiful sacrifice to Him on an altar.

Paul points out this altar when he explains that he's discerned their religiosity, or worshipfulness, by seeing they've built an altar dedicated 'to an unknown god' (v. 23). Apparently, every other altar Paul had seen had been designated for a specific deity that had definite characteristics, but there was one altar left that *should* have been used for the *true* God. The Athenians had failed to recognize that identity of the One who had made them. And such is the case for many westerners today.

God is Separate or Holy

Having prefaced his description of the Maker of all things, he then gives several essential characteristics of God that the Athenians need to acknowledge before they can be reconciled to Him through Jesus. Paul's first attribute of God is that He is essentially separate from the creation, as the Creator. He says this by simply stating that He "made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth," and so "does not dwell in temples made with hands" (v. 24). With these words, Paul sets God apart from any other thing in all creation, and also declares that He is the "Lord," or *Ruler*, of every sphere, including the earth, and everything *outside* the earth (or heaven). This is the basic meaning of God being "holy," or set apart.

God is Self-sufficient

Paul's second point logically follows from God's separate divinity. Since He has *made* everything, He needs *nothing*. That's why he goes on to tell the Athenians that God is *not* "served by human hands, as though He needed anything". In man's pride, we naturally think that we offer God *something* necessary that He can't get without us. Instead, the opposite is true. Rather than we fulfilling *His* needs, He fulfills *our* needs, which Paul details as "life and breath and all things" (v. 25). Therefore, we can't win His favor by giving Him something He needs. We can only gain His favor if He freely gives it to us.

God is the Establisher of Nations

After summarizing God's absolute supremacy and infinite contentment, Paul next describes God's rulership over human history and all people groups. This is just a basic overview of man's history up until the coming of Jesus. He starts with the first man, who is the "one" from whom God made "every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth" (v. 26). And not only did God make everyone, but He also "determined their appointed times," or the time limits for the existence of each human society. He goes on to conclude that the reason God formed the nations across the earth is so that they "would seek God". It seems that God's purpose in separating people into nations, and thus weakening them, was so that they would long for the original Ruler of mankind that provided a perfect community in the Garden of Eden. But Paul has one other application of this characteristic of God.

God is Ever-Present Reality

As the Maker of all things, it follows that God is also the ever-present Being everywhere. That's why Paul says that "in Him we live and move and exist" (v. 28). This implies that God isn't only the *Creator*, but the *Sustainer* and *Provider* of all things. As such, we

have to recognize that He is *spirit*, or non-physical, and not “like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man” (v. 29). That is, God is wholly unlike anything we could imagine, and must be recognized as the infinite Being. We can’t find God in our *minds*, but only in the revelation that He’s provided for us through creation, Christ, and Scripture.

This is the last attribute of God that Paul describes. After establishing the distinguishing features of God’s nature that the Athenians had ignored, he next goes to God’s *message* to all people based on the coming of Jesus the Messiah. This is what I termed the *call* of the gospel in the last chapter. But people can only respond to the call of a God whom they rightly recognize. Once we’ve made sure that our hearer recognizes Him, we can then tell them what He requires them to do in response to Jesus’s coming to earth.

God is Commanding Repentance

The main response that God would have all people give Him is “repentance”. Paul’s preaching to the Athenians is direct, simple, and unapologetic. This is the essence of what we need to tell all non-Christians:

“. . . God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent . . .” (v. 30)

The word Paul uses for “declaring” is a simple one that means “to announce,” but is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to “commanding” or “ordering”. Thus, this declaration isn’t a *request* or some *advice*, but is God’s *demand* of “all people”. His requirement for them to please Him is that they “repent,” or literally “change the mind”. And repentance is the defining feature of a proper response to God’s revelation of Jesus in the gospel.

Obviously, if we’re going to tell someone to “repent,” we need to make sure they know what that means. So what does it mean to change your mind according to God’s standard? Well, in the case of the Athenians, we can go through the attributes of God piece by piece, and show how they needed to change their minds about Him and themselves.

First, sinners need to agree that the God who sent Jesus to the earth is the rightful *Ruler* of the universe, and therefore has the claim of everyone’s obedience to His rules. We need to give up thinking that *we* rule our lives, and yield control to God.

Second, we need to stop thinking that we can give God anything that He needs, and recognize that *everything* we have is provided for us by Him. And this implies that we don’t belong to *ourselves*, but to *Him*.

Third, as the ever-present God, we need to agree that we can hide nothing from Him, and that He knows our characters better than we do. Rather than hiding our faults from Him, we ought to instead admit them to Him. This is called *confession* of sin.

Fourth, as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, we need to stop thinking that we can conceive of God through our imagination or creativity, and instead recognize that God is infinite in nature, and beyond our understanding. All we can do is believe what He says about Himself, and enjoy the knowledge of an unknowable Being.

But finally, as I already alluded to, to repent basically means to recognize that we've rebelled against and offended the One who has revealed how to live to us, and that such rebellion is evil and rightly damnable by Him. It's to agree that He is the One who determines what's right and wrong, true and false, and that we need Him to withhold His just wrath from us, so we escape the punishment we deserve. Which is the subject of Paul's last declaration in his sermon, where he explains *why* God is commanding everyone to repent.

God Has Proven that He's Going to Judge Everyone through the Resurrection

The final part of Paul's sermon is the point where his audience no longer has the patience to listen, so that they "sneer" at him, and others ask him to speak to them another time (v. 32). But it is the decisive point of his message, since it provides one of the best reasons for why they should repent. In fact, it's God's *own* reason for why He's demanding that people repent. The solemn reason is that He has set a definite day in the future on which "He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man" (v. 31).

What does this tell us about God's motive in charging everyone to repent? Is it because He's a cruel tyrant who just wants to tell us what to do, even if it means depriving us of our happiness? Of course not! His motive in urging us to repent is *love* and *compassion*. Because it's only in response to our repenting that He'll *save* us from the condemnation we deserve on judgment day. That is, He calls people to repent because He wants to give them an opportunity to avoid hell!

And notice that God's judgment will be "in righteousness," or in perfect conformity to His perfect standard of goodness. On that day, He will punish all who are found guilty of sinning against Him, and that in a way that is appropriate to their crimes. On the other hand, anyone who is found to be *righteous* in Christ will be declared *innocent*, and deserving of eternal life! As we've already seen and know, this reward of eternal life can't be earned by anyone other than Jesus the Judge.

It's also important to highlight that last point – the Judge that God will use in evaluating everyone's lives, and rewarding them accordingly will be the *man* Jesus. People need to know this because it leaves no doubt that God's judgment will be perfectly reasonable and considerate. Since Jesus experienced the temptations and trials equal to anyone else's experience, He'll be judging people with full understanding of their condition. No one will have an excuse for having sinned when they stand before the perfect Man. But this also points to the reality that He will be the One that must be appeased in order to avoid His just sentencing to hell.

Paul doesn't stop with the final judgment, but with the historical reality that proves the certainty of this judgment. And that's the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He ends by saying that God has "furnished proof to all men" of Jesus's role as the perfect Judge of humanity by raising Him from the dead, and giving Him a spiritual body to dwell in heaven. Just as in Paul's summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus's resurrection is the climactic proof that all God has said about Jesus is true, and that Jesus is the God whom we must trust for mercy by repenting, or be damned.

Oftentimes, it's necessary to explain to people the reasons that they'll be condemned on judgment day, so they understand how desperate they are for forgiveness. This is what Paul does in the first few chapters of Romans, where he describes the condemning message of the gospel.

Reflection Questions

1. Why is it sometimes necessary to describe God's basic qualities to unbelievers?
2. What is God's most prominent attribute that sets Him apart from all other beings?
3. What is the basic response that God requires of all unbelievers?
4. Why does God call unbelievers to change their minds about everything?
5. How can we know that God is going to judge all people?

Chapter 4: Explaining the Condemnation and Need for the Gospel

Having looked at the groundwork that often needs to be laid for an understanding of God and His call of repentance, we now need to show how Paul described and defended “the judgment to come” that he explained to Felix and to the Athenians. The most detailed section of Paul’s writings on this subject is the first few chapters of his Letter to the Romans. For the sake of our purposes in providing models for sharing the gospel, we’ll focus on two passages in chapters 2 and 3 of the letter. In the first passage, Paul explains how God’s final judgment will be carried out on everyone, and warns his readers of the eternal consequences of their lifestyles. In the second section, he simply points to several passages of Scripture that prove people are utterly incapable of pleasing God by themselves, but are instead sinful in every component of their natural being.

The Condemnation and Doom that the Gospel Answers

We begin with Paul’s reasoning with a hypothetical reader that views himself as morally superior than others, and uses this delusion to persuade himself that God will bless him on the day of judgment. This is what Paul continues writing in a long address to the self-righteous:

“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” – Romans 2:4-10

God’s Kindness Moves You to Repentance

Paul begins by continuing his reasons why the self-righteous hearer ought to give up thinking that he’ll escape God’s judgment, and instead acknowledge his sinfulness and guilt. The first reason is that God has been *kind* to this unbeliever. In spite of his proud self-righteousness and distrust of God’s justice, God has showered this person with comfort,

pleasure, and happiness. But obviously, such a person deserves the exact opposite. If he would truly recognize his condition, and God's acts on him, then he would be led "to repentance."

Refusal to Repent Increases God's Wrath Against You

As opposed to rightly responding to God's kindness by repenting, people usually go on sinning against Him through their unbelief, and continue to "store up wrath for [themselves] on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (v. 5). This means that God will only have *more* reason to unleash His anger on unbelievers, the longer they refuse to repent. But what will be the basis of how God decides to treat people on judgment day? Paul explains this next.

God Will Reward Everyone According to How They've Lived

In spite of what many respected Bible teachers, theologians, and influencers teach about the judgment, the Bible is clear that God will judge based on *actions*, not *beliefs* alone. It will be by the character of people's visible behavior that He will decide what reward or punishment they receive. The main reason for this seems to be that everyone in attendance at the judgment will be able to confirm from their own experience that people are being treated according to the kind of people they were on earth.

Paul hints at this when he writes,

"... to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation." (vss. 7-8)

So how should we explain how people will be judged on judgment day? The same way that Paul, along with Jesus, Peter, John, and the prophets did. If someone *habitually* does the good by God's standard so that they'll be honored by God, then God will give them "eternal life". But if they decide to *not* obey the truth about goodness, but live *unrighteously*, they will get God's "wrath and indignation" (v. 8).

