

“Using Questions and Dialogue in Evangelism”

Text: Various Scriptures – Randy Newman – May 29, 2011

Introduction – Obstacles to Evangelism

1. The first obstacle to evangelism is within us. For most Christians, we are uncomfortable, even fearful, with reaching out and engaging the lost with the gospel.
2. The second obstacle is the world. Most unbelievers are not receptive to the gospel. They would rather talk about anything else than about Jesus Christ. And they are about as likely to believe the gospel as they would the imaginative but improbable “plug theory” of Randy’s son.

Three Evangelistic Skills All Christians Need:

1. Declaring the gospel – we need to be able to clearly and concisely state the gospel in about three or four minutes.
2. Defending the gospel – we need to know how to answer people’s objections and questions. For example, we need to be able to answer such questions as: why believe the Bible? Why do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Why is there so much suffering in the world?
3. Dialoguing about the gospel – we need to learn how to ask and engage others with good questions. As well, we need to learn to answer questions with good questions.
 - a. Jesus’ example: Most of the time, Jesus answered questions with questions:
 - i. When asked if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus replied, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?” (Matt. 12:11)
 - ii. When asked by the leaders of Israel the source of Jesus’ authority, Jesus answered with a question, “The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” (Matt. 21:25)
 - iii. When asked if it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus replied while showing them a Roman coin, “Whose inscription and likeness is this?” (Matt. 22:20)
 - iv. When asked by the rich young man what he must do to inherit life, Jesus replied with a question: “Why do you call me good?” (Mark 10:18)

Four Observations from Paul's Example of Evangelism (Acts 17:1-5)

1. Like Paul's, our evangelism might be more of an ongoing process than a one-shot proclamation. On three separate occasions, Paul went to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures (Acts 17:3).
2. Like Paul's, our evangelism might be more dialogue than declaration. Paul "*reasoned* with them from the Scriptures, *explaining* and *proving*..." These verbs indicate that a process of dialogue was happening—a process of arguing or reasoning that moved the Jews toward understanding truth of Scripture (Acts 17:2-3).
3. Like Paul's, our evangelism might get mixed reviews. Some people believed. Some rioted (Acts 17:4-5). We should not be surprised if this happens to us as well. It also happened to Jesus—some followed, others thought he was demon possessed.
4. Like Paul's, our evangelism might be bad news before it is good news. Paul reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures that it was "necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead" (Acts 17:3). Our sin is so bad that it needs something more than instruction, a good example or a list of dos and don'ts. We need a total transformation that could only be accomplished by a Savior who suffered and died in our place to pay the penalty of our sins and to satisfy the wrath of God that we rightly deserved.

Principles to Learn and Questions to Ask

1. Principle #1: Some people aren't awake. Have you ever had someone tell you, "It doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you are sincere." This is someone who isn't thinking very deeply. A good question to ask is, "Really?" or "Do you really think so?"
2. Principle #2: Some things can't be true: For example, someone might say, "All religions are basically the same." A question to engage them in a discussion and lead them toward truth is, "Can you explain that to me?"
3. Principle #3: Some questions aren't sincere. Not every question that comes our way is genuine. Some questions are attacks; some are sarcastic. Most of them reveal foolish thinking. For example, someone might ask angrily or sarcastically, "Are you telling me that everyone who disagrees with you is going to hell?" When questions like this come our way, we must be willing to engage them in a process of dialogue by asking questions to dislodge their foolish thinking so they don't go away thinking they are wise in their own eyes (Prov. 26:4-5). A question in response might be, "Do you believe in hell?"

Sermon Outline

4. Principle #4: Sometimes a gradual approach is best. We need to engage people and find out where they are on the scale of belief where A = a hardened atheist and Z = someone ready to come into the kingdom. Jesus had different starting points and did different things with different people. We need to do the same. Patiently and graciously, we need find out their starting point and help them move toward truth. In this gradual process we need to remember God's patience with us—we didn't come to faith overnight. And we need to trust God with the process and trust him to do what only he can do—change hearts.
 - a. Below are two questions that can move people and the conversation along:
 - i. "Isn't it possible ...?" For example, isn't it possible that there are some answers to your questions? Isn't it possible that if God exists and he wanted to communicate truth to us that he could have had it written down?
 - ii. "How do you know that?"

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a care group to read the various passages that Randy referenced in this message, particularly Matt. 12:9-14; Matt. 21: 23-27; Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 10:17-22; Acts 17:1-5.
2. Does evangelism make you uncomfortable or fearful? If so, what makes you hesitant to step out?
3. How would you communicate the gospel in your own words to an unbeliever? Can you share this in about 3-4 minutes?
4. What is the purpose and benefit of engaging unbelievers in a dialogue by asking good questions and responding with good questions?
5. What principles can we learn from Paul's example in evangelism in Acts 17:1-5? How does Paul's example encourage your faith to reach out?
6. One of Randy's principles was, "Some times, a gradual approach is best." What are the benefits of a gradual process of evangelism? What temptations might surface in your heart with this approach?
7. Take time to pray for those who are lost: friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, etc.

Sermon Outline