

Confident Evangelism, #1

Confident Evangelism

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The Confederate General Joseph Johnston was one of the weaker leaders on either side of the United States civil war. He was too slow to engage a battle and too quick to retreat. One man who knew him well said never in his life could he make up his mind that everything was so exactly right that the time to act had come. One historian writes about him, "Though reputed to be a crack shot with a rifle, when Johnston went hunting, he always complained that the bird flew too high or the dogs were too near. There was always some excuse for not committing himself. He was too fussy; too hard to please; too cautious; too much afraid to miss and risk his fine reputation for a crack shot. While everyone else banged away missing often and occasionally bagging a bird, Johnston kept on with his excuses. He never did miss, but it was only because he never shot."

Too many of us, including myself in the realm of the discussion here, too many of us are like that in evangelism. We are so afraid of making a mistake, so afraid of being shown up to not know as much as we think we do, we're so afraid of making a mistake that we never fire a shot, a verbal shot in defense of the truth and it shouldn't be that way and it doesn't have to be that way. We understand that we are going to face unbelievers who are hostile to our proclamation of Christ. We understand that many will be indifferent or even condescending toward our faith in Christ. Those who say, "I'm glad that Christianity works for you and I'm glad that you have Jesus but that's not for me. I don't need that." Well, here's the question that I want to ask and answer over the next couple of weeks, today and next Sunday: how do you defend and proclaim your faith before people like that? Where people are not interested. Where people are hostile. Where people are mocking. And where people don't even share your commitment to the authority of Scripture. You come and say, "I believe the Bible and the Bible says this," and they say, "I don't believe the Bible." What do you do then? How do we advance the cause of Christ in circumstances like that? I want to answer that question for you over the next two Sundays.

Some people, I'm convinced not just by observation but by biblical conviction, some people make this far too complex. They would tell you that you must have mountains of evidence that you must know and bring to bear on a discussion and overwhelm people with information in order to convince them of the authority of Scripture and to defend the faith. There are others who would reduce Christian witness to simply being friendly and not being too confrontational and so the idea being that you witness by your life and by

your general demeanor; you give somebody a vague impression that something's different about you and maybe one day they'll ask a question in the hope that somehow the unbeliever will catch on as if being a good guy is enough to communicate the Gospel. That's not true. That's inadequate because faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ, Romans 10:17 says. It takes a verbal witness to call men to Christ, not simply the display of a lifestyle.

Now, let me state a fundamental assumption here as I begin. This is a very important starting point so you can understand where I'm coming from in what I say. There is no value, there is no virtue in us as Christians winning an argument about the existence of God. There is no value in winning an argument about the general broad truth claims of Christianity if an unbeliever walks away from the conversation without hearing the Gospel. The point of addressing an unbeliever is to get to the heart of his spiritual need and address him in his sin and call him out of sin to the only Savior who can redeem him and deliver him from sin and judgment, the Lord Jesus Christ. If an unbeliever walks away not having heard that, then I really don't know what we've accomplished in the discussion.

Now, if you agree with that, it will narrow the scope of what you try to accomplish as you discuss and interact with people who do not know Christ and let me be very clear about what I'm trying to do here. I'm trying to set the boundaries so that it's very clear what I'm trying to do. By the way, I'm not announcing this morning a new door-to-door evangelism campaign for Truth Community Church so if you were sweating and concerned that you were going to have to go door-to-door as the climax, I'm not building up to that so you can relax. That's not the point here. It's more significant than that. This has nothing to do with setting up a program like that so we're not going there. Rather, this is much more fundamental and, I believe, much more helpful to you to understand how you should think in general about unbelievers and how you approach your conversations with them. I understand and so let's put it this way: this message is primarily for people in the workaday world or people who have family that they care about, who want to see their friends, their loved ones, their neighbors, their coworkers, come to a saving knowledge of Christ and to have a sense of how is it that I can do that effectively. Well, what I want to give you over these next 45 minutes and next week, what I want to give you are the biblical principles that will inform your approach and give you an understanding that says, "This is what I am to do in those conversations. This is how I am to think. This is what I am to say." And to give you a sense of direction that gives you a sense of confidence in your evangelism, in your witnessing.