Is Paul teaching that God rewards people with salvation and heaven because they live good lives? In one sense, yes – but this is not the *ultimate* and *underlying* reason. People don't *earn* eternal life through their good behavior, as though they can outweigh their sins with their goodness, and put God in their debt. Instead, the gift of *faith* that God freely gives them is what *causes* them to live habitually good lives, and He gives them eternal life to testify to the fact that He's *already* forgiven them through their faith. In other words, their habitual goodness is the *proof* that He has already saved them by His grace and through their faith in Jesus. But their

good behavior will be the *evidence* on judgment day that they've been granted eternal life through the faith God has given.

Next, Paul ends by specifically describing the punishment and reward that await people on judgment day, in order to persuade a sinner to trust Jesus to give him life.

God Will Distress Evildoers and Honor the Good

We conclude by thinking about the way that Paul describes hell and heaven in this passage. He's already said that those who are found unrepentant, ambitious for themselves, and disobedient to God, will receive His wrath and indignation. That in itself is an unimaginably frightful thought. For the Creator of all things, and the One who knows your thoughts, to be hatefully *angry*, or wrathful, at you for your sins should be enough for anyone to cry to Him for mercy. But the *results* of His anger make it far worse. Paul seems to be understating the severity of God's punishment in these verses, but if we take a moment to think about what his words mean, we'll see that the punishment awaiting the unrighteous is mind-numbingly terrible and beyond words.

He simply says that unbelievers will get "tribulation and distress for every soul" (v. 9). "Tribulation" is an old-fashioned word for "trial" or "trouble," and the Greek word for "distress" literally means being "pressed" or "squeezed" in a tight place. To grasp the extent of this punishment, we have to realize that this trouble and distress will come directly from *God*, the only One who provides us with all peace, comfort, and rest. And secondly, we need to remember that this trouble and distress will *never end*. Unbelievers who are condemned for their sins will be confined to a place where they will never experience anything *but* pain and agony. There will never be any hope of relief, and the more they experience, the more they'll know that there will be more coming. All that they'll suffer will consist of everything unpleasant in life, including shame, pain, and sorrow. *This* is why it's important to warn people of God's judgment on the unrepentant, and urge them to repent.

Thankfully, Paul ends with the good news that those who have done any true good through faith will get "glory and honor and peace". *This* is the hope of all who put their faith in Jesus to save them, and is the benefit of believing the gospel. But it's only received by those who confess that they have no good in themselves, but only sin. And Paul makes this point in our second passage.

No One is Righteous, No One is Good

In our look at this next passage, I won't go to any great lengths to analyze it, since it's very clear. I mainly present it to you so you can see how Paul the evangelist used multiple quotations from Scripture to persuasively demonstrate that God considers no person in their natural state to be right or good in His sight. On the contrary, everyone is naturally *unrighteous* and *evil* because they don't "seek for God" and have "no fear of God". Here's how Paul proved to sinners that they had nothing in themselves to earn God's approval or favor:

"What then? Are we [the Jews] better than they [non-Jews]? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written,

'THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;
THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;
ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.'

'THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECIEVING,'
'THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS';
'WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS';
'THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,
DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,
AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.'

'THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.'" – Rom. 3:9-18

Could Paul be any clearer? Here we have the best combination of Scriptures found in the Bible that deny any inherent righteousness or goodness in unbelieving people. These Scriptures say that no one is naturally righteous, and therefore they don't *understand* or seek to *know* God. Instead, everyone inherently turns *away* from God, and therefore are spiritually and eternally *useless* for God's glory. That's why they don't even do *any* good. Instead, they speak *death* like graves; they are habitually *lying*; they try to *kill* people with their speech; they constantly *curse* and *despise* people; and they are hateful *murderers* at heart. And why do they act these ways? Because they don't fear, or revere, God at *all*. Does this sound like the kind of people that can freely seek and fear God, and understand the gospel? Not at all. Rather, this is

describing people who need to be *reconciled* to God from a state of hostility and opposition, and that through becoming *new creations* in Christ.

The reconciliation that needs to be explained and effected by the preaching of the gospel and the giving of new life to sinners is found in the last basic model for evangelism we have from Paul. In this next example of his preaching, we'll see the role we need to recognize ourselves in as sharers of the gospel, and see how earnestly, passionately, and urgently we should urge unbelievers to repent.

Reflection Questions

1. What is God's intended purpose for His patience with unbelievers?
2. How does people's persistence in unbelief affect God's attitude toward them?
3. Why is judgment day called "the day of wrath"?
4. How will God determine how to punish or reward people at the end of time?
5. Why did Paul tell sinners that they would be punished if they ended up never repenting?
6. What does it mean that "no one" is righteous or does any good? How should this affect the way we share the gospel with them?

Chapter 5: Serving as an Announcer of Reconciliation

So far in our studies, we've looked at the basic content of the gospel, background knowledge for the gospel, and the condemnation that the gospel warns of. But now we're going to walk through a passage that succinctly shows how all these elements were used by Paul to preach the good news of peace with God. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he exposes nearly everything about his life and preaching. And in the passage I want to share with you, he exposes the heart of his evangelism by making an evangelistic appeal in the middle of the letter. Along with this appeal, he shows us the attitude we should have as believers living in the midst of unsaved people, and describes our main responsibility to them. To summarize, you could say that Paul is explaining how to exercise our ministry of reconciliation to the world. For the sake of context and instruction in witnessing, I'll begin before the heart of his teaching here, in verse 16:

“Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain – for He says,

‘AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU,
AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.’

Behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation’ . . .” – 2 Cor. 5:16-6:2

From this passage, Paul unveils four main lessons for us:

1. How we're to evaluate people without knowing them
2. The fact that all Christians are now *new creations*
3. Why God reconciled us to Himself

4. How we are to speak as peace ambassadors on Christ's behalf

How to Evaluate Strangers

We'll begin with the first verse, where Paul confesses his changed attitude toward strangers. Before he was a Christian, he was a proud, selfish, and boastful person who looked down on others, and especially despised non-Jews. But once he was converted, he saw himself for who he really was as a wretched, blind, pitiable sinner. It was then that his eyes were open to see that people's value isn't based on their background, attainments, ancestry, or physicality, but on what God *does* to them. So, if God has chosen to save an unbeliever, no matter how vile, despicable, and monstrous that unbeliever may be, he's nevertheless precious to God, and will eventually be transformed into a beautiful and lovely image-bearer of God.

This is what Paul means when he writes that he recognizes "no one according to the flesh," or based on natural, fallen, and human standards of valuing people (v. 16). The implication is that we are now inclined to value people according to what the *Spirit* has said about people, and about what he does through us to *change* people. And the greatest proof of the reasonableness of this view of people is found in Paul's next point.

We are New Creations in Christ

He next explains *why* Christians no longer view people based on the things of the flesh. It's because "if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature" (v. 17). We who believe in Jesus are no longer the people of the flesh we once were, but now belong to God's *new* creation, which He's promised to perfect when He sends Jesus again.

The fact that we are new creations begs this question – why are new creations still in the *old* creation that is dominated by people's flesh? The answer is given in the rest of what Paul says – we are left here to bring *more* people into the new creation with us, through God's reconciliation.

Why God Reconciled Us to Himself

In the heart of this passage, Paul grandly describes the way in which God has begun to reconcile sinners to Himself, beginning with those who are already saved. He then says why God reconciled believers to Himself on earth. In verse 18, he writes that as soon as God gave us peace with Himself through Christ, He also gave *us* "the ministry of reconciliation". The word "ministry" literally means service, and shows us that we are now in a divinely-appointed service to others – those who are still alienated and at *war* with God.

Then, Paul defines this ministry that we have in a way that is absolutely stunning, especially when we understand the implication for our service. Rather than saying *we* are called to reconcile people to God, Paul explains our ministry as what *God* has *already* done “in Christ”. So it says, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (v. 19). Notice that all these actions are in the *past* tense. When Christ came, died, and rose again, God was thereby granting the whole *world* peace with Him. And how? By refusing to hold their “trespasses,” or sins, against them, by *forgiving* them.

This raises a question – if God already forgave people through Christ’s death and ascension into heaven, then why do they need to repent and believe to *be* forgiven? Does God do it twice? I believe the answer lies in the predestination and foreknowledge of God. Because He’s the One in control of the future, when Christ died for those who would believe, their future forgiveness was *guaranteed*, so it was as *if* God had already forgiven them. And if God has forgiven someone of their sins, then they are reconciled to God.

The last statement shows us how God effectively reconciles sinners to Himself in *time and space*. As part of His reconciliation, and our *ministry* of this peace, He’s entrusted us with “the word of reconciliation” (v. 19). This word, or message, is obviously the gospel, and this gospel is what Paul preaches to the Corinthian hearers next.

Speaking as a Peace Ambassador on Christ’s Behalf

The last few verses of this passage give us one of the most passionate and practical examples of gospel preaching found in Scripture. Here we see how we more often need to view ourselves, and speak to unbelievers. He starts by revealing that Christians are “ambassadors for Christ” (v. 20). This puts our role in the world in a challenging and solemn perspective. Christ is now the Lord of heaven and earth, with “all authority in heaven and on earth” having been given to Him by the Father. This means that He is the rightful Ruler and King of the universe, and deserves everyone’s obedience, submission, and trust.

The problem is obviously that the world is living in *rebellion* against God and His ruling Son, so they stand under His wrath and condemnation. That’s where we come in as members of the new creation who have been reconciled to God, and now belong to His kingdom. As servants of peace, we have the responsibility and the privilege to *represent* our King Jesus, just like an ambassador would in ancient times. We live in foreign territory that’s inhabited by hostile enemies of Jesus, so we’re acting as His messengers to offer the peace that He’s provided with God through the cross.

This is why Paul describes serving as Christ’s ambassador, or emissary, as being like God “making an appeal through us” (v. 20). This appeal also comes from Christ, and it says, “be reconciled to God”. In other words, whenever we share the gospel with unbelievers, we should be basically declaring God’s demand to them that they *receive* His reconciliation. But according to Paul, we shouldn’t only *state* this command, but “beg” and *plead* with sinners to accept God’s terms of peace. We’ve already seen previously that the terms of this peace are to repent of our sinfulness, and to put our *faith* in the Lord Jesus for our peace with God.

Therefore, Paul next sums up the *basis* of this demanded reconciliation. God has done *everything* needed for sinners to be at peace with Him, since

“He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (v. 21)

We’ve already explained this verse, so if you need a reminder of its full meaning, you can turn back to Chapter 2 under the heading *righteousness*. Needless to say, this verse explains the core truths of the gospel, that the Father treated Jesus as *sin*, so that He could treat believers as His *righteousness*.

