

## Evangelism

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Brethren have always laid strong claim to a biblical basis for their doctrinal stance and their church function. We maintain that the New Testament is our creed, and the New Testament has much to say about evangelism.

Brethren have historically maintained a strong evangelistic thrust. Alexander Mack and Christopher Hochmann went up and down the Rhine Valley in Germany, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was the continued interest in evangelism that made possible our phenomenal growth in the United States. Early Brethren moved to new frontiers and established churches wherever they went. Donald Durnbaugh says in ***The Church of the Brethren Past and Present***, “In the autumn of 1724 the entire male membership (fourteen in number) of the Germantown congregation set forth on an evangelistic tour in the wilds of ‘Penn’s Woods.’ Their expedition led to the formation of two new congregations.” Over the years Brethren have had an interest in evangelism.

The very nature of our biblical understanding and of our view concerning the mission of the church—prompts us to believe that God’s people should be continually winning more people to faith in Jesus Christ.

### 1. THE MEANING OF EVANGELISM

There are many ideas about the meaning of evangelism. To some, evangelism is what Billy Graham does and what their pastor does not do. To others, evangelism is firing a stream of Bible verses at prospective converts. To still others, anything one does as a Christian is evangelism.

The Bible does not give a quick answer when we search for a definition of evangelism. The word ***evangelism*** in fact is not in the Bible — but the words ***evangelist*** and ***evangelize*** are there, and from these we learn what evangelism

is. The Greek word *euaggelizo* means “to preach, to proclaim the good tidings, to tell the good news.” The angels evangelized. They brought “good tidings of great joy” (**Luke 2:10**). Jesus evangelized. He preached the “glad tidings of the kingdom of God” (**Luke 8:1**). Paul evangelized.

He said, “I have preached to you the gospel” (**2 Corinthians 11:7**). Philip evangelized. He “preached unto him Jesus” (**Acts 8:35**). Evangelism in the Bible, then, was a ministry of the spoken word. Evangelism means “to make known the message of the gospel.”

Evangelism is not the mere testimony of a good, consistent life. The quiet, pervasive influence of the Christian life is necessary — but it is not evangelism. Being friendly, helpful, and neighborly may be a necessary *preparation* for evangelism, but it is no *substitute* for evangelism. Christianity cannot be radiated; truths about God and his Son have to be communicated. Good deeds do not convey the actual content of the gospel; the good news must be expressed in words. Evangelism, then, is the specific, articulate presentation of the message that Christ’s death upon the cross propitiates (turns away) God’s wrath which abides upon man in his unregenerate state (**Romans 3:25; John 3:36**). Evangelism is the presenting of Jesus Christ, so that men will accept Him as their Savior from the guilt and power of sin and declare Him Lord as they seek to follow Him in their daily lives.

## 2. THE MOTIVATION FOR EVANGELISM

Christians are motivated to share the Good News primarily because our Lord *commands* us to evangelize. The heart of the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:19-20** is “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” The command in **Acts 1:8** is “Ye shall be witnesses unto me.” At the Berlin Congress on Evangelism John R. W. Stott said: “We engage in evangelism, not necessarily because we want to, or because we choose to, or because we like to; but because we have been told to. The church is under orders. The risen Lord has commanded us to go, to preach, and to make disciples, and that is enough for Us.

We are motivated to evangelize also because men are lost (**Luke 19:10**), without hope (**Ephesians 2:12**), under condemnation (**John 3:36**), and destined for destruction (**Mark 16:16**). For some, nobody is lost in the eternal sense; nobody is really perishing; nobody is destined to spend eternity in Hell. This is a new form of an old universalism — but Jesus taught eternal punishment as well as eternal life (**Matthew 25:46**).

