



Truth Matters

A Publication Discussing Matters Related To Truth Because Truth Matters

Cleaning Up the Dictionary

Evangelism

A lot of evangelical activity gets placed under the heading of “evangelism” that really is not evangelism.

Does evangelism include such activities as inviting a neighbor to a church service? Taking a meal to hungry man? Giving a cloak to a cold man? Building a shelter for a homeless man? Running a series of provocative commercials during a Super Bowl?

The answer is that none of these things in and of themselves are evangelism because they do not require a clear proclamation of the Gospel message with an urgent call for repentance. In fact, let’s use that sentence as a definition of biblical evangelism: *a clear proclamation of the Gospel message with an urgent call for repentance*. There are four aspects to this definition:

- Without a proclamation of the **evangel** – the Good News – the Gospel, there can be no evangelism. This principle goes to content, or to the message itself. There are certain truth claims and propositions that must be responded to by human hearts. Evangelism proclaims those claims as good news to sinners. At the very least, Paul seems to indicate that the historical veracity of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection are the heart of the Gospel’s content (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-4). However, I think the historical veracity is the very least of the Gospel’s content. That is, it is simply the foundation upon which the Gospel is built. Belief in the historical reliability of these events is not the litmus for embracing the Gospel. For example, Paul refers to the Gospel as being the “gospel about the glory of a happy God” (cf. 1 Tim. 1:11). An individual might believe in the historical events of the Christ but have not interest in living for God’s glory.
- Without a **proclamation** of the Gospel there can be no evangelism. The Scriptures clearly indicate that without the preaching of the gospel there can be no faith (Rom. 10.14). The good news must be heralded. It must be proclaimed. Every believer must come to see himself as a preacher of the gospel. Plain and simple. Preaching is not the responsibility of the seminary graduate or the paid professionals; it is the voice of the redeemed. (cf. Matt. 11:5; Acts 8:4, 25; Rom. 1:15; 1 Cor. 1:17; Eph. 3:8)
- Without a **clear** proclamation of the Gospel there can be no evangelism. The Gospel must be presented in a way that is clearly understood. Paul makes this plain in Colossians 4 when he asks the church to pray for his evangelistic endeavors by praying for him “that he might make [the gospel] clear, which is how I ought to speak” (v.4). Furthermore, Jesus is the Master at demonstrating how to tailor fit the gospel to an individual’s heart. Compare the way he addressed the woman at the well in John 4 compared with the rich young ruler of Matthew 19 or the Pharisees in John 6 and Nicodemus in John 3. Each instance was uniquely tailored and spoken with flare. I think speaking with flare is a good paraphrase of Paul’s heart in Colossian 4:6, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” The opposite of “with salt” would be bland and boring – a kind of one-size-fits-all approach with the gospel.
- Without a clear proclamation of the Gospel **followed by an urgent call to repent** there can be no evangelism. Study the works of the biblical evangelists, John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Paul, et. al. They each brought their hearers to the crossroads – the point of dilemma. “You have heard the claims of Christ; you know your heart; what will you do?” Good news is only *good* news to those who embrace it. The need to respond in faith is urgent (cf. John 3:18, 36)

Scripture Reading

Week of

January 16th – 22nd



Monday

- ❖ Genesis 31, 32
- ❖ Psalm 11
- ❖ Matthew 11

Tuesday

- ❖ Genesis 33, 34
- ❖ Psalm 12
- ❖ Matthew 12

Wednesday

- ❖ Genesis 35, 36
- ❖ Psalm 13
- ❖ Matthew 13

Thursday

- ❖ Genesis 37, 38
- ❖ Psalm 14
- ❖ Matthew 14

Friday

- ❖ Genesis 39, 40
- ❖ Psalm 15
- ❖ Matthew 15

Saturday

- ❖ Genesis 41, 42

Sunday

- ❖ Genesis 43, 44

(Continued on next page)



Cleaning Up the Dictionary ... Continued

Several distinctions can then be made that help us clean up the dictionary and use the right words in the right way.