But Paul doesn’t end by charging his audience to receive God’s peace, and declaring the gospel. He ends with a solemn *warning* of the urgency of a sinner’s response, and the consequences of neglecting God’s appeal. He continues by noting that he is “working together” with God in his preaching and teaching to the Corinthians. And what are they working together to do? To “urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain” (6:1).

This warning is one that believers often neglect to give to unbelievers. The terrifying reality is that it’s possible to accept the grace that God offers through the gospel “in vain,” or worthlessly, and to no good purpose. That is, it’s possible to understand the gospel, to believe the historical facts that it proves, and yet to refuse to entrust yourself to the Lord Jesus for salvation and reconciliation. That’s why Paul concludes by emphasizing that the moment to receive God’s reconciliation, forgiveness, and life is *now*. The opportunity for sinners to repent and believe for salvation is the moment they learn how God has provided reconciliation to Himself for the wicked in the death and ascension of Christ.

This is the urgency we need to use in our own evangelism. We shouldn’t let people learn the gospel from us without obeying its call of repentance, and then be content to let them feel comfortable in their apathy. We need to warn them that they still are in danger of God’s wrath and punishment, as long as they remain content with their sinfulness, guilt, and hostility

toward God. Having learned the gospel, they are now *obligated* to put their trust in its promises for their salvation. Otherwise, their suffering will be even greater in eternity, having heard of the remedy for their sins, but refused to accept it from God.

So, let us follow Paul's example in acting like Christ's ambassadors, and compassionately *urging* unbelievers to repent and trust in the God who punished His Son, so we could have His life. It now remains for us to look at a few more specific examples of how our New Testament teachers shared the gospel with unbelievers, and apply the principles and strategies we find there to our own witnessing.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you view non-Christians as potential children of God, or just as the people they are in their unbelief?
2. Are you a wise steward of the reconciling message that God has entrusted to you?
3. Do you share the gospel with people as though Christ was speaking through you?
4. Do you urge unbelievers to accept God's reconciliation through Jesus's work?
5. Are you urgent and insistent in your call to sinners to repent and believe the gospel?

Part 3: Three Clear Biblical Examples of Evangelism

Chapter 6: How to Illustrate Gospel Truths with Everyday Things

We now come to the most practical part of our studies, since we'll be looking at a few of the most detailed recordings of gospel presentations found in Scripture. We'll begin by looking at the most excellent of all – the Lord Jesus Himself, who was the first preacher of the New Testament gospel. The story I want us to examine together is that of His preaching to the Samaritan woman at a well. In this example, the Lord perfectly shows us how to take a mundane and socially awkward encounter, and turn it into a conversation about the salvation of his hearer's soul. In our look at this passage, we'll pull out each main action the Lord takes to respond to the woman in a way that makes way for explaining how she can have the eternal life she is in desperate need of.

To preface our explanation of the passage, here are the main steps our Lord takes in the conversation to get to the main truth she needs to understand – His identity:

1. He turns a physical *necessity* into a spiritual *illustration*.
2. He counters the *temporality* of physical water with the *eternal benefit* of spiritual water.
3. He counters a *scornful* response with an exposure of the woman's most glaring sin.
4. He counters a cultural *objection* with the spiritual necessity for worship.
5. He points to the need for *rightly* worshiping God based on His nature.
6. He unveils His identity as the Provider of God's spiritual life, and object of worship.

Now, let's walk through the passage point by point, starting with Jesus's illustration through His physical necessity:

"So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink.' For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?' (For Jews have no dealing with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.'" – Jn. 4:6b-10

The setting of this conversation is important to understand, as it discloses what the woman's attitude was toward Jesus as they began. Jesus, of course, was a respected Jewish man,

and as such, His culture would not have thought it worthy of Him to be speaking to a female stranger in public at all. He was breaking a social custom by simply opening His mouth, but John's words show us that He was extremely exhausted. Most likely, He had been walking since the sunrise for miles in the desert, and now it was “the sixth hour” after sunrise, meaning high noon. His mouth was parched with thirst, and His legs and feet were fatigued from the journey. So He asked this woman to give Him a drink, since she was the only one with Him who was physically able to draw water from the well next to Him (v. 8).

But Jesus was breaking *another* cultural rule in their region by talking to the woman, who was probably dressed uniquely like a Samaritan. The Jews hated the Samaritans, since they were the descendants of Jews who had intermarried with Gentile pagans, and had founded a new society with its own pseudo-Jewish religion, headquartered at their own temple in the city of Samaria. Hence, the woman asks Him how He could find the pluck to ask her for anything (v. 9).

In spite of the woman's surprise, Jesus knew that the Father had led Him to that exact location to preach the gospel to the woman, and plant the seed of revival among the Samaritan people. Instead of directly answering her question, He immediately gets to the subject matter that He needs to share with her. Although He began the discussion by asking *her* for something, He now puts Himself in the role of provider, and reveals that He has something for her that is infinitely more valuable than a drink:

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” (v. 10)

Here we see the genius of Jesus in His proclamation of the gospel. He had just asked her for the gift of water, but He says that He's the Provider of the gift of *living* water. Now, the phrase “living water” could have been taken in either a symbolic *or* a literal sense in that day. In the Book of Jeremiah, God says,

“They have forsaken Me,
The fountain of living waters,
To hew for themselves cisterns,
Broken cisterns
That can hold no water.” – Jer. 2:13

For water to be “living” could have been taken to simply mean that it was *moving*, but obviously the *spiritual* connotation is that this water has the power of life within it. That's

partly why the woman responds to His assertion the way she does. Although she throws in a ethnocentric jab in her reply, she most likely thinks that He's either jesting or has a mental problem.

He contrasts the temporality of physical water with the eternal benefit of His living water

But in His answer to her objection to His offer, He again uses the picture of the water to describe the contrasting nature of the water He just spoke of:

“She said to Him, ‘Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?’ Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.’” – Jn. 4:11-14

Jesus's next action is to come out and disclose what He meant by “living water”. Although she thinks that He's talking about *physical* water, He just offered her a water that will eternally prevent your thirst, and will produce a spring, like a well, that gives the possessor eternal life. So, in essence, He just offered her the eternal life that the Old Testament Scriptures repeatedly describe, though in lesser detail than the New. For the Jews and Samaritans, eternal life was life in a restored Eden-like kingdom of God, where the creation was brought back into perfect order and peace under the Messiah's authority. So, He's just said that He can provide her with heavenly life, if she only asks Him for it.

The way she answers His description of heavenly water is clearly sarcastic, since she is still speaking in physical, earthly terms about this water. Nevertheless, Jesus answers her scorn with a change in tactics, which is to now point to her spiritual need for God's life. He does this by forcing her to confess her most glaring social sin, the reason why she's getting water in the hottest part of the day, with no one else around.

He counters a scornful response with an exposure of her worst social sin

“The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, giver me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw.’ He said to her, ‘Go, call your husband and come here.’ The woman answered and said, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You have correctly said, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.’” – Jn. 4:15-18

Clearly this woman was sexually immoral, and perhaps even an adulteress. Which is why she was drawing water during the exact time of day that no normal woman would have. She was avoiding her neighbors by doing this, because they would have shamed and ostracized her if present. So, instead of pointing to the absurdity of her reply to His offer of heavenly water, He points out the abundant sinfulness to which she's enslaved. And being a religious Samaritan, she would have known full well that God's Law forbade sexual immorality, making her accursed by God. Not only did she need eternal life, but she also needed the washing of her sins. And that's why Jesus reminds her of the sin that most plagues her conscience and her everyday life, making her especially miserable.

Thankfully, He now starts to get somewhere with this woman, since her next response is to genuinely ask about the proper way to worship God. Since the Jews and Samaritans had two opposing religions, they had two different places to offer their animal sacrifices to God. Thus, she implicitly asks Him which is right, which gives Him an opportunity to teach her that the physical locations used for God's worship are not what matters, and that she will have the opportunity to truly worship God as *Father*.

He answers her cultural conundrum with the truth about God-pleasing worship

"The woman said to Him, 'Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'" – Jn. 4:19-24

Now that He's revealed that He knows about her specific sins, she first thinks that He's simply a prophet of God. So she poses the question of where God wants to be "worshiped," which literally means "bowed before." So, as Jesus revealed the spiritual reality pictured by physical water, now He reveals the spiritual reality about fearing and serving God that was only pictured by the temple in Jerusalem. He explains that the way God wants people to worship Him doesn't require an earthly place or temple, but requires that they worship the *Father* that they know, and that they do so "in spirit and truth."

If this worship, or “bowing before,” needs not be done at *any* temple, then it follows that this bowing is a bowing of the *inner* man, with your spirit. And since we can only honor God inwardly through His *Spirit*, it follows that we need more than our own spirit, but His empowering us. And His worship is also to be offered “in truth,” meaning with honesty, and according to what He has revealed about Himself. That’s why Jesus tells the woman that God must be worshiped as your *Father*, and not just as your Judge and Lawgiver. This is what we must make clear to people when we share the good news of God’s reconciliation through Jesus.

All that was left for Jesus was to finally identify Himself to the woman as the promised anointed Prophet, Priest, and King, who would provide “salvation” from God’s wrath, and sin’s guilt and power. So the story ends like this:

“The woman said to Him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am *He*.’” – Jn. 4:25-26

This is the climactic point that all gospel presentations must get to – revealing who Jesus is. That means explaining *how* He provided eternal life for us through His death and ascension into heaven. Then, we urge our hearer to avail himself of the gift that Jesus has earned by just *asking* for it from God, through repentance and faith.

Summing Up

Just to review what we’ve seen from Jesus’s example of sharing the good news of salvation with a seemingly closed heart, we’ll start from the top. He took his physical necessity that He was asking from the woman, and made it an object lesson to describe the spiritual life that He came to provide her. Then, He further described it by showing its exceedingly greater value to physical water, in that it would give the recipient eternal life. Third, He revealed her need for the life He was offering by gently exposing the darkness of her immoral lifestyle. Fourth, He answered her cultural confusion (as an objection) about the right place to worship by explaining what true worship of God is. And finally, He simply told her that He’s the One who came to save us from our sins through His life work, and that He is willing to give true life with the Father to those who seek it.