There is an estrangement between man and God which needs reconciliation (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). Jesus says that it is sin that defiles us and cuts us off from God (**Mark 7:14-23; Isaiah 59:12**). Something happened in the Garden of Eden that blighted the

entire human race (**Romans 5:12**). As a result, the whole human family is spiritually dead (**Ephesians 2:1**) and is under the grip of sin (**Galatians 3:22**). Therefore, man needs to be shown the depth of his depravity and the extent to which he has fallen short of the expectation of God.

Francis Schaeffer in his book, *Death in the City*, discusses the question, “What would you do if you met a really modern man on a train and you had just an hour to talk with him about the Gospel?” Schaeffer says, “I would spend forty-five or fifty minutes to really show him his dilemma; to show him that he is even more dead than he thinks he is; that he is morally dead because he is separated from the God who exists. Often it takes a long time to bring a person to the place where he understands the negative. And unless he understands what’s wrong, he will not be ready to listen to and understand the positive.”

The evangelist, then, is motivated by the bad news that every person in his natural state is a fallen, sinful creature who stands in need of a complete transformation. He knows that sin has brought God’s displeasure, and “**knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men**” (**2 Corinthians 5:11**).

The doctrine of the return of Christ has also been one of the great motivating factors in evangelism. The day of salvation is “**now**” (**2 Corinthians 6:2**). Jesus said there is a night coming “**when no man can work**” (**John 9:4**). The second coming of Jesus Christ is the blessed hope of every believer (**Titus 2:13**), and to desire others to share in that hope becomes an impelling motive for evangelism.

### 3. THE MESSAGE IN EVANGELISM

The evangelistic message is centered uniquely in a Person — the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the way and the truth and the life. The Scriptures say that when Philip the evangelist encountered the Ethiopian eunuch, he “**preached unto him Jesus**” (**Acts 8:35**). Paul’s own testimony to the church at Corinth was: “**For I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified**” (**1 Corinthians 2:2**). Paul was thoroughly trained in the school of the Torah at Jerusalem, and well versed in Hellenistic culture as a result of his training in Tarsus — but his one and only concern was to bear witness to Jesus Christ and His death upon the cross for the sake of all people.

The evangelistic message offers a remedy for man’s alienation from God. The good news is that the death of Jesus has become a bridge between a holy God and a sinning people (**1 Timothy 2:5-6**), and that His blood propitiates God’s wrath for those who accept Him with a saving faith. The writer of Hebrews says, “**So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many**” (**Hebrews 9:28**). Jesus himself said, “**For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins**” (**Matthew 26:28**).

**Romans 3:25** says of Jesus Christ: “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sin.” The good news is that we sinners do not have to die eternally since Jesus Christ died for us. The New Testament uses three prepositions when speaking about Christ’s death: *peri* — for us; *anti* — in place of us; and *huper* — in behalf of us. Christ died for us, in place of us, and in behalf of us. The evangelist makes much of Christ’s death upon the cross. The message of evangelism is that man is lost, undone, and without hope — but that Jesus Christ acted in our behalf by his death, burial, and resurrection (**I Corinthians 15: 3-4**). Christ took upon himself the penalty rightly belonging to us, so that through believing in Him, we are freed from the penalty and guilt of sin.

Jesus offers pardon and forgiveness to all who receive him through faith (**Acts 14:38-39**), repentance (**Acts 2:38**), and baptism (**Mark 16:16**). One who accepts the new life in Christ, submits to Him as Lord. Hate is transformed into love; selfishness into sacrifice; and pride into humble dependence upon what God has done for us. Homes are changed. Money is spent for that which is bread. Barriers that alienate men from one another are broken down. The new man in Christ has turned from the power of Satan to God, and becomes as salt to the earth. The evangelistic message leads to the transformation of the individual.

#### 4. THE METHODS FOR EVANGELISM

The New Testament illustrates several methods of evangelism. We find examples of mass evangelism in the work of John the Baptist, Peter, and Stephen (**Acts 2:14-41**). We see personal evangelism by observing the thirty-five personal interviews of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels (e.g., **John 4:5-42**). Paul used dialog evangelism on Mars Hill in Athens (**Acts 17:16-34**). The early Christians practiced visitation evangelism when they went from house to house as recorded in **Acts 5:42**. And then there was literary evangelism as seen in the writing of the Gospels of John and Luke (**John 20:31**).

