

Series: Basic Evangelism
Title: Why We Should Witness
Text: Mark 16:15
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The words “evangelism” and “witnessing” evoke fear in the hearts of many. Some see the actions as difficult tasks reserved for the spiritual elite. Others see them as obnoxious activities for zealous Christians who resemble pushy salesmen.

Many modern Christians have given up on any hope that they might lead someone else to Christ. Sharing the gospel is often relegated to the ranks of those who serve as ministers or missionaries.

To overcome our stagnancy in this area, it is helpful to consider the meaning of the word “evangelize.” The New Testament term was closely related to the Greek word for “angel.” In fact, it was a verb form of the noun used of angelic beings. One could think of the word “evangelize” as meaning “to angel-ize.”

What is the relation between evangelism and angels? Well, the word angel primarily referred to a messenger in the ancient world. Though there is a lot of sensationalistic folklore associated with angels nowadays, in times past they were regarded as heavenly beings responsible for delivering divine messages. Consider the role of angels in the birth announcements of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-33).

Do you see how evangelism is similar to the task reserved for angels? Just as heavenly entities were used in Bible times to declare messages from God, we have been commissioned to announce the gospel. Perhaps such a perspective will help you. Evangelism isn’t the act of convincing people to follow Christ. You don’t have to be a clever salesperson. Evangelism doesn’t require you to have an answer for every challenging question you might receive. To be a faithful witness it is only necessary for you to share the message of Christ.

On top of clearly defining evangelism, I believe it is important for believers to consider why they should witness. Many are slow to speak of Christ because they aren’t aware of biblical truth. A consideration of basic principles of Scripture can do something to awaken believers from apathy. As we begin our study, let’s consider seven reasons why believers should share the gospel.

It is something Jesus has told us to do.

I still remember my first days as a pastor. Fresh out of seminary, I had taken a class on apologetics. In that class, I was taught how to defend the principles of the Christian faith. One tactic I learned was to ask questions in order to uphold the logical basis for a Christian worldview. Our Sunday evening worship services were small in that first church; consequently, I chose to use a discussion-oriented format in order to engage attendees. Excited to teach some of the things I recently learned, I walked church members through an introduction to the basics of the Christian faith.

As I taught the small band of believers, I used some of the questioning techniques I had learned. I remember asking things like, “How do we know the Bible is God’s Word?” One older church lady was startled by my approach. She had taught both public school and a Sunday school class for years. She seemed a bit flabbergasted that a young preacher would ask such questions. One time I led discussion by inquiring, “Why do we believe God exists?” The aged church lady loudly replied, “Because the Bible says He exists!”

I appreciated the woman’s candor. Her straightforward belief in God’s Word was refreshing. When it comes to the subject of evangelism, such a perspective can be beneficial. Many debate and doubt whether or not God’s people should be active in sharing the gospel. When we read the Bible, we learn that God gives us simple instruction to engage in such activity. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on

you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

As we start our study, know that obedience to Christ is important. We share the gospel with others because Jesus has told us to do so. When our Lord gave what is known as the Great Commission, He said, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples...” (Matthew 28:18-19). The word translated “authority” is one that referred to conferred power. It spoke of the right to decide a course of action. It was used of power commanding officers in the Roman army invested in subordinate soldiers. Applied to Jesus, the term revealed that our Lord was invested with the power to determine the purpose and priorities of His church. We should be committed to evangelism because Jesus has told us to evangelize! The little, old church lady from my first church would agree.

It gets glory for God.

While I was in college, I worked in the restaurant industry. I remember receiving training at one particular job. On the first day, the manager told me, “Patrick, there are two things we never talk about here. Never talk about religion or politics.” It seems our world operates by a similar mantra. It is commonly believed that polite individuals don’t push their beliefs on others. Such an unspoken value system has silenced many believers. Most assume that sharing their faith is off limits.

While believers certainly want to avoid being overbearing and obnoxious, it is worth remembering how our witness can get glory for God. In 2 Corinthians 4:11, Paul spoke of His commitment to the message of Christ by saying, “For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’s sake, so that Jesus’s life may also be displayed in our mortal flesh.”