In our next lesson, we’ll analyze another one of Paul’s gospel presentations, in which He proves that the Scriptures foretold the death and resurrection of the Messiah, and the forgiveness of sins through His work.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are some common activities you do alongside unbelievers that you could use as illustrations of spiritual realities, and bring up the concerns of their soul?
2. How can you gently point out the sins to which unbelievers are addicted to show that they are in need of God's forgiveness and cleansing?
3. How would you define the proper way to worship God, and how does it compare to our Lord's definition?
4. How would you answer questions of which denominations, buildings, or methods are proper for worshiping God?

Chapter 7: Proving that Jesus is the Messiah Foretold by the Prophets

As our second to last study of specific examples of evangelists preaching the gospel, we turn now to Paul's longest recorded gospel sermon in Acts. In this sermon, he shows us how we can effectively share the gospel with people who know and believe the Old Testament prophets, like Jews. This is particularly important for those of us who aren't familiar with the main events of the Old Testament, and how they point forward to Jesus.

So, we find ourselves in the city of Pisidian Antioch, as Paul and his fellow church planters attend the Jewish synagogue. Paul's fame as a leading Jewish scholar and defender of the faith has given him an opportunity to speak:

“Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, ‘Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance – *all of which took* about four hundred and fifty years. After these things, He gave *them* judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom he also testified and said, ‘I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.’ From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not *He*. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’ Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers; recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled *these* by condemning *Him*. And though they found no ground for *putting Him to death*, they asked Pilate that He be executed. When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead; and for

many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.’ *As for the fact* that he raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY *and* SURE *blessings* OF DAVID.’ Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*, ‘YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.’ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.” – Acts 13:16-39

Paul does five basic things in this sermon:

1. He recounts Israel’s history up until David.
2. He recounts the history of Jesus’s life and death.
3. He proves that the Old Testament promise of salvation through Messiah was fulfilled through Jesus.
4. He proves that the Old Testament, through the prophets, foretold the resurrection of the Messiah.
5. He promises them that they can have God’s forgiveness simply through trust in Jesus.

So, let’s start looking at its details, beginning with the Israelite history that Paul describes. Why does he provide this history? The answer is for the sake of talking about Jesus. Now, there is much background knowledge that he’s assuming his hearers have about his summary of the Israelite story. He assumes that they know why God “put up with” them for forty years in the wilderness (v. 18). He’s also assuming that they know why it took “about four hundred and fifty years” for the land of Canaan to be spread out to the different tribes (v. 19). There are a couple other details he points out about God’s dealings with them, which were events that took place because they refused to obey His commandments. Finally, Paul gets to David, the greatest king of Isreal, who was the one to whom God promised that He would provide a *perfect* king, savior, and provider from his descendants. This is what is known as the Davidic Covenant, which is recorded in 2 Samuel 7. The kingdom God promised David’s line

was one that would never end, and would rule the entire earth. And Paul points out that only Jesus, “a Savior”, fulfilled this promise (v. 23).

The second section of the sermon concerns the essential parts of Jesus’s earthly life, which begin with John the Baptist. Doubtless, these Jews who lived far away from Israel had heard of this prophet. He had provoked droves of people to come to him for baptism, as he preached a message of “baptism for the forgiveness of sins” in the deserts outside of Jerusalem. The entire populace of the Jews was stirred as he, dressed in his camel’s hair and leather belt, and eating the austere diet of locusts and honey, publicly proclaimed that the Messiah was coming soon, and God would finally bring in His kingdom that would punish evildoers, and reward the righteous. This is exactly what Paul asserts when he quotes John as saying that the One coming after him was so far superior to him that he was “not worthy to untie” His sandals (v. 25).

Then, he finally gets to Jesus Himself, who is the subject of “the message of this salvation” (v. 26). Note that he makes sure that *all* his listeners in the room know that his gospel is for them, as he includes “those among you who fear God [who are Gentiles]” (v. 26). And when he describes Jesus’s arrest and crucifixion, he emphasizes the point that the inhabitants of Jerusalem and “their rulers” fulfilled “the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath” by calling for His execution (v. 27). So, Paul describes how they did “all that was written concerning Him,” and buried Him in a tomb (v. 29).

Fourth, Paul proves that Jesus fulfilled the promises made by the Old Testament of the Messiah’s resurrection from the dead. Like all the gospel preaching in the New Testament, the resurrection is the visible proof that Jesus was the Son of God sent to die for our sins, and provide us with God’s forgiveness. But not only is it *visible* proof – it’s *prophetic* proof, for many Old Testament Scriptures point to it. Paul just cites a few, including Psalm 2, Isaiah 55, and Psalm 16. When God promised that He would “beget” His king as His Son, He was referring to the resurrection that launched Jesus into cosmic rulership. Likewise, Isaiah recorded that God promised to give the promised blessings of David’s ruling descendant to describe Jesus’s resurrection. And finally, David explicitly said in Psalm 16 that God’s “Holy One” wouldn’t “undergo decay” (v. 35). From these Scriptures, Paul proves that Jesus’s resurrection fulfilled the promises of the Messiah. And this promise was originally made to “the fathers” of the Jews, or their Old Testament ancestors, starting with Abraham.

After he proves that Jesus is the promised King-Savior whom God raised from the dead to reign over His eternal kingdom, he ends the sermon in much the same way that he ended the one in Acts 17. However, since he's now speaking to followers of Jewish law, he fits the good news of the gospel to their situation. Like him, they had been striving to please God and gain His favor through obedience to the Law of Moses. This proved a futile and agonizing effort, since its demands are far beyond any human ability, and meant to be that way. As Paul writes in Romans 3:20, "through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin," and it was brought in to *increase* people's sins, and leave them without any hope but God's mercy. Thus, why Jesus came was good news indeed for miserable law-keepers.

Paul's words of invitation in his gospel call are worth remembering:

" . . . through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses." (vss. 38-39)

This is what we should preach to all people who are vainly trying to follow the Old Testament teachings, and believe that God spoke through the prophets. They can be freed from bondage to all the Old Testament laws, and the condemnation they bring, if they simply believe the promise of life through the crucified and risen Messiah, Jesus. The Law brings about wrath, but faith brings the blessing of Abraham to all who trust God's Messiah without working.

In summary, those who believe the Old Testament prophecies usually need to be shown that Jesus has fulfilled them through His life, death, and resurrection. They need to be shown from the New Testament testimony that He has done all that God requires for our forgiveness, cleansing and adoption. He is the son of David, the son of Abraham, the true Israelite, and most importantly our great High Priest who has once for all satisfied God's wrath through the sacrifice of Himself. Only He has brought to completion and fulfillment all that the Old Testament pointed forward to.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does Israel's history before David show the need for the Messiah?
2. What are the major things the Old Testament predicts about Jesus's life and death?
3. How did the Prophets speak of Jesus's resurrection?
4. Why can't people be freed from sin and guilt through the Law?
5. How does Jesus free Law-keepers from "all things"?

Chapter 8: The First Gospel Message to Gentiles

Our last example of gospel preaching comes from Peter's encounter with the first Gentile to believe the gospel and be saved. This is the famous account of the Roman centurion named Cornelius, along with his household. The story begins with Peter staying at a tanner's house by the sea. As he's praying, he receives a vision from God showing him every sort of animal on a carpet, and the Lord telling him to eat them. After replying that he can't eat the unclean animals shown to him, the Lord declares to him that he should stop calling "unclean" what God has purified.

As soon as the vision ends, Cornelius's servants come to him, asking if they can speak to him. So they tell him that Cornelius has also received a divine message telling him to request Peter to meet him at his house, so he can hear God's message of salvation. Having arrived at the house, and prefacing his address to the man's entire household, he explains the gospel like this:

"The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) – you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. *You know of* Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." – Acts 10:36-43

In this beautiful gospel message, Peter does three things, which serve as an outline for our own witnessing:

1. He summarizes the gospel as peace through Jesus the Lord.
2. He surveys Jesus's life from John to the cross.
3. He confirms Jesus's resurrection appearances as being seen by many.
4. He conveys the meaning of Jesus's death and resurrection for our peace with God.

The Gospel is Summarized

Conveniently for us, Peter seems to give his lesson a title that sums up its entire content: it's "the word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)" (v. 36). Here is the aim of the gospel in a nutshell. It's first of all the "word," or "message," that was originally sent to the Jews. However, it's now been proven to be the message for *all* people. Its aim is to give peace to sinners "through Jesus Christ," the Lord of all.

At the very beginning, Peter implies the bad news that necessitates the good news. Needing peace implies that there's war, or hostility, between us and God. This is due to God's hatred for the sin within our hearts, and the sins we commit continually. As rebels against Him, we are in danger of His punishment, so we need Him to give us a way to be in harmony with Him. And that Way is Jesus Christ, or Messiah, the anointed King-Savior. It's through His mighty deeds that He's appeased God's justice against us, and given us a way to become God's children. He has the power to do this because He is "the Lord of all," or God Himself in the flesh. Hence, before even giving the details of the good news, Peter has encapsulated all he intends to say in this beautiful message title.

He Surveys Jesus's Life from John to the Cross

The second portion of Peter's gospel is a detailing of Jesus's earthly ministry and death. Since Cornelius has already heard about these things, this is a reminder, but it's a *necessary* reminder, since he needs to understand the proof that Jesus lived the Messiah's life, and died as the "notorious" Jesus of Nazareth. It all starts with John the Baptist's preaching of his "baptism for the forgiveness of sins." This was the event during which Jesus was first publicly displayed as the Messiah through the Father's voice from heaven, and the visible descent of the Spirit upon Him.

And that descent of the Spirit was God's anointing "Him with the Holy Spirit and with power" (v. 38). Due to this empowerment that was promised to the Messiah, He was "doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (v. 38). These things were also prophesied by the Old Testament, and essential as a foretaste of what He'd accomplish through His atoning death and resurrection.

Finally, Peter asserts that he, and those with him, are "witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (v. 39). He's assuring Cornelius here that what He's describing was seen by his own eyes, as evidence for Cornelius to base his faith on. And

the climactic event in this section is obviously the fact that Jesus was put to death through crucifixion. This would have been widely announced already by many to the surrounding region, but it must be said that the One crucified as a criminal was the same One who only did good to people through the power of the Holy Spirit. But this is incomplete without a testimony about Jesus's essential resurrection.

