

My Current Theology of Evangelism

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Introduction

Evangelism is at the heart of God's mission in the world. Jesus Christ came to seek and save the lost, and He calls His followers to participate in this mission by making disciples and proclaiming the good news. Therefore, evangelism is not an optional activity for a few specially gifted Christians. It is a central calling of the church and an essential part of following Jesus.

My understanding of evangelism is shaped especially by Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Jesus' teaching about being salt and light in Matthew 5:13–16, His compassion for the crowds and His command to pray for workers in Matthew 9:35–38, and Paul's teaching concerning holiness and usefulness to the Master in 2 Timothy 2:20–22.

Evangelism requires both faithfulness to the truth of the gospel and sensitivity to the people we are trying to reach. It requires us to proclaim Christ clearly while listening carefully, building relationships, understanding people's perspectives, praying earnestly, living holy lives, and depending upon the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. Evangelism Is Proclaiming Jesus Christ and His Gospel

Evangelism is sharing Jesus' love with people who have not believed, while helping them understand who Jesus really is, what He has done, and what He will do in the future.

Evangelism therefore includes more than demonstrating kindness or helping people with their practical needs. Christian love is an important part of evangelism, but our good works should ultimately point people to Jesus. If we help people without allowing them to know that our love comes from Christ, we may demonstrate kindness without actually proclaiming the gospel.

The gospel must also address the whole truth about humanity and God's salvation. Evangelism should not hide the reality of sin simply because the subject may be uncomfortable. Neither should we avoid the resurrection of Jesus, the truthfulness of heaven and hell, or the call to respond to Christ.

Therefore, evangelism involves both loving people and telling people the truth about Jesus. We should not separate proclamation from love. Our words should communicate the truth of Christ, while our lives demonstrate the reality of that truth.

2. Evangelism Requires Contextualization Without Compromising the Gospel

Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 gives an important model for evangelistic ministry. He describes becoming “all things to all people” so that by all possible means he might save some.

This does not mean changing the gospel to make it acceptable to different people. Rather, it means understanding people well enough to communicate the unchanging gospel in ways they can understand.

In my ministry context, I encounter people with very different backgrounds: people with high and low levels of education; citizens and non-citizens; people with different economic circumstances; married, single, and divorced people; people with Christian backgrounds and people with no Christian background; people from other religious traditions; and people with very different understandings of the Bible.

These people may have very different perceptions of Jesus. Some may have no knowledge of Him. Others may see Jesus primarily as a symbol of American culture, a cultural tradition, a restriction on personal freedom, an obstacle, a human being, or merely a prophet.

Therefore, effective evangelism begins with listening and understanding.

I need to allow people to express their opinions fully, listen with respect and attention, take notes, and understand why they believe what they believe. Then, rather than immediately attacking their assumptions, I can gently offer a different perspective while building a relationship of trust. When difficult questions arise, I should be willing to search for answers rather than avoiding them.

This is especially important when people have strong emotional reactions to subjects that may appear insignificant to me. Just as I would take seriously my daughter's feelings about something that may seem very small to me, I should demonstrate sympathy, respect, and understanding when another person feels intensely about an issue.

Evangelism therefore requires both biblical faithfulness and relational sensitivity.

3. Evangelism Is Both Proclamation and Incarnational Witness

Jesus calls His followers to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Matt. 5:13–16). Many people may take their first step toward Jesus because a Christian simply allows the light of Christ to shine through his or her life.

This means that evangelism cannot be separated from Christian character.

My effectiveness as an evangelist is affected by the quality of my relationship with Jesus. When my relationship with Him is not right, being salt and light becomes difficult. Likewise, difficult contexts can challenge my understanding, and sometimes people may attempt to exploit my willingness to help.

The answer is not to withdraw from difficult people. Instead, I need to maintain a healthy relationship with Jesus, seek wisdom from spiritually mature Christians, pray for guidance, and be willing to go the “second, or third mile” in demonstrating Christlike love.

Therefore, evangelism involves who I am as well as what I say. My life should provide credibility to my message, while my message explains the source and meaning of my life.

4. Evangelism Depends on Prayer and God’s Harvest

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 9:35–38 reminds me that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Evangelism is therefore not a hopeless task. There are many people whom God is preparing to reach, while there are comparatively few Christians willing to labor in the work of evangelism.

Jesus specifically commands His disciples to pray earnestly for workers.

For me, earnest prayer means recognizing a great need in my heart, recognizing that no human or external help is sufficient, and praying with full attention and hope.

My prayer life needs to become deeper and longer. I need to give thanks even through trials and repeatedly remember my identification with Jesus.

Evangelism therefore begins not merely with a strategy but with prayerful dependence upon God. Before asking God to use my words, I must ask God to prepare my own heart, prepare the people I am reaching, raise up workers, and bring about the harvest.

5. Evangelism Requires the Holiness of the Evangelist

The usefulness of a Christian in evangelism is closely connected with his or her holiness. In 2 Timothy 2:20–22, Paul teaches that those who cleanse themselves from dishonorable things become vessels useful to the Master.

Holiness is therefore not an advanced level of Christianity reserved for exceptionally mature Christians. It is part of normal Christian life and essential to faithful ministry.