As he wrote, the apostle had the words of Jesus in mind. When our Lord taught His first disciples, He said, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Our Lord’s words weren’t a requirement for His disciples to be literally crucified. Instead they depicted the way a certain death was necessary for discipleship. In order to faithfully follow Christ, one must daily die to priorities related to self and the world. It is for this reason that Paul said, “...we who live are always being given over to death.”

Paul died to his dreams and aspirations so that Christ might be made great through his life. He even subjected Himself to the threat of real, physical death. He would speak of such things later in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). In short, Paul’s entire existence was “for Jesus’s sake.” He was willing to give himself for the message and mission of Christ.

Paul proclaimed he wanted “Jesus’s life” to “be displayed” through his “mortal flesh.” Many Bible scholars believe that the apostle’s language alluded to a practice from ancient pagan religions. One has said, “Paul is using the imagery of Greco-Roman epiphany processions in which the devotees sought to attract attention and new converts to their cult with a parade. Such pageantry grew increasingly lavish, as devotees carried the symbols, sacred objects, and images associated with the rites and the saving action of the god or goddess.”¹ Instead of flaunting devotion to the pantheon of Greco-Roman gods through a gaudy ceremony, Paul lived his life for the glory the one, true God. He was devoted to glorifying and magnifying Jesus Christ. Through a simply holy lifestyle and through simple gospel proclamation, he pointed people to the Lord.

When it comes to the subject of evangelism, it is worth remembering Paul’s words. Believers of all generations exist to declare the praise of the Lord. Each is saved to shine the light of Jesus (Matthew 5:16). Those who never witness fail to embrace their purpose as a believer. The words of the Westminster Shorter Confession are true — “Man’s chief end is to

¹ Garland, David E. *The New American Commentary: 2 Corinthians. Vol. 29.* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), [CD-Rom].

glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Sharing the gospel is one of the foremost ways one glorifies God; therefore, it stands to reason that witnessing and evangelism ought to be priorities for every Christian.

It is an act of worship.

The Psalms are ancient songs of praise that were sung amongst the Jews. One of them says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his faithful love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord proclaim that he has redeemed them from the power of the foe” (Psalm 107:1-2). The aforementioned words are a verbatim recitation of a song sung in ancient Hebrew worship. As such, they reveal that God’s people formerly sang about giving witness to the Lord’s goodness. In addition, the words reveal that witnessing for the Lord is an act of worship.

Some see worship as nothing more than the act of singing songs. Some relegate it to the weekly gathering of God’s people. The Psalmist indicated that worship has a way of infiltrating everything one does. One can worship through a variety of means. Witnessing is no exception. By telling others about Jesus, one can engage in a meaningful form of worship that is just as valid as singing songs at the Sunday morning church gathering.

Part of the power of the reformation was that it recaptured a biblical view of worship. The reformers taught that God’s people could worship during the public assembly on the Lord’s Day, but they also taught that God’s people could worship at home, at work, through rest, through leisure, through relationships, and through even the smallest, even most mundane tasks of life. It was proclaimed that a farmer at the plow or a woman kneading dough could worship just as well as man singing songs in the most ornate church building.

Know this — evangelism is an act of worship. When you share the words of the Gospel, you are proclaiming the Word of God. The Lord gets great glory when you speak of His love, the righteousness of Christ, and the glories of the resurrection. See evangelism in the correct light. It is not the act of a spiritual salesmanship. You are not reciting cold concepts or pious principles. By uttering the truths of Christ, you are worshipping. You are praising God and giving glory to His Son. Such a perspective will change how you approach evangelism. We should witness because it is a pathway for worship!

It is wise.

According to the Proverbs, the person who witnesses is wise. In Proverbs 11:30, we read, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but a cunning person takes lives.” The Hebrew word rendered “cunning” was used of skillful artisans (Isaiah 40:20). It referred to people who were endowed with wisdom and strong reasoning capacities.²

There are debates concerning the exact meaning of Proverbs 11:30. A consideration of the context of the passage helps. In the surrounding verses, Solomon spoke of the disastrous consequences of physical violence, the type of violence associated with ancient warfare (Proverbs 11:29).³ In verse 30, he provided a contrast to such bloody actions. He maintained that righteous and wise people have a positive impact on lives around them. The King James provides a valid translation of the Hebrew within our text, saying, “And he that winneth souls is wise.”