He Confirms that Jesus's Resurrection Life was Seen by Many

As the greatest point of evidence for the validity and cosmic significance of Jesus's life, Peter must confirm that Jesus rose from the dead. He does this by saying that God made Him visible to a select number of people who literally "ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead" (v. 41). If this isn't a compelling testimony of His new life, then what is? This full-blooded Jew, who had likely never set foot in the house of a Gentile, was telling a Gentile that he and his companions had eaten with the resurrected Messiah. But he now must get to the *meaning* of these facts for Cornelius's salvation.

He Conveys the Meaning of Jesus's Death and Resurrection for Salvation

Finally, Peter concludes with the significance and promise of these historical facts he's described. The first point is that, through Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, God has proven that He "has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead" (v. 42).

The fact that Jesus is the Judge of all people at the end of time, when all are raised from the dead, shows that He possesses the same authority and wisdom as God. The Old Testament, as well as logical reasoning, testifies that only God is qualified to render sentences for all people based on every decision they've made in their lives. Only God could judge "the thoughts and intentions of the heart," and "judge the secrets of men" (Heb. 4:13; Rom. 2:16). Hence, Jesus must be divine as well as human.

The fact that Jesus is the Judge also implies that He speaks on behalf of the law used as the standard of judgment. With this in mind, it's not much of a leap to infer that He's the one who has determined the law. As such, He's the One who rules over all people, and will determine everyone's final destiny.

Thankfully, the One whom Peter describes as the ultimate Judge is *also* the One who provides us with the forgiveness we need from God. He concludes his message by proclaiming that "all the prophets" of the Old Testament testify that those with faith in Jesus receive the forgiveness of their sins "through His name" (v. 43). Although this idea of the "name" of someone being the power that does God's work is quite foreign to most of us, any who are

familiar with the Old Testament will understand. By “name,” Peter means Jesus’s *nature* and *deeds*. His name is something like His *reputation* or *authority*, which tells us what role He plays in God’s redemption. Since His full name is the Lord Jesus Christ, He possesses everything necessary to provide us with God’s forgiveness.

As “Lord,” He is the divine Son of God who controls everything, and will judge everyone. As “Jesus,” He is the perfect man who lived the perfect life, suffered our death, and now lives forever as our Representative and Head. Finally, as “Christ,” or “anointed One,” He is the ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King, who reveals God’s Word to us, gives us access to the Father through His blood, and rules the new heavenly nation of redeemed saints. Therefore, when Peter says that Jesus’s name is the instrument through which God grants believers forgiveness, he’s saying that believers are relying on everything about Him represented by His “name”.

Thankfully, since Jesus is the Judge, it should be understood that this “forgiveness of sins” isn’t partial, but complete. Since Jesus paid for *all* our sins, it only makes sense that *all* our sins are forgiven the moment we believe, and this perpetually. God can’t hold any more sin against us, since Jesus’s sacrifice was full, complete, and perfect. He suffered *all* the punishment we deserve, so we receive forgiveness for *all* the sins we commit. And this is the most wonderful news non-Christians can hear!

Recap

The breakdown of Peter’s gospel presentation is so simple. He first gives a sort of thesis statement to what he’s going to describe. It’s “God’s peace through Jesus the Savior and Lord”. Then, he details the proof from Jesus’s life that He was the promised Messiah through His life of love and miraculous service through the Spirit. Third, he confirms that Jesus truly died and rose from the dead, since He appeared and ate with many eyewitnesses who knew Him. And finally, he explains that all these facts prove that Jesus will judge and sentence all people to the afterlife suited for them, and that God’s forgiveness is promised to all who put their trust in what He’s done for sinners.

Questions for Reflection

1. Are you able to briefly summarize the gospel message in a sentence in casual conversation?
2. Do you know the most significant details of Jesus’s life and death?
3. Are you able to explain the compelling proof that Jesus rose from the dead?

4. Do you emphasize that people will be judged by Jesus at the end of their lives?
5. Are you clear to promise that God promises full forgiveness to all who believe?

Part 4: Principles, Methods, and Practicing Evangelism

Chapter 9: The Basic Principles of Evangelism

It's now time to condense all that we've learned from the Scriptures in the previous chapters, and outline a simple summary of the gospel message, and what needs it addresses. I've boiled down the message and purposes of evangelism into six core principles. These are as follows:

1. **God is Calling People to Worship His Son**
2. **Man is in Rebellion Against Our Creator**
3. **Jesus the Christ Came to Make Peace Between God and Man**
4. **God's Pardon and Life are Received through Repentant Faith**
5. **Repentance Should Appear in the Form of Outward Obedience**
6. **Converts Must Be Mentored, Shepherded, Counseled, and Taught**

Calling to mind the teachings and examples we've studied thus far, let's see how these principles can be relevantly, clearly, and succinctly shared with non-Christians. As we've seen, the whole work of evangelism is expressing the gospel to unbelievers in ways they can understand, in whatever situation we find ourselves in to preach.

God is Calling All People to Worship His Son

In the Creator God of the Gospel chapter about Acts 17, we saw that God has a universal call to all people to “repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed” (Acts 17:31). As the Judge of all people, Jesus exercises the kingly authority of the Father over all creation. Hence, He is the one to whom all allegiance, obedience, reverence, and submission is owed.

Since Jesus is the supreme Representative of the Father, the only way God can be worshiped is through Him. The New Testament is filled with references to worshipping Jesus, since worship is manifested in praise, adoration, and obedience. To give one example, Paul begins his first letter to the Corinthians by describing Christians as those who,

“. . . in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” – 1 Cor. 1:2

In the Old Testament, to “call on the name” of someone is almost always used in reference to God. And when it's used in relation to Him, it's always describing an act of

worship. In essence, to call on the name of Jesus means that we're asking Him for divine help and power. We rely on Him for our every need.

As another example of this call to worship the Lord Jesus, take the grand purpose statement of the universe in Colossians 1:

“He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him . . .” – Col. 1:17-19

What can it mean for Jesus to “have first place in everything” except that He is the attention center of the universe? In other words, since He is God in the flesh, and rules over all things, He deserves all of humanity's trust, adoration, and reverence. We ought to worship the Son even as we worship the Father. Jesus Himself said this when He was on earth:

“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” – Jn. 5:22-23

Case closed. Jesus Himself said that the Father wants His Son to be honored in the same way that He is honored. And the way He's spreading this message of worshiping Jesus is through gospel preaching. The gospel is nothing less than a call to idol-worshippers to worship “the true God and eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:20). By preaching the gospel with unbelievers, we echo the warning of Psalm 2:12:

“Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!”

Man is in Rebellion Against Our Just Creator

The obvious problem we've noticed that the gospel provides a solution for is mankind's sin. And we've further seen that sins aren't merely mistakes, misunderstandings, or a superficial illness. Sin is a deadly condition of hating God's character and requirements. Simply put, sin is rebellion against the authority of our Creator. At its heart is the desire to be our *own* creators, providers, and rulers.

By examining the passages in Romans, we found that sin is evil within the heart of man, and continually practiced by his nature. If we were to read the second half of Romans 1, we'd find that man's sinfulness is even more graphically and hideously described. In this passage, Paul narrates the natural progression of all people, in all places, at all times.

He writes that even though people *know* who God is by “seeing” His “eternal power and divine nature” in the creation, they refuse to find in Him their ultimate good (Rom. 1:19-21). Instead, we choose to find our objects of worship in what he’s made, such as animals and people (1:22-23). Since we “exchange the truth of God for a lie,” we ignore the knowledge of right and wrong that He’s built within us, and instead do what pleases our selfish desires (v. 25). As a consequence, God allows sinners to be more and more corrupted by their sins, so that their thinking becomes increasingly unreasonable (v. 28). Sinners still know that their sins deserve death through their consciences, but continue rebelling against God anyway (v. 32). At the heart of sin is a refusal to trust the goodness and truth of God’s moral standard, or law, for us.

The second element of man’s rebellion is God’s just response to it. People must be warned that He is jealous for His glory, honor, and worship, through humanity. Although He’s given every good thing everyone has, He also has a hatred for sinners that’s demonstrated on earth in consequential suffering and death. When I say that He hates sinners, I’m saying nothing unbiblical, since the Bible is clear about this reasonable fact. First, just think – how could the good, pure, and truthful God take delight in creatures that *despise, rebel against,* and *misrepresent* Him? We have the potential to be the most godlike creature in the universe, and instead we misuse and corrupt our own human nature, and therefore God’s image.

Just to give you one example of Scripture’s testimony about God’s hatred for natural man:

“The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates.” – Ps. 11:5

One of the clearest short passages about God’s wrath is a quotation from the words of John the Baptist:

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” – Jn. 3:36

Notice here that God feels a *wrath* toward *all* who fail to obey His Son. This is what we must help sinners understand. They must be convinced of sin, righteousness, and God’s impending judgement of them. Only then will the gospel be the soothing comfort for a condemned rebel.

Jesus the Christ Came to Make Peace Between God and Man

If evangelism is a call to worship, and people are unable and unwilling to worship God, then Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection are the only ways we can be restored to friendship with

God. Hopefully, we've so encountered the details of Jesus's nature, death, and resurrection that you have a firm grasp on how to simply explain it. However, it bears repeating in the most succinct and contemporary form I can muster.

The heart of the good news is that God sent His eternal Son to earth in the form of a man. He was conceived in the womb of a virgin, Mary, by God's infinite power. As such, He didn't share the sinful nature of Adam, the first man. Yet He was fully human. He lived about 2,026 years ago in Roman-ruled Israel, where He was baptized by John the Baptist, empowered with the Holy Spirit to do miracles, and went about for over 2 years preaching God's kingdom, healing the sick; raising the dead; restoring sight for the blind; giving hearing to the deaf; and casting out demons. Then, nearly three years into this, He was condemned by the Jews and Romans under Pontius Pilate for claiming to be the divine Messiah. He was executed by crucifixion, but not simply by people.

On the cross, Jesus, by His own free will and love, let Himself be abandoned, condemned, and punished by God the Father. The Father treated Him how we deserve, as if Jesus had committed all our sins. In other words, Jesus satisfied God's justice and wrath that we've earned through our sins. Then, God raised Him from the dead two days later, when He appeared to His disciples for forty days afterward. On the fortieth day, they saw Him enter physically into heaven, where He's now controlling all things through the Father's power. He proved this first when He rose from the dead, and then when He sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to begin the body of Christ, which exploded into the most influential and pervasive community in history. But Jesus's death and resurrection can only provide you with God's forgiveness if you respond to His command.