The confidence that we're after is not a confidence that says, "I can guarantee that the person that I'm talking to will come to Christ." You do not have that power as you evangelize. You cannot guarantee a result. Salvation is from the Lord. Salvation requires new birth from above. It requires a work of the Holy Spirit in that person's heart and you don't control that. John 3 says that the Spirit is like the wind. You don't know; it's a mystery in how he moves. You don't know when he's going to move. You don't know how he's going to move. You don't know what he's going to use. You can't control that. You can't control the result. You personally have no power over a dead human heart and

so if we're wanting to be confident in evangelism, we say we can't guarantee the result in any conversation or with any particular person. What is the confidence that we're after then? Well, this kind of changes the whole focus. The confidence that we're after is the confidence that comes from saying, "I understand the spiritual dynamics that are in play in this discussion. I understand. I am confident in the content of the Gospel. I am confident in the authority from which I speak. And I am confident in the ability of Christ to bless my efforts regardless of whether that person comes to Christ or not." I want us to be confident. Our goal is to be confident that we are doing it rightly with a right understanding and then once we're doing that, then we can trust the Lord for the outcome of whatever it comes and that's the confidence that we'd want, it's the confidence that is born of being equipped for the discussion and being satisfied to trust Christ. Let me say that again: it's the confidence that when these discussions come up, that you are equipped for the discussion and then you are content to trust Christ, therefore you can share Christ, you can speak about Christ even to a hostile unbeliever with a sense of serenity and confidence that, "I know what I'm supposed to do here." Our goal, really our first goal, the first thing that we want to do whenever we open God's word to anyone, whether it's me from a platform or you in the privacy of your home with someone you care about, our first goal should always, first and foremost and always be that we please God with the discussion because if he's pleased with us, then we can rest in that and let him do what he wants with the souls of those that we address.

So that's where we're coming from here today. It's a mindset about evangelism, not a program for evangelism or a step-by-step approach. It's deeper than that. It's broader than that. It's more fundamental than that. What are the biblical principles that are informing and governing a confrontation with an unbeliever. That's what we want to understand here today and what we're going to do is I'm going to give you five principles in this series to frame your approach to spiritual discussions with the lost. We'll cover two this morning and the rest next week and I am very excited to share these things with you. In some ways, it's not going to be anything new that you haven't heard before, but it's going to be a way to review fundamental principles and apply them in the area of evangelism that says, "Okay, now I know. I've got a sense of what to do here." And gives us a sense of not backing down from a discussion; not being quick to retreat like the Confederate General that we mentioned at the beginning was, too quick to retreat when the battle starts to rage. No, I want us to be marked as Christians to be courageous Christians who can enter into a battle and stand and be firm and to be confident, worthy of a soldier of Christ. That's what we want today. That's the direction that we're going.

How do you get to be like that? First of all, first point for this morning is that you need to remember the sufficiency of the Scriptures. You need to remember the sufficiency of the Scriptures. You know, the truth of the matter is that if you're a Christian, if you've truly been born again, you have resident within you the basics that are necessary for you to be able to share the Gospel effectively. You don't become a Christian without understanding something about the holiness of God; understanding something about your sin which is an offense to him; without understanding something about God's judgment on the lost and that you need to turn from sin and receive Christ in order to be saved; without understanding something that Christ was crucified in order to pay the debt of sin to turn

away the wrath of God against sinners and you trust yourself to that, you entrust yourself to him fully and completely and unreservedly. That's just basic to being a Christian and if you know something about that, then you know something that's necessary to be able to direct a discussion in the right way.

You don't have to know a lot of extrabiblical information in order to be an effective witness for Christ. That doesn't hurt. There are times where information can turn and maybe pivot a point, but the power for salvation is not found in evidential means. The power for salvation is found in the Scripture and Scripture has everything that you need to lead a soul to Christ. Period. Full stop. End of sentence. End of paragraph. It is the Scriptures that give people the knowledge that is necessary to lead them to Christ. That is what Scripture claims for itself.

Turn now in the Scriptures here to Psalm 19:7. You see, it is just so essential for you and me as Christians to understand our own position. It's essential for us to know what our position is, what is the artillery we bring to battle, what is the strength, what has God provided and to engage the discussion with an unbeliever on the grounds that God has established rather than on the sinful rejection of an unbelieving mind. We enter into the discussion and we fight the battle, as it were, according to the plan that God has given us and our duty is to be faithful to the one who has called us regardless of how that is received in the world.

That's very essential for us to know and to understand and what does Scripture say about itself? Psalm 19:7 says, "The law of the LORD is perfect," it's complete, "restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple." Look over at Psalm 119:98-100, actually we'll start in verse 97. Verse 97 really sets the orienting affection of your heart as you approach these things. Psalm 119:97 says, "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." Let me just stop right there for a moment and just tell you that fundamental to your witnessing effectively for Christ is for you to have a vibrant love for the word of God. Only a vibrant love for the word of God is ultimately going to be that which is effective long term for leading people to Christ. They need to see that Scripture is precious. They need to see that the God that you love is a God to be feared and that comes out of a heart that is given over to his word; that is given over in affection to Christ; given over into deference and fear and reverence for the living God. That is distinct. An argumentative spirit about academic matters is not something that you should expect God to honor when it's not flowing from a love for God's law, a love for God's word, a love for God's Son, a love for the soul of the one in front of you. So in many ways, beloved, confident evangelism, effective evangelism starts with what's going on in your own heart. You must be a Christian first of all to be an effective evangelist. Let's not presuppose the most basic things, but along in that, to be a growing Christian, loving God's word and having your life flow out of that sweet, clear, pristine fountain that you drink from, there is where effective confident evangelism comes from.

Going back to Psalm 119:97, "I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." Now watch what it says here in thinking about this in the context of evangelism, "Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. I have more

insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Your precepts." What's he saying there? He is declaring the absolute sufficiency of Scripture. He is saying that the Bible, the word of God is sufficient to give him wisdom over his enemies; to make him more discerning than his teachers; to make him more effective than the aged who do not give themselves over in similar manner to God's word. So what you have on your lap or on your iPad, beloved, when you have the word of God in front of you, you have that which when you read and study and comprehend and meditate on it, you have the most powerful spiritual force operating in your heart that is able to give wisdom to your mind so that you're able to be effective in evangelism. So we look at Scripture and we see that it is sufficient in general.

Now go over to 2 Timothy 3 in your New Testament. 2 Timothy 3:13 says and watch this, look at what all of these things say about the sufficiency of Scripture. 2 Timothy 3:13, "But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." So we're going to be operating as evangelists, we're going to be sharing Christ in a hostile environment with evil men who are deceptive, evil men who are deceived and the difficulty of that on a human level is insuperable; it cannot be conquered on a human level.

So what does Paul say to Timothy then as he prepares him for ministry? He says, verse 14, "You, however," by contrast you be somebody different from the environment in which you live, "You however continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them." He said, "You don't need something new, Timothy, to be effective in ministry. You don't need something outside of what you have already received. What you have learned and you've become convinced of, just continue walking in that."

He goes on and he says in verse 15, he says, "from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." He says, "Timothy, you have in front of you that which is sufficient to lead someone to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ."

So we love God's word, we recognize its power and we recognize that it is sufficient to accomplish the purpose which we believe is paramount in an interaction with an unbeliever, the salvation of their soul, and if you don't think that their salvation is the primary point, then what I have to say to you here this morning isn't going to be that important to you perhaps. But the problem is not in what's being said here, the problem is in what you're defining to be the most important thing. We have to realize that eternal souls are at stake when we interact with people. When we interact with the lost, we have to be mindful of that and say what matters is that they hear the Gospel, not whether they like me, not whether they respect what's being said, and the things that they need to hear come from Scripture. And I can read the Bible and understand it, you say to yourself as a Christian. I can read the Bible and understand it and so here's what that does, here's how that makes you confident. Maybe you don't know the latest spin on evolution, maybe you don't know the latest attack on the integrity of the Gospels that scholars argue about and

waste their time on, but understand this, understand that scientific theory cannot lead a soul to saving faith in Christ. Understand that Scripture does and if your heart passion is for that soul to come to a saving knowledge of Christ, then you can take confidence in the fact that God has given us a word that is sufficient to accomplish that goal. So you're just mindful and you're clear in your mind about what the goal is and what the means is to achieve that goal that God uses. It's his word and you say, "Okay, now that narrows things. I don't have to carry a sack of encyclopedia on my back in order to try to carry the conversation. I can point people to Scripture." You can do that, can't you? You can do that. You can open up a Bible and point them there.

Scripture not only is sufficient to lead someone to Christ, beloved, look at this: it is sufficient to make you adequate to witness for Christ. Look at verse 16 and 17 there as we continue down in the text where it says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." From a scriptural perspective, beloved, is evangelism a good work? Is evangelism a good thing in the sight of God? Is declaring Christ to someone who is in darkness, is that a good work for a Christian to do? Of course it is. Then what does this passage mean for that? It means that Scripture is sufficient to equip you to do just that.

So we take heart in the sufficiency of Scripture and as you grow in your knowledge of God's word, it makes you adequate for those times when you are called upon to explain or defend your faith. Beloved, if you know certain key verses from Scripture on God's holiness, on sin, on the work of Christ on the cross, the call to repentance, if you're mindful of those things, if your mind is engaged in those passages of Scripture, you can trust the Spirit of God to bring them to mind at just the right time in your conversations in order to be able to deal with the situation at hand. And if, as often happens, if you're faced with a question that you don't know how to answer, don't panic, don't worry, don't be afraid, just say, "That's a good question. I'll get back to you. I'll look into that. I'll see what the answer is because I don't know that." Beloved, there is no possibility whatsoever that someone is going to present to you a brilliant argument that diffuses Christianity that hasn't already been addressed and answered effectively over centuries of Christian teaching. Unsaved men who don't know Scripture like to puff themselves up and pretend and mock and think that they've come up with something that no one else has ever thought of. Listen, they don't understand the heft, they don't understand the weight of the work of the Spirit of God through godly teachers over the centuries. They don't understand the weight of the perfection of God's word and how God has made things clear to his people over the course of time and so the fact that you don't know the answer personally doesn't mean that that question hasn't often been examined, answered effectively and dealt with. So you don't have to rest simply on your own understanding and knowledge of these things, you are in the flow of a Christian tradition, the flow of evangelical reformed Christian thinking over a long period of time that has addressed these questions and answered them over time. So you're not alone in the discussion and if you personally don't know the answer, just say, "Hey, I'll get back to you on that." No big deal. It's not that complicated.

Now, here's one of my favorite aspects of addressing this because I know what some of you are asking. You say, "Okay, that's all well and good. I can see where that would work well for somebody who accepts the authority of Scripture, but what about those, pastor, what about those who say, 'I don't accept the Bible. I don't believe the Bible. I'm not interested in the Bible.' What about those kinds of people? If they won't accept the authority of Scripture how am I ever going to address the argument? Where are we going to meet to have a discussion about this if we're coming at it from completely different grounds of authority?" Well, beloved, when that comes up, here's what you don't think. Don't think this, and if you've thought this in the past, stop it and don't ever do it again. Don't think, "Uh-oh, this is bad. Now I have to use something other than the Bible to reach him for Christ." Here's something to help you remember the right way to think about that, how to respond to this. We'll come back in a moment. I'll give you my illustration first.

I have a friend who is a former Navy SEAL and was involved in the first Gulf War many years ago and this former Navy SEAL often would talk with me about military tactics, not because he wanted to but because I asked him. I was curious, you know, "Well, what about this? And what about that?" And one time we were discussing how a Navy SEAL is trained to respond to an ambush. He unexpectedly comes under fire and there is heavy fire upon them and they have no route of escape, what do you do? Well, what he told me was, he said, "You stand up, you get your line, and you walk toward the enemy firing your weapon. You don't run from the attack. You look at the attack and you fire your weapon at it and you respond to it with the overwhelming power at your disposal. You don't run, you engage it. You go right toward it firing your weapon." Well, beloved, right there is a perfect picture of what we should do when an unbeliever attacks the authority and the credibility of the Bible. When that happens, you don't go along and change the subject and say, "Well, did you know what historians say?" Or, "Do you know what the latest archeological evidence is?" Or, "Let me tell you about my personal experience." That's not the right response. There is no power in any of that.

Listen, if there is anything else that comes out of these two weeks of messages, this is the one central theme that I would like to have you walk away with: when someone is attacking the authority of Scripture you do not abandon Scripture in order to defend the Scriptures. Why would you do that? Why on earth would you abandon the one clear space where God has spoken? Why would you abandon the God-breathed authority of the Bible in order to try to defend the Bible and to bring somebody to saving faith? That's absolutely incoherent. That makes no sense whatsoever.

Here's the way that you should think about it. Here's the way that we should think about this as a church. Here's the way that you should think about it individually in your own life as you're contemplating these discussions. Here's the way that we think about it: God has spoken. God has revealed himself in Scripture. What higher testimony is there than that? There is no higher authority to appeal to. There is no better authority to appeal to. We as Christians accept Christianity on God's self-testimony. There is no higher standard of truth to appeal to. There is no greater authority to appeal to. So when the authority of Scripture is attacked, we reinforce and we, as it were, double down on the authority of

Scripture rather than running away from our position of strength. That's all that we have. That's all that we need because Scripture is sufficient, but that's all that we have, and we openly, gladly say that Scripture is our starting point and we start and we reason from there.

Now, unbelievers have their own starting point and, you see, the starting point here is the whole issue of the discussion. Unbelievers have their own starting point to evaluate truth claims. They – watch this, this is so important for you to understand – they presuppose a standard of truth that they probably haven't even thought about but they just assume it. Now, their standard of truth may be science, it may be church tradition, it may be their own feelings, it may be their own sense of reason, but ultimately it comes down to this: their starting point is ultimately nothing more than their own opinion. "Science is the authority because I think it's the authority. My reason, what I think is reasonable is the authority because, well, isn't that obvious?" Well, no, actually it's not so obvious. It's not so obvious, and we're engaging a discussion with an imaginary unbeliever here, it's not so obvious to me that I should bend down to your sense of reason, your sense of propriety, you who have spent 30 years on the earth, you who are a fallen creature in sin, you whose mind is darkened like the Gentiles. It's not at all obvious to me that I should presuppose your standard of authority. I reject that. I don't believe that that is the determining, controlling factor in the discussion is what you think in your unenlightened mind. I don't believe that. There is conflict for you but that's the right conflict to have and so from his starting point he says, "Scripture doesn't make sense to me." Or he says, "I don't believe in fairytales. I don't accept your Bible as the standard." What do you say then? Well, I think your response should be, "My friend, you have presupposed, probably without even realizing it, that your opinion is the best judge of truth and it's not. You need to believe in the Scriptures. You need to come to God's word and read God's word and see what God has to say about the matter and bring your mind in submission to Scripture."

Now, I realize that in the moment, that that may create greater sparks flying and friction and accusations of how you're blind to any other opinion other than your own, but don't let them frame it that way. Listen, here's the way that you need to think about it and coming back to our fundamental starting point that we said, that the most important thing in a discussion with an unbeliever about Christ is that he come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Nothing else, everything else pales in comparison to that, presupposing that you're being faithful to Scripture and in your own attitude and all of that. But in terms of what you want to see happen in his life, it's not primary on your heart to win the argument so that you can walk away puffed up and say, "I put another one in his place." That doesn't mean anything. That's just sinful pride if there's not a sense of urgency for the salvation of his soul that's animating you.

So if we're agreed here in this room, or over the live stream, if we're agreed that what we want for an unbeliever is for him to come to faith in Christ – watch this, be mindful of this – that unbeliever has to read the Scriptures; he has to be exposed to the word of God. They have to accept the authority of the Bible if they're going to believe in Christ, otherwise they're going to hell. If we allow them to continue in their rejection of Scripture, their casting aside of the authority of God's word, then where are they going to

hear the Gospel? Where are they going to receive it? Where is it going to come with authority upon their conscience if we allow them to walk away and not confront them about the ultimate authority in the discussion? If they won't receive the authority of Scripture, everything else is secondary by comparison to that.

And beloved, listen, you and I need to humble our own hearts when we think about this and I...well, I won't go there. If that unbeliever that you're thinking about as we discuss this, if they won't listen to the Bible, they're not going to listen to your other arguments as well; they're not going to receive evidence well from another because they're still putting themselves in the central place of authority. And you shouldn't think, you should not think, you should be mindful of, if God's word isn't persuasive on their hearts, then there's nothing that you can say that's going to be of greater persuasive authority than that. This is part of just having a humble attitude toward the word of God, a humble attitude toward your own abilities. But, you're thinking, remembering that we're saying we want his soul won, remembering the sufficiency of Scripture, but by contrast – mark this – if they will just read the Bible they will suddenly be exposed immediately to the direct work of