The most common and perhaps the most effective biblical method of evangelism is the sharing of the Good News on a person-to-person basis as we come in contact with others. Sometimes just being a friend or listening to another person’s troubles becomes a point of contact. It is usually best not to pounce upon a prospect and start off on him. It is best to wait for an opportunity to open. Some think we should give the unbeliever a “believe-or-be-damned” ultimatum, but witnessing is relating to persons, and people have feelings. We need to take their feelings into consideration.

Traveling home from Chicago on a plane, I sat beside a man who seemed to be lonely. I asked him if he had been on a business trip, or visiting relatives, or if he objected to sharing the purpose of his trip. He told me about it; we had a general conversation:

and then he noticed that I was reading Billy Graham's book *World Aflame*. At about the same time, the pilot informed us that we were approaching thunderstorms and seat belts were to be fastened. God used that thunderstorm and the title of the book to provide an opportunity to share the Christian faith with a needy soul. If you have ever been on a plane flying above thunderstorms, you'll never forget it! My partner sat there and listened to what was being said, like a little boy in Sunday School.

Sometimes a wisely chosen tract can be used as a good point of contact. Hand the tract and say, "Here's something that I'm sure will help you — I hope you can read it sometime." There is probably not much value in standing at a bus station and shoving a tract into the hand of each person who passes by, or sneaking them into mailboxes, or slipping them under the windshield-wipers of automobiles on a parking lot. The most effective witness will be made to those whom we contact day after day at home or at work. This is why each of us — and not merely the preacher — should be an evangelist.

Most readers of this brochure come in contact with scores of people every week who scarcely know a preacher. But they know you. You work at the same place of employment, under the same boss, and with the same pressures. There's not another person in all the world who is better equipped than you to say, "Christ is my Savior; He died for my sins; He gives me a motive for living, and a hope for the future." If you are too timid to say it with words, hand him a carefully chosen tract, and say, "Here's something that helped me; I hope you'll read it sometime."

Sometimes ordinary conversation gives good opportunities for witness. For example, when folks talk about how quickly time flies — we can remind them that we have just 25,550 *days* at the most, and then we face eternity. But if ordinary conversation does not lead to an opportunity for witness, one can ask several questions. You can say, "By the way, do you have any interest in spiritual things?" And then (regardless of the answer given), say, "Suppose someone were to ask you 'What is a Christian?' — what would you say?" Notice that the question does not pin the person down; it is not saying that he is not a Christian; it is simply an appropriate question that can turn the conversation into channels discussing one's spiritual welfare.

Witnessing is something we learn by doing. Each time we talk about the Christian life, we become more at ease. We learn by experience. We profit from past mistakes. We can build upon strong points gradually discovered.

A tragic note is that vast numbers of church members could not witness to their faith if they wanted to, because they *have* no genuine faith. The methods churches use in receiving new members usually require a minimum of commitment, and many smoothly slip into church membership thinking of the church simply as a nice ethical society that

practices a few interesting ordinances, and stands by to offer special services for weddings, illnesses, and funerals. Therefore many of our churches today have become *fields* for evangelism rather than *forces* of evangelism. Each of us needs to examine his own life, and respond to God's call to repentance and cleansing—and then let evangelism become a priority in life.

Sophie, a scrubwoman, used to say that she was called to do two things — to scrub and to preach. Wherever she went, she would tell others about the Savior. Someone made fun of her one day, noting that she was talking about Christ to the wooden Indian standing in front of a cigar store. When she heard the report, she said “Maybe I did; my eyesight's not too good — but talking about Christ to a wooden Indian isn't nearly as bad as being a wooden Christian who never talks to anybody about Him!”