God's Pardon and Life are Received through Repentant Faith

After describing who Jesus is, and what He's done, we must convey the gospel *call*, or command. This is the "repent" we considered earlier with Paul's sermon in Athens. Although Jesus has already paid the penalty for our sins, God will only forgive all our sins, treat us as innocent or just, and bestow His blessing on us, if we do two interdependent things. We must repent and believe His promise.

God will not simply withhold His wrath from us because His Son died in our place. He'll only reconcile to Himself those who acknowledge their sinfulness and wrong, and ask for His mercy and forgiveness because of Jesus. These are the two elements: to repent means to "change your mind," or give up your deceitful way of thinking about God and His perception of

you, and agree with what He's declared in the gospel; to believe means you rely on, depend on, or trust in God's promise to forgive, adopt, and transform you because of what Jesus did for your sake. In sum, you give up your sin and guilt to Jesus, and take His innocence, goodness, and blessedness from Him through prayer. This is all that needs to be said. There's no example or encouragement to ask a convinced person to repeat a prayer after you. Their understanding of the gospel should be enough to enable them to ask from God what He's promised the repentant.

Repentance Should Appear in the Form of Outward Obedience

Unfortunately, because people are so deceitful, even toward themselves, those who profess faith and confess their sinfulness need something to confirm to other believers that they genuinely trust the Lord (even though there's nothing fool-proof). In the New Testament, the first and most important of these signs is baptism, or literally "immersion" into water.

Thus, when someone expresses their desire to worship and honor Jesus as their God (i.e., "confess Jesus as Lord"), we should impress on them first their need to give up their sins, and secondly, their need to seek the opportunity to be baptized. Since my concern is to provide the *basics* of evangelism principles, I won't go into detail about the particulars of baptism, which is the subject of much disagreement and debate. Instead, I'll just provide two Scriptures that support the necessity of urging immediate action after an unbeliever confesses his faith:

"... but [I] *kept* declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance." – Acts 26:20

"Peter *said* to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" – Acts 2:38

Converts Must Be Mentored, Shepherded, Counseled, and Taught

The final main principle of sharing the gospel is the goal for those who are persuaded through our preaching. It's based on the mission statement the Lord gave us through the apostles, found in Matthew 28:19-20:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . ."

The middle instruction we've already mentioned, but we need to consider the first and last. As is often noted, Jesus didn't say "make *converts*," but make *disciples*. A disciple is a

follower, student, and imitator. Through the gospel, we're tasked with persuading people to submit to the authority and rule of the Lord Jesus, and commit themselves to Him and His teaching in Scripture. This is why Jesus further describes making disciples as "teaching them to observe all that I commanded".

The first goal of evangelism is to share the gospel. The second one is to persuade the hearer to *believe* it. But the *end* goal of winning someone to the kingdom of God on this earth is to teach them to obey the Lord. This is one of the main purposes of local churches, or assemblies. Localized groups of believers gather on at least a weekly basis for mutual instruction, encouragement, and counsel.

However, the "discipleship" of new believers usually shouldn't be confined to the weekly gathering of the saints, as often brief and inadequate that is. The teaching, counseling, and mentoring of newborn believers should often be supplemented from *outside* the weekly assembly. This is why many churches have new believer or member classes, "small groups," or "discipleship groups".

It's especially important for new believers to be immediately mentored and taught the basic teachings of the apostles, since they're so ignorant, undeveloped, and newly separated from the sinful world. This is why follow-up, friendship, and regular meetings for encouragement and counseling are nearly essential for new converts.

Hence, if we have the privilege of being used by the Lord to win a soul to faith, we should do our utmost to follow up with them. We should at least exchange contact information, and help them find the best local fellowship they can participate in. Further, we should attempt to make sure they have a printed Bible, which is a necessity in our digitally addicted society. Also, we should make sure they have someone in their life that can be a more mature godly example to them, as a mentor. Finally, we should remember to pray with them, in order to teach them to pray, and receive God's help for them. The end goal of winning a sinner to Christ is to help them be *conformed* to His holy image in their thinking and behavior.

Evangelism is How Christ is Redeeming All the Peoples through His Servants

To sum up these principles, let's think about the big picture once again. The Lord has left His followers here to engage in the work that He did while on earth. Basically, this work is to serve people with the love of God. But the heart of this "work of service" is to proclaim the good news of God's reign through Jesus's redemption. In evangelism, we're carrying on the proclamation that Jesus and His apostles began.

But what is God's purpose in spreading the good news? It is primarily to call His chosen people out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). That is, to grant the gifts of repentance and faith to the elect by "the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). The gospel is God's call to people to repent and trust His Son, so that they *will* obey His command. Through preaching, the ones whom Christ reconciled to God in status are now being reconciled to God in time and space. God is recreating a new humanity for Himself out of all the tribes, peoples, tongues, and nations of the earth. And we're his human means to do this.

Secondarily, the gospel also *hardens* and *condemns* those who *haven't* been predestined by God to believe the gospel. The gospel is the testimony against them that they are so hostile to God, they won't accept His gracious, wonderful, and free terms of peace. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2, the gospel is an aroma of death to those who are perishing (2 Cor. 2:15-16). Nevertheless, God is still glorified in leaving them without any excuse, and demonstrating His kindness to evil and ungrateful men.

In all this, as in all things, the purpose of evangelism is to glorify God. Through speaking of the Lord Jesus, He's more known, recognized, and honored. Not only are those who *hear* the gospel privileged to think about God our Savior, but everyone who *shares* the gospel is brought under the sanctifying, comforting, and delighting influence of the Word of God. "To us who are being saved," the gospel is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18).

We've now overviewed the basic principles of soul-winning, but before we end our study of evangelism, it will be helpful to explain some of the most effective methods of sharing the gospel, and then address some of the most common *obstacles* to sharing the gospel.

Chapter 10: Main Methods for Evangelism

In spite of many teachings about evangelism, there isn't one, or even a few, methods of sharing the gospel prescribed by Scripture. As we've seen in the survey of various preaching examples, the ways in which we explain the gospel can be as varied as the different situations we're put in for evangelizing. Still, there are several ways of sharing the gospel that are time-tested, practical, and effective. We'll give an overview of them here.

In all these methods, the basic message of the gospel remains the same, as described in the previous principles. However, based on the circumstances under which we're enabled to share, the form that message takes will often change.

Ask a Spiritual Question

One of the most obvious ways of sharing the gospel is simply to strike up a conversation with someone by asking what they think or believe about a spiritual topic. There are many good open-ended questions we can ask, such as:

- "What do you believe happens to us when we die?"
- "Do you have a religious background?"
- "How do you think a person gets to heaven?"
- "Who do you believe Jesus is?"
- "Why do you think there's evil and suffering in the world?"
- "What does it mean to be a good person?"
- "What do you think is the ultimate purpose of life?"

Depending on the person and situation, if we ask an appropriate and compelling question, we can be well on our way to explaining the gospel. Most people enjoy expressing their opinions on important subjects, since they're proud of their thinking. We just have to be ready to respond to their answer with correction or a line of questioning that will lead them to consider their relationship to God, and the historical reality of Jesus's work.

Offer a Gospel Tract

My most common method of sharing the gospel is to offer a gospel tract. A gospel tract is any pamphlet, card, or booklet that briefly explains the gospel. These have been used by Christians since the soon after the Reformation, and are one of the easiest ways to get the gospel into someone's hands, or to initiate a conversation.

One way you can offer tracts to people is by saying something like, “Would you like some good news from the Bible?” And tracts can be offered almost anytime and anywhere. When you’re checking out at a store or restaurant, you can offer a tract. Or if you’re saying goodbye to someone you just met, you can do it as well. Often, people are more interested in reading what it says than they come off as, and have the liberty to learn the gospel in private.

Ask for a Prayer Request

Another common way that Christians share the gospel is by offering to pray for someone. The key with asking for prayer requests is to actually *share the gospel* after praying. Praying for an unbeliever can be a good way to show you care about them, and to show that you know the God that they’re disobeying. It shows that God is willing to do good to them if they repent.

As with asking a question, this will often require you to ask them about your prayer. You can even lead the conversation with a question *about* prayer, such as “Why do you think God should answer our prayers”? Or “Do you know why I pray in Jesus’s name?” You can also explain to them that they could get assurance that God will answer their prayers if they believe the gospel. Then you may have an opening to *explain* that gospel to them.

Preach in a Public Place (Open-Air Preaching)

The last and most uncommon form of sharing the gospel is called “open-air preaching.” This is the delivery of monologues to large groups of people in public places, usually using an electric speaker. This was the distinguishing form of evangelism in the First and Second Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries (minus the electronics). However, in the last couple of decades, it’s grown in popularity among many American believers.

This obviously is the most irritating, uncomfortable, and unliked form of evangelism. For these and other reasons, it’s also a form that’s only practiced by a select few Christians. And this is a good thing. When you’re attempting to rightly explain the gospel to a multitude of people in public, in the most obtrusive and invasive way, you need to be sure you’re called by God to do it.

Due to its commanding and authoritative fashion, open-air preaching ought to only be done by men. It’s not the role of women to be forcefully confronting people about the gospel without their permission. This is a task that is only designed for masculine brothers who are compelled to go out and make the Word known to the masses.

Finally, although this is the most abrasive method of sharing the gospel, it does have strengths. For one, people who otherwise may have not decided to listen to a personal conversation about the gospel can be forced to hear it. And in spite of their unwillingness, God can still use His powerful Word to change their hearts. Secondly, open-air preaching shows our secular, anti-Christian, and pluralistic world that Christ's body won't be silenced. It's a reminder that God is still spreading His gospel, in spite of people's individualistic and closed-off lives. Further, it's also a reminder that at least the United States is a country where people are guaranteed the freedom to share their messages with the public, no matter what people's attitudes are toward them.

How do you know if you should preach in the open air? You should only do so if you are gifted with one-sided communication, have a longing to plead with many sinners to believe, and have a good public setting and occasion to do so.

On the topic of public places, let's briefly consider a few places that are especially convenient for sharing the gospel.

Public Colleges

One of the ripest communities in the West for gospel preaching is the public college or university. Theoretically, colleges are designed as the spaces for the most open and free exchange of ideas. They have traditionally been places where opposing viewpoints are compared, contrasted, and debated. This spirit still exists on campuses, making them ideal places to present the gospel.

Also, most students at colleges are young people who have not yet formed their guiding beliefs, life philosophy, and are usually confused about the ultimate questions. In our day, the young adult generation isn't grounded by any holistic belief system, and is usually searching for answers to the biggest questions of life. Hence, they're often more willing and eager to listen to the message of Christ than most other generations.