1. Evangelism vs. Bridge-building

While none of the activities listed at the beginning require the Gospel message be proclaimed with an urgent appeal for repentance, they contain a valuable starting point for evangelism. And I mean *starting* point! ***We must come to see evangelism as a process and not an event.***

Bridge-building is the initial activity in the process. As Christians, we want to establish a relationship with lost individuals that will enable us to love them to Christ. Meeting felt-needs may be a fine starting point but it is not evangelism if it ends there. We will carry food to the hungry and water to the thirsty with a goal to proclaiming the gospel with an urgent call for them to repent. This was Jesus' method throughout the gospels.

Danger: When the good works and social concerns of bridge-building abort, they easily become a kind of social gospel. We assume that we are bringing them Christ in the meal or in the water, when in fact, Jesus is only revealed to hearts through the gospel. Beware of aborting the process too soon.

2. Evangelism vs. Discipleship

Evangelism is a process not an event. Inviting people to an evangelistic church service is an event. Handing out a tract is an event. Biblical evangelism is a process. Jesus illustrates for us the process of evangelism in the words of the Great Commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20)

There are three participles and one command. The one command is "make disciples." The three participles are "as you are going," "by means of baptizing," and "by means of teaching." It reads something like this: "As you are going, be making disciples of all ethnicities by means of baptizing them and teaching them to obey all my commands."

This is a process that starts with the initial acts of bridge-building and carries on throughout the convert's life as he is continually taught how to obey the commands of Christ. I get the impression that the process doesn't end until the convert can perfectly keep the commands. Until that time, he still needs the evangelist (Read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress!*)!

Evangelism, then, is not separate from discipleship. We often assume that evangelism's course is complete when the person prays a prayer, walks an aisle, or enters a tank of water; then the work of discipleship commences. This is a false dichotomy. It is the same process.

Danger: When evangelism is viewed distinctly from discipleship, two dangers emerge. On the one hand it develops a kind of easy-believism on the side of the evangelist and on the other hand it produces a false sense of security on the side of the disciple. "Success" for the

evangelist is gauged in merely closing the deal. Numbers are objectively marked by prayers prayed, aisles walked, heads dunked. Then, once the disciple has prayed the prayer, walked the aisle, entered the tank, he believes he is a done deal regardless of how he perseveres or not. Viewing disciple-making as a process alleviates this dichotomy. "Success" is gauged not in decisions made but in marks of faithfulness and continued repentance. Security comes not in our actions but in dependence on Christ's actions.

3. Evangelism vs. Witness

Witnessing, by definition, is not evangelism. It enhances evangelism. "To testify," hence, "witness" means that one is speaking of the impact or the effect that the gospel has had on his/her life. We can share a testimony about the reality of the gospel and the reliability of Christ and not necessarily proclaim the gospel with an urgent call to repent. Do not confuse the two. Evangelism states the claims of Christ as they are while witnessing testifies to their effect as they have been experienced by one particular person.

Danger: When witnessing is equated with evangelism it produces two evils all its own. First, it begins to communicate that the gospel is primarily a kind of self-help-fix to life's issues. A person simply says, "I accepted Christ and he healed my marriage. You should accept Christ." While that testimony may be true, when that is all that is said, it communicates that people can simply come to Jesus as a means to another end, namely saved marriages. Such an approach sells the gospel short. The only end of the gospel is the glory of God.

Second, when witnessing is equated with evangelism it makes the gospel primarily existential and not propositional. In other words, it is simply an experience to be had and not a truth to be trusted. Salvation is more than the experience. It includes the experience; but the experience is not all. We must guard against selling the gospel short. We are not out to get others to live our experience but to trust our Savior.

Let's be careful how we use our terms. When the words are used in the wrong way, we may be conveying a world of wrong ideas. Clean up the dictionary!