

Clarifying the Message of Evangelism

Introduction

In our [previous article](#), we sought to clarify the nature and goal of biblical evangelism. We noted that evangelism is proclaiming the good news of Jesus with the goal of persuading people to repent and believe in Christ. In today's article, we want to clarify the message of evangelism so that we can faithfully proclaim the gospel.

Defining the Gospel

Definition: The gospel is the good news that sinners can be saved from sin and reconciled to God through repentant faith in Jesus Christ.

To understand this news, essential truths about God, man, sin, Christ, repentance, and faith need be clearly explained.

God the Holy Creator

Summary: God, the holy creator, made us in His image so that we would know Him and live by faith under His righteous rule.

Scripture:

- “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” ~ Rev. 4:11

Explanation: The gospel is fundamentally about God. Christ came, suffered, and died to “bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). God is both the giver and the gift of the gospel. For people to understand the gospel, they must first have a basic understanding of who God is.

We cannot assume that the average unbeliever has any kind of Biblical notion about God. As we talk about God, we must first emphasize that He is the Creator. Life begins with Him. He made us in His image so that we could know Him. Because He is the Creator, He has the right to rule over His creation. As creatures, we are ultimately accountable to Him for how we live.

God is holy, which means that He is distinct from His creation. He is perfectly righteous and separate from sin. God cannot ignore, overlook, or tolerate sin (see Hab. 1:13). Instead, He must judge sin because sin is rebellion against Him. Only against the backdrop of God's holiness will sinners be able to understand the magnitude of their sin and the beauty of His love.

People: The Rebellious Sinners

Summary: Instead of trusting in God and submitting to His righteous rule, we've rebelled against Him. We are sinners by birth and by choice.

Scriptures:

- “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Ro. 3:23
- “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Jer. 17:9
- “There is none righteous, no not one.” Ro. 3:9

Explanation: Most people think of sin as an action that hurts others. The Bible, however, tells us that sin is rebellion against a holy God. Our sinful thoughts, words, and actions stem from hearts that reject God and His rightful authority over our lives. Only as people see sin the way God sees it will they begin to understand sin's judgment and their need of a Savior.

So how do we help people understand their sinful condition? By showing them God's Law. In Romans 7:7, Paul testifies, “If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin [it's gravity or scope].” The Law was given in order to show us our sin (Romans 3:20) and subsequent need of Christ (Galatians 3:21-24).

Sin's Judgment: Death

Summary: Because God is holy, He must judge sin. The penalty of sin is death: separation from God both in this life and for all eternity.

Scriptures:

- “For the wages of sin is death” Ro.6:23
- “And you were dead in trespasses and sins... and were by nature children of wrath” Eph. 2:1

Explanation: Sin makes us guilty before God. The good things we do, compared to how holy God is, are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Each one of us has broken God’s Law and stand guilty before God. We are not “basically good people who occasionally mess up.” We are rebels against God who deserve His wrath.

Jesus: The Substitute Savior

Summary: Jesus, God’s Son, died as a substitute for rebels like us. Jesus paid the debt that we owed God by dying in our place. He took the full force of God’s justice on himself so that forgiveness and pardon might be available to us. He rose again, conquering sin, death, and hell so that we could have life forever with God.

Scriptures:

- “Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God” 1 Peter 3:18
- “But God demonstrates His own love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” Ro. 5:6-8

Explanation: In His love and grace, God sent His Son Jesus to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. We’ve broken God’s Law. Jesus kept it. We deserve death for our sin. He died in the place of sinners so that our sin debt might be cancelled. The good news of the gospel can be summarized in four words: Jesus in my place.

Response: Turn and Trust

Summary: The good news of what Jesus has done demands a response: Repent and believe.

Scriptures:

- “Repent and believe the gospel” Mk 1:15
- “But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” Jn 1:12
- “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” Jn 3:36

Explanation: The grace we need for salvation can only be received through repentance and faith.

Repent / Turn: To repent means to decisively turn from sin to God through faith in Jesus. [Greg Gilbert](#) accurately notes, “To repent of our sins means to turn away from our rebellion against God. Repentance doesn’t mean we’ll bring an immediate end to our sinning. It does mean, though, that we’ll never again live at peace with our sins.”

When people repent, the following things happen:

- They realize that they are sinners who deserve eternal death because of their sin.
- They hate their sin and have no desire to continue living in it.
- They acknowledge that they are spiritually bankrupt. They know that there is nothing that they can do on their own to take away sin’s punishment or earn God’s favor.
- They turn from pride, self-reliance, and sin to God, humbly trusting in God’s grace to be forgiven and reconciled to Him.

Believe / Trust: Believing in Jesus is not simply agreeing with the facts of the gospel. Faith is completely depending upon Jesus alone for salvation from sin.

When people place their faith in Jesus, the following things happen:

- They believe that Jesus is the Savior who died and rose again to pay sin's penalty for them.
- They believe that Jesus is the Lord who is worthy of their worship, love, and obedience.
- They stop depending upon their own goodness and self-righteous efforts for a relationship with God. Instead, they place their entire trust and hope in Jesus for salvation.

Conclusion: Two Ways to Live

Summary: The gospel of Jesus demands a response. We either continue in our rebellion against God, trusting in our own goodness and living life according to our own rule, or we humbly submit to God and His way of salvation in repentant faith, trusting in Jesus alone for forgiveness and life everlasting with God.

A Resource

Obviously, I could elaborate more on each point, but I hope this article helped summarize the core truths of the gospel. To help believers communicate the gospel in a biblically faithful, culturally winsome way, I've written an evangelistic Bible study handbook called "[Discovering Hope: Exploring the Good News of Jesus Christ.](#)" This resource is unique in that it covers the redemptive arch of God's Word through eight inductive Bible study lessons. I'd be happy to email you a PDF copy of the book for free. Just email me at colberts@odbm.org and ask for a copy of "Discovering Hope."

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