This is why we should prioritize promoting the teaching and preaching of the gospel on public campuses. One way to do this is just to go yourself during the free time students have, and seek to share the gospel with them. Or you can somehow partner with a Christian club or group at a campus, and work with them to promote evangelism and discipleship there.

A final reason, which is perhaps most important, for preaching on public campuses is that they have one of the highest concentrations of foreigners and immigrants of all the places in our society. And this means that great numbers of nations and peoples are represented by the

students. This being the case, public colleges are one of the few places where we can truly make disciples of many far-away nations, and equip them to go back to their own people to promote preaching to unreached peoples *around* them. College ministry is one of the key ways we westerners should play a direct and powerful role in the Great Commission. We can evangelize distant peoples without even going to their lands, since they've come to *us*. Let us make this a priority for our Christian witness as local fellowships.

Charity Activities

A second endeavor for sharing the gospel can be charitable efforts. This has long, and still is, one of the most effective ways of reaching the needy with the Word of life. Obviously, the act of providing material goods for those who lack is a wonderful instrument for also *explaining* God's love through the gospel. The key here is that we must make sure our acts of kindness are supplemented by our *preaching*. We must make clear that we're helping people because we serve the God who provided the ultimate mercy and Help we need. That is, while meeting their physical needs, we need to explain that they have a spiritual need of forgiveness that can only be granted by God through Jesus.

Whether this involves using a clothing bank, offering a free meal, or going directly to the impoverished or homeless, loving our community can be one of the most persuasive means of spreading the gospel with the perishing.

Busy Streets

Finally, the most obvious place to share the gospel is a busy street or town square. This is where open-air preaching and tract distribution is often most effective. Especially since there may be vendors hawking their empty wares, shouldn't the life-giving message of Jesus be offered to the perishing and deceived masses? Let us use the high concentration of people on the streets to our advantage in communicating to large numbers of people within a short time period.

Message Over Method

No matter what way you decide to share the gospel, the important thing is that you're regularly doing it *somehow*. We should have such a fear of our Father, and such a love for miserable, guilty, sinners, that we're *impelled* to share the best news anyone can ever hear. But in all our efforts, we need to partner together with our local fellowships to pray for, and to discuss, the spread of the gospel for the conversion of the lost around us.

All that remains in our practical advice is to address a few common hindrances.

Chapter 11: Overcoming Obstacles and Objections to Evangelism

Because we're doing God's work to rescue souls from the dominion of the devil and his hosts, we need to expect opposition when trying to preach the gospel. This opposition comes from all three main sources of evil in our lives – the flesh, the world, and the devil. To address this opposition, we'll first explain how to overcome our own personal discouragement for sharing the gospel with our neighbors, and then briefly look at a few of the most-heard objections to the truthfulness of the gospel. This second part covers the area of thinking known as "apologetics," or the defense of Christianity.

Some Common Personal Discouragements

"I Never Have an Opening with People to Speak About Jesus"

Our first obstacle that keeps many of us from sharing the gospel is a perceived lack of opportunity. I say a *perceived* lack because except in the most extreme cases, we usually have opportunities to share the gospel every *day*. What's lacking is our willingness to take the first step, and bring up the *subject*.

Usually, at the root of the problem is first a forgetfulness about our *mission* as the Lord's servants. When we're at work, at school, or in a public place, our ultimate purpose is to make God's glory known through Jesus. And the most direct and loving way to do this is to describe what He's done for sinners like our co-worker, classmate, or neighbor. We must remember that we're representing *Jesus*, their *Judge*, to them.

The second mistake we make in our everyday interactions with people is neglecting to ask for the wisdom, courage, and *ability* to share the gospel. If God desires that people learn the gospel through us, don't you think he wants to answer our prayers for help with this, so that He'll get the praise? Of course he does! Hence, when we're around our everyday companions, we should first be *asking* for a way to speak of Christ and salvation, and then *look* for the way that God has promised to provide.

At the same time, we shouldn't expect every spiritual exchange we initiate to allow us to explain every aspect of the gospel. This should be our goal, but God often uses bits and pieces of the truth to convict a person, and then persuade him to believe. All we need to do is try to explain the gospel in a respectful, considerate, patient, but clear way. May the Lord empower us to speak the truth in love.

“I Can’t Explain the Gospel in a Way that’s Persuasive”

Although by this point, you shouldn’t be using this as an argument for your inadequacy, I must bear with the weaknesses of the weak. This objection is rooted in the false belief that *how* you explain the message is more important than the message itself. Actually, one of the biggest factors in your witnessing is that you make clear that *you* believe the gospel, not that it *sounds* appealing. The gospel is appealing just by itself, but you should share it such that you’re *caring* about your hearer, and you’re also *gripped* by the goodness of the gospel.

Nevertheless, you shouldn’t fall into the trap of believing that *you* have the power through your personality to convince someone to believe the gospel. The One who ultimately has to supernaturally change your hearer’s heart for them to believe is *God* through the Spirit. And the Holy Spirit effects this change of mind through the *truths* of the gospel, not primarily through your expressions, mannerisms, or illustrations. You simply have to be faithful to earnestly explain the gospel with clarity and concern, and leave the impact up to the Lord. This is why without prayer, our efforts are fruitless.

“I’ve Misrepresented Jesus So Much that They Won’t Listen.”

The final personal objection I’ll answer is that of a ruined testimony. This can be a legitimate claim, since often unbelievers who experience a professing believer’s sinful behavior use it as an argument against the truth of the gospel. If you’re in this situation, then it can be remedied. But it will probably require you to humble yourself and confess your hypocrisy to the unbeliever you’ve offended.

However, one of the greatest evidences for the truth of the gospel is a humble confession of sin to someone you’ve wronged. And make no mistake – any time you commit sin in the sight of someone, you’re wronging them because you’re misrepresenting God to them. But if you prayerfully ask to apologize, and then apologize to whoever has witnessed your flagrant sinfulness, this is often the perfect opportunity to share the gospel.

You can use such a confession to say something like, “I’ve committed a great sin, and I used to live a *life* of sin. But I’ve given up that behavior, confessed it to God, and believed that He’s forgiven me. And His grace through Christ’s death is the only hope I have of escaping hell on judgment day. I’m here because I want you to have God’s forgiveness too. But I also want you to forgive me for both our sakes. Will you?”

After such confessions, God can work miracles. And then you can start demonstrating that you *do* believe the gospel for your salvation through your godly, but imperfect, actions.

Next, we move to some of the most common objections to the gospel from unbelievers.

Some Common Objections to the Gospel

I'm no apologetics expert, so I can't provide the specific evidence supporting every gospel truth that's objected to. However, with a thorough understanding of the gospel, the overarching story of Scripture, and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian church, most objections can be answered rather easily. But if you ever are put in the position where you're compelled to answer an objection that you're uninformed on, you always have the option of simply admitting, "I don't know," and reminding your listener that the destiny of his soul doesn't depend on the answer, but on his response to Jesus Christ. One thing to remember is that the gospel and your obedience to it are always their own best arguments. Nevertheless, here are a few responses to some common arguments against the gospel.

"Why Should I Believe the Bible?"

As in most cases, the greatest proof for the truthfulness of Scripture is Jesus Himself. First of all, most professional historians agree that there was such a man as Jesus of Nazareth who lived 2,026 years ago, shook up Jewish society in Israel, and was crucified by the authority of Pontius Pilate. Even the staunch Jewish historian Josephus, in his great historical work, testifies that Jesus of Nazareth was claimed to have performed miracles within the first thirty years of the 1st century, and then to have been executed.

Secondly, if we carefully read some of the historical narratives of the New Testament, we'll find that they include minute people, place, and custom names. Specifically, the Gospel of Luke and Acts, addressed to the same man, are intricate works of historical research. When he begins his Gospel, he specifically mentions seven different rulers to pinpoint the exact time period when John the Baptist began his preaching, including the year of Caesar's reign. Also, he mentions the names of so many people, that it's clear he's writing accounts from eyewitnesses of the events. In addition, he doesn't put Jesus's disciples into an exaggeratingly positive light, but describes many of the failures, the chief one being their abandonment of Jesus during His arrest. Then most of all, the details included in the resurrection events and appearances are so many and specific to be beyond doubt of their sincere testimony. Added to Luke's historical detail is the harmony of the other Gospels, told from three different perspectives, and told for slightly different purposes. It's clear that the authors and co-authors of these accounts witnessed the life, death, and resurrection of the same Man.

Based on these eyewitness accounts, which are included in part in the rest of the New Testament, we see a portrait of a Man who stirred up multitudes of people, including the highest authorities of Israel at the time. He was so popular for a time, that crowds of people were suspected of wanting to force Him to be the Jewish king. And they were compelled to this opinion by seeing Him do spectacular miracles, including raising the dead. Given that this Man could do miracles, and opposed the hypocritical and oppressive leaders of His society, we can have good reason to take into consideration His reverence for the Old Testament Scriptures. *He* believed that the historical claims of those Scriptures were true, including the origin story of Adam.

Beyond this, Jesus shows us that the Old Testament clearly predicted the events of His life and death. The Gospels are thoroughly littered with Old Testament quotations that foretell events such as His birth, exile, miracles, and betrayal. Although not quoted by Himself, Isaiah 53 specifically predicts that the Messiah would be “pierced” hundreds of years before crucifixion was invented!

Although many other reasons could be cited to argue for believing the Bible, one of them stands above them all. Its accounts are the only ones in any ancient religious text that present our human condition as we experience it, and provide a real solution for alienation from God. Only the Bible claims that our Creator became a human being, so that He could suffer our pain, guilt, and shame through betrayal, and satisfy the justice of God that we all inwardly sense must be fulfilled. Only the Bible teaches that God has provided a way out of our misery, guilt, and death, by giving up His Son as the sacrifice for our moral evil, and promising full forgiveness, peace, and eternal life to all who trust in the One who rose from the dead. Which leads to our next common objection.

“Why Should I Believe that Jesus Rose from the Dead?”

This might be the most pressing objection to answer, since it’s one of the most argued truths in the New Testament. Paul himself asserts that if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then our faith in Him is useless, and we’re living a fantasy (1 Cor. 15). There are many proofs that Jesus rose from the dead, but in explaining them to someone, we should remember the words of Abraham to the rich man in hell:

“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.” – Lk. 16:31

Nevertheless, it's important for some people that they know the basic evidence that Jesus rose again. In explaining how we can know that He's alive, all I'll do is point out some compelling facts about the circumstances of the resurrection.

First, the tomb in which He was laid was sealed and well-guarded. It would have taken a gigantic effort for any human being to take His body out of the grave. The stone that shut its opening was a huge one weighing at least hundreds of pounds. Then, the Jewish leaders ordered that the stone have a seal placed on it, so that if anyone attempted to remove it, they would know. Finally, they commissioned two soldiers to guard the tomb from any tampering.

It's clear that the Roman and Jewish authorities wouldn't want it to even *look* like Jesus had risen as He predicted, since people's belief in His resurrection would cause more problems for them, as so happened. That leaves the disciples as possible suspects for taking His body from the grave, but they were terrified of being treated like Jesus, and went to hide themselves from the authorities. Further, *they* didn't even believe that He'd rise from the dead, which is evidenced by the fact that they were making no attempts to see the tomb until the women had gone to it with *burial* spices for his body.

At this point, the resurrection accounts demonstrate their honesty, since the first person to see Him risen from the dead is Mary, a woman. At that time, the testimony of a woman meant nothing, especially according to the Jewish Talmud. And yet in the Gospels, they are the people who first testify to anyone that Jesus has risen.

So, when Peter and John go to the tomb to investigate, the Gospels tell us that they found exactly what the women claimed to have seen, except for Jesus. Even *they* don't believe He rose from the dead after initially witnessing the tomb. However, the narratives go on to recount several different appearances of Jesus, from three different authors, Matthew, Luke, and John.

The next piece of evidence for the resurrection is that the disciples, who had previously been hiding for over a month from the Jewish authorities, eventually went out in public during the feast of Pentecost, then on a couple more occasions, insisting that Jesus rose from the dead in fulfillment of the Old Testament Prophets. But the important point to note here is that they did this *knowing* that the Jewish leaders were ready to use violence to silence them. This is described in the first several chapters of Acts, and shows that the apostles were willing to be arrested, imprisoned, beaten, and shunned for claiming that Jesus was the resurrected Messiah.

A final intellectual piece of evidence for Jesus's resurrection is the impact of the early disciples on Jerusalem, Israel, Samaria, and the entire Roman Empire. Christianity became one of the most influential and growing faiths at the time, and convinced thousands of Scripturally ignorant people to worship a crucified and risen Man. Along with this, one of the most ardent opponents of the Christians was himself persuaded that Jesus rose from the dead – Paul. Paul claimed to have seen Jesus while he was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians by the authority of the chief priest. And after that event, he became one of the most fervent promoters of the gospel in the 1st century. Further, Paul himself testifies in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 that Jesus appeared to Peter, all the apostles, more than five hundred Christians, and to James His brother in the flesh. A man who went from the archenemy of the gospel, to the proclaimer of the gospel, isn't to be taken lightly in anything he says about it.

In sum, the multiple eyewitness accounts in the New Testament, the lives and suffering of the first disciples, and the impact of Christians and gospel message on the Jewish and pagan worlds, provides clear and consistent *proof* that Jesus came back to life, and is now reigning in heaven to give eternal life to all who trust in Him.

“How could a good God create a world with sin, and then condemn those whom He knew would sin?”

Although there are several other common objections to the gospel, I'm content to finish with this one. This is one of the most difficult, since it's essentially about the problem of evil, paired with the paradox of God's control and man's responsibility. This objection basically claims that the God we proclaim isn't deserving of worship because He's allowed us to sin, and then punishes us for it.

Of course, this distracts from the whole point of the gospel, which is God *satisfying* His justice so we can *avoid* punishment. But sometimes we may need to answer this objection nonetheless, which even many Christians don't know how to answer.

Another way to ask this question would be, “what is the relationship between God's rule over all (or sovereignty), and man's responsibility to Him?” How can God hold people accountable for something that He could have prevented?

The answer is to accept both truths side by side, and simply accept what God's Word says about reality. But first we need to correct the question, since the Bible never claims that God created a world with sin. Instead, Genesis 1 testifies that God saw that *everything* He made

was “good.” In Scripture, sin is always blamed on creatures, and never on God. For example, take the conclusive statement of James 1:13:

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”

Here, James tells us that God *never* directly leads someone to sin.

On the other hand, Scripture is equally clear that God, as the Creator, has before time planned out every event *in* time, and also *holds* all of creation together. Consider these Scriptures:

“. . . having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will . . .” – Eph. 1:11

“And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.” – Heb. 1:3a

Lastly, this statement from Peter is one of the best to understand God’s sovereignty over sin:

“. . . this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.” – Acts 2:23

This last verse clearly gives us much of the explanation of God’s relationship to sin. Notice that it says, speaking of Jesus, that He was *delivered* by the *plan* and *foreknowledge* of God. And what delivered Him? The sinful hands of men, who arrested and nailed Him to a cross. But by what power did this happen? Again, by *God’s* plan, which was *predetermined*. In other words, God sovereignly controlled the events, such that Christ’s enemies committed great sin by *condemning* Him to death. Put in an old-fashioned way, God *ordained* that these men would cause the murder of His Son.

Since Paul says in Ephesians 1:11 that God *works*, or effects, *all* things according to His will, and that Jesus *maintains* all things, it must be that *every* sin is allowed to happen by God Himself. And this as part of His plan devised before creation.

Given these truths, how can God hold people responsible for their sins, since they’re sinning according to His plan? The simple answer is that they *choose* to sin. God has given every rational person the ability to make decisions, and many of those decisions are to *knowingly* sin. Further, Romans 1 and 2 are clear that all rational people often *know* when they sin, since God has given us a “work of the Law written in their hearts” (Rom. 2:15). This the

moral guide also called our “conscience”. People are culpable for their evil because they knowingly and willfully sin, knowing there’s a God that is displeased.

But all this still doesn’t answer the question of why God included people sinning into His story of the world. While it won’t do much good for an unbeliever to know the answer, since it doesn’t persuade them to repent and receive forgiveness, we can still know part of the explanation.

Take sin out of the world, and God has no wrath, punishment, or hatred. But take sin out of the world, and there’s also no mercy, forgiveness, sacrificial love, or redemption. One of the purposes of sin is to allow God to make Himself *fully* known, with *all* His characteristics. Because of sin, God gave up His only Son, Jesus, to reconcile enemies to Himself, and make them His eternal children. The greatest demonstration of love is this solution to sin.

So, God is just to punish sinners, and in exercising goodness in *using* sin for His good purposes. But if you use that as an excuse to continue opposing His standard and will, then you will have to suffer the eternal suffering that your sinfulness deserves. The good news is that God promises to treat you as innocent if you just entrust yourself to the Lord Jesus, who “carried our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Pet. 2:24).

A Basic Strategy for Winning the Fight to Preach

As with all things in the Christian life, overcoming obstacles and objections to our witnessing is determined by our reliance on the power and wisdom of God. The Lord has empowered, gifted, and positioned each of us in our unique places to serve as witnesses to His love, grace, and justice. We’ve been indwelt with the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to Christ; we’ve been joined together to other believers who are also seeking the salvation of souls; and we’ve been gifted with the holy Scriptures, containing the truth, wisdom, and Word of our God. We just need to be faithful with the powers and resources God has granted us.

Of course, as we work against the kingdom of darkness, we’ll experience opposition from our own flesh, the devil, and the world. But the more we learn the Scriptures, the more we put their teachings into practice, and the more we simply *speak* the gospel, the more consistently we’ll be able to make the most of our opportunities to preach. If you’re afraid of objections, you have no need to be, since you now understand the details of the gospel, and how to explain it. If you can be wise, considerate, and truthful, then you have the abilities you need to answer almost any objection, and to know when to *refuse* answering objections.

That brings up the last point about objections. As Jesus warned, some people are like “dogs” or “swine,” and only wish to distract, confuse, or intimidate you, but have no desire for a good answer to their questions. With those people whose only design is to have verbal wars with their objections, we have an obligation to answer a fool as his folly deserves, and refuse to indulge his malicious desire. We must be as wise as serpents, as well as innocent as doves.

Conclusion: Evangelism Fueled by Love

If the New Testament is clear about anything in serving the Lord, it's that pleasing Him is an act of love. God *is* love, so we love because of His first love of us (1 Jn. 4:19). Our Lord said to the Jews that the two greatest commandments were, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). Because we've experienced and believed "the love that God has for us," we now "walk in love, as beloved children" (1 Jn. 4:16; Eph. 5:2).

And what is love? True Godlike and Christlike love is the yielding of yourself for the good of another. As believers, we can't *help* but to love our heavenly Father, and our wonderful Lord (although inconsistently). However, we have a much greater struggle with loving our fellow image-bearers surrounding us on a regular basis. That's why we need to constantly remind ourselves of the gospel – the sublime expression of love.

As the body of Christ, we meet together around the truths that the Lord taught us in the gospel. As we've all experienced His love by believing the gospel, we now enjoy the love of one another on a regular basis to remind each other, and remember, what God has promised to do for us in Christ. But we do this as a means to certain ends. And one of those ends is to proclaim God's love to the ignorant, deceived, and sinful people that are yet under the dominion of the devil.

So ultimately, all we do as local fellowships, and as individual believers on this earth, is purposed to expand God's love to those who have never experienced it. In other words, we don't just share the gospel because it's expected of us, or feels good, or gives us something to do. We proclaim the unsearchable riches of Jesus to unbelievers because it's the most loving thing we can do as average Christians. In the gospel is the truth that can set them free; it's the bread of life that can sustain them for eternity; it's the water of life that can take away their thirst; it's the light of God's glory that can enlighten their hearts; it's the healing balm that can cure their wounds; it's the power that can raise them from the dead; and it's the promise that offers God's forgiveness, mercy, and blessing to those who believe. If we truly love the Lord, and love our unbelieving neighbor, then we will be controlled by the love of Christ to hold out the message of life, peace, and salvation to the perishing. Let us "do all things for the sake of the gospel," "that [we] may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22-23). Our God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Other Books and Resources by the Author

Available on Amazon and at BearingChrist.blog:

*The New Testament Revival of Western Christianity: How to Restore the Love,
Leadership, and Learning that the Apostles Taught*

*The New Covenant Answer to Western Christianity: Recovering and Applying the
Apostles' Teaching on the Church*

Read my devotional and theological writing at:

christophervandusen.substack.com

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Listen to The King's Hand in History Podcast here:

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Other Helpful Books on Evangelism

Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God by J.I. Packer

Equipped to Evangelize: A Biblical Foundation by Rob Ventura

The Broken-Hearted Evangelist by Jeremy Walker