A part of the confusion with Proverbs 11:30 rests in the picturesque language Solomon employed. The verb translated “takes” is one that literally meant “to attack.”⁴ The strong

² Gesenius, Wilhelm, and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. *Gesenius Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003).

³ Garrett, Duane A. *The New American Commentary, Volume 14: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), [CD-Rom].

⁴ Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck. eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), [CD-Rom].

language metaphorically depicted a righteous person having profound moral and spiritual impact on others. The New Testament validates such an interpretation of Proverbs 11:30. In one of his letters to the church at Corinth, Paul maintained that the lives of godly people serve as "the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Corinthians 2:15). D.A. Carson has summed up the meaning of Solomon's words in Proverbs 11:30 by saying, "...the wise win others to wisdom."⁵

Prior to speaking about the righteous taking lives, Solomon used another illustration to depict the impact of a Christian testimony. He said, "the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life." His words used a picture from an agrarian society. His readers would have had great familiarity with his metaphor. Anyone in ancient society would have been acquainted with the blessing and life-giving benefit of a fruit tree. Families and villages knew what it was like to receive sustenance by picking produce from trees. For Solomon, such an everyday event was a metaphor for the impact a righteous person could make on others. By living according to the truth of God and sharing the truth of God, one could impart life to others within his or her circle of influence.

My family recently installed a raised-bed garden in our backyard. We also planted a few tomato plants. Throughout the summer months, we had an intermittent harvest of produce. At most any moment, my children and I can walk into the backyard and pick a tomato, okra pod, or other vegetables. Scripture uses such things as an example for the power of gospel witnessing. Those who live the Christian life and share the message of Christ are like plants or trees that provide spiritual food for others. Aim to be a luscious fruit tree that provides spiritual sustenance for people around you.

According to Solomon, those who exert such gospel influence on others are "cunning." Personal evangelism and witnessing are activities for the wise. Do you want to be a person of insight and wisdom? Live in a way that provides a testimony for Christ. Share the gospel with those within your circle of influence. All along, know that such things are marks of those who are truly wise!

It helps us in our spiritual progress.

During my early years as a Christian, I had a handful of older men who disciplined me and aided me in my spiritual development. One was an influence in regard to evangelism. He had a heart for sharing the gospel. A day rarely passed in which he didn't witness to someone. Encouraging me to evangelize, he once said, "Patrick, sharing the gospel will do a lot to help you grow spiritually." He rationalized that those who witness regularly are more likely to study the Bible, pray, and pursue personal holiness. Personal evangelism is a catalyst for other spiritual disciplines.

I believe my mentor's advice was sound. Scripture confirms that evangelism encourages faithfulness in other areas of the Christian life. The apostle Paul testified regarding such truth. In talking about his own ministry, he said, "So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). Notice that Paul was more compelled to pursue spiritual disciplines because of his personal proclamation of the gospel. He didn't want his witness to be invalidated by any moral blemish in his life.

Be aware of these things. If you set out to be faithful in regard to evangelism, other areas of your spiritual walk will experience benefit. You'll probably be more likely to pray, as you'll be keenly aware of your need for spiritual power. Your devotion to daily Bible reading will

⁵ Carson, D. A., R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, eds. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed.* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), [CD-Rom]..

increase, as you will sense your need to hear from God each day. You'll be more prone to study theology and apologetics, as you'll want to be prepared to answer questions you may encounter when witnessing. You'll be more likely to serve in church ministries or go on mission trips, as such things will give you opportunities to share the gospel. In short, a commitment to evangelism will cultivate deeper commitment in other areas of your Christian walk. Such is a benefit of evangelism — it helps us in our spiritual progress.

It helps others.

Acts 16 describes how Paul travelled to a city named Philippi for the purpose of sharing the gospel. He went to the city because he knew it was a crossroads for culture and business in the first-century world. His visit resulted in the start of a congregation. Eventually, his letter to the Philippians (a book within our New Testament) would be penned to the church he started.

For the purpose of our study, it is interesting to look at what led to Paul's trip to Philippi. Though the man made a personal decision to go to the city because of its influential nature within the region, a heavenly revelation first led him to the area surrounding the city. Previously, Paul had attempted to travel to different locations, but Scripture says the Holy Spirit prevented him (Acts 16:6-8). God had different plans for the apostle, so He gave what theologians call a "special revelation." The Lord spoke directly to the apostle via the means of a vision. Scripture says, "During the night Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian man was standing and pleading with him, 'Cross over to Macedonia and help us!'" (Acts 16:9).