I have recognized that even seemingly small areas of sin and distraction can affect my usefulness as an evangelist. For example, I need to be cautious about improper content on social media. I also need to maintain a healthy marriage relationship.

Sin can dry up my passion, energy, confidence, and will to evangelize. It can also reduce my care for the people I am trying to reach and consequently weaken the impact of the evangelistic team.

Therefore, an evangelist must continually repent, confess sin, pursue holiness, and maintain healthy relationships. The messenger is not the gospel, but the life of the messenger can either strengthen or undermine the credibility of the message.

6. Evangelism Is the First Priority in Church Planting

In church planting, evangelism is the first step and the first priority.

A new church plant exists not for gathering Christians who are already attending another church. Its purpose is to reach nonbelievers and unchurched people with the gospel and making disciples of them.

For this reason, evangelism should begin before the worship service is established. The church plant should develop an evangelistic culture from its earliest days.

This also creates an important opportunity to train potential future church members to see evangelism not as the responsibility of the church planter or paid staff, but as a normal part of Christian discipleship.

Evangelism should therefore not be delayed until the church has a building, regular worship services, or a large membership. Neither should it be something that gradually becomes less important once the church becomes established.

A healthy church plant should be born through evangelism and continue to reproduce through evangelism.

7. Evangelism Is the Responsibility of Every Believer

Evangelism is not something that only the church planter, pastor, missionary, or paid staff member should do.

Every follower of Christ can participate in God's mission according to his or her gifts, relationships, opportunities, and calling. Some may preach publicly. Others may share the gospel one-on-one, build friendships, show hospitality, pray, answer questions, serve neighbors, or introduce people to other Christians.

The church planter therefore has a responsibility not merely to evangelize personally but also to create an environment in which others learn to evangelize.

This is especially important in a church plant. The goal is not to build a church around one gifted evangelist. The goal is to establish a community in which evangelism becomes part of the normal life of God's people.

8. With God, Evangelism Is Possible and Is a First Priority

I believe that, with God, evangelism is possible and should be treated as a first priority. My notes describe evangelism with God as “easy” and as a “first priority.”

“Easy” does not mean that evangelism is always comfortable or that people will always respond positively. Rather, it means that the ultimate responsibility for producing spiritual life does not rest upon my human ability.

I am responsible to be faithful—to pray, listen, love, speak, explain, invite, and testify. But I cannot manufacture repentance or faith. God is the One who gives life and brings people to Himself.

Therefore, I should not allow fear of rejection, difficult questions, cultural barriers, or apparently small results to cause me to abandon evangelism. My responsibility is faithfulness; the harvest belongs to God.

9. In Christ, Evangelism Connects Us to God's Mission

Evangelism is not simply a ministry activity performed for Jesus. It is an expression of our relationship with Jesus.

My understanding is that evangelism is a way of being connected with Jesus and the Father, a way of receiving and experiencing the assurances Jesus has made, and a way of seeking the kingdom of God.

As I participate in Christ's mission, I become more deeply aware that evangelism is not my private project. It is God's work, and I am being invited to participate in what He is doing.

This changes my motivation. I do not evangelize merely because I need to increase the size of a church. I evangelize because Christ loves people, because the gospel is true, because people need salvation, and because Jesus has called His followers to participate in His mission.

10. The Holy Spirit Is the One Who Prepares and Convicts

The work of evangelism ultimately depends upon the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit tills and prepares people's hearts, reveals the truth, convicts people of their sins, and facilitates their decision-making.

This means that evangelism is a partnership in which I faithfully proclaim the gospel while depending upon the Spirit to accomplish what I cannot accomplish.

I cannot force someone to believe. I cannot create spiritual hunger. I cannot manufacture conviction of sin. I cannot produce regeneration through persuasive technique.

Therefore, I should approach evangelism with humility and prayer. I should speak the truth clearly, love people patiently, answer questions honestly, and leave the ultimate work of transformation to the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: My Theology of Evangelism

My theology of evangelism can be summarized this way:

Evangelism is God's people, empowered by the Holy Spirit, proclaiming the truth about Jesus Christ to people who have not believed, while demonstrating Christ's love through their lives, listening carefully to people's perspectives, contextualizing the message without compromising its truth, praying earnestly for the harvest, and calling people to respond to the gospel.

Evangelism is therefore both word and life, proclamation and relationship, prayer and action, faithfulness and contextualization.

For me personally, evangelism begins with my relationship with Jesus. I cannot effectively shine His light if I am not walking closely with Him. I need to pursue holiness, maintain healthy relationships, pray deeply, listen carefully, and continually grow in my understanding of the people God has called me to reach.

For church planting, evangelism must be the first priority rather than an activity added later. The church should be planted among people who need Christ, and the people who become part of the church should be disciplined into a lifestyle of evangelism.

Finally, I must remember that the harvest belongs to God. My calling is not to save people through my own ability. My calling is to be faithful—to go, listen, love, pray, proclaim Christ, answer questions, live as salt and light, and trust the Holy Spirit to prepare hearts, reveal truth, convict of sin, and draw people to Jesus.

Thus, my theology of evangelism can be expressed in one sentence:

Because Jesus Christ has come to seek and save the lost, I am called to love people, listen to them, proclaim the whole truth about Christ, live as His light, pray for the harvest, and depend upon the Holy Spirit as I participate in God's work of bringing people into His kingdom.