Notice the driving motivation for Paul's trip to the region. A man from Macedonia asked for "help." The original language of the text used a word that meant to "run to the aid of one who cries for help."⁶ It described one who offered assistance after hearing a cry for help.⁷ The term was used on multiple occasions in the New Testament to depict those who called out to Jesus or the apostles for aid (Matthew 15:25; Mark 9:22, 24). In such contexts, it referred to literal, physical help.

In the context of Acts 16:9, the Greek word for "help" was used in a spiritual sense. It depicts the spiritual and moral assistance available through the truth of Christ. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word was used in Israel's prophecy concerning Joseph. The patriarch told of the way in which the Lord would give divine assistance to the seed of Joseph — "...by the God of your father who *helps* you, and by the Almighty who blesses you..." (Genesis 49:25).

In the New Testament the word for "help" was used of the divine assistance available in the gospel. Paul used the word in quoting Isaiah — "At an acceptable time I listened to you, and in the day of salvation I *helped* you" (2 Corinthians 6:2). The author of Hebrews also used the term in a similar way. In speaking of the life Christ lived on behalf of God's children, he said, "For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to *help* those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

Scripture's use of the word rendered "help" reveals important truth about Christian salvation. In Christ, people can find great help for their souls. Though mankind is marked by fallen flesh, and though deceptive philosophies abound within the world, the light and life of Christ can give divine assistance. When Christians share the gospel, they offer spiritual and moral help for all who hear. Individual souls, families, schools, workplaces, and entire communities can be blessed by the truth of Christ!

⁶ Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Baker's Greek New Testament Library. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000). [CD-Rom].

⁷ Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), [CD-Rom].

It is an act which brings great eternal reward.

Ultimately, sharing the gospel is important because it has an impact on eternity. The book of Revelation gives witness to such. When John caught a glimpse of glory, he observed a mass of humanity giving praise to the Lord. He gave record of what he saw, saying, "After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10).

I once heard a preacher say that there aren't many things that live forever. God, the Word of God, and souls are a few of the only things that are unending in nature. Since this is true, God's people should be zealous for evangelism. Every soul will live forever somewhere; therefore, evangelism should be an imperative for local churches. What is done in the name of gospel ministry will have an impact for all of eternity.

When the prophet Daniel ministered, the Lord reminded him of such realities. The man served during dark days. After being exiled to a far-off land, he worked for godless world leaders. During his exile, he received prophetic visions concerning the future. The Lord told him of more dark days that would come upon the earth. However, the Lord's prophecies weren't meant to discourage the man. Instead, they were intended to stir the man to fresh fervor for speaking the Word of God. The Lord told him, "Those who have insight will shine like the bright expanse of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

What did God mean by the metaphor of righteous people shining "like the stars forever and ever?" His intent was to convey the eternal reward reserved for those who evangelize. When one leads another soul to faith in Christ, one makes a difference that will last forever. Paul understood this to be true. In talking to the church of the Thessalonians, he said, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of boasting in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?" (1 Thessalonians 2:19). The apostle knew that his investment in new converts would result in heavenly reward. Such truth undoubtedly compelled him to keep ministering despite many difficulties.

As we start our study on evangelism and witnessing, remember that we are dealing with eternal matters. Just yesterday I had an opportunity to share about Jesus. While I was on a jog, a woman in a neighborhood stopped me. A snake was in her yard and she wanted my help. Should she kill the serpent? I advised her not to. It wasn't poisonous, and it was heading toward a wooded area. I told her that the snake meant no harm, and then I transitioned to talk about the part such a snake played in our ecosystem. I said, "You know, our Creator really made a magnificent world." My words opened an opportunity for a spiritual conversation.

Why did I feel compelled to witness in such a situation? There are many reasons. We will talk about several in what follows. Eternity, however, is one of the foremost reasons for sharing the gospel. The Lord made every man, woman, boy, and girl for Himself. Each is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and everyone will live forever somewhere. The reality of such things should compel us to speak up for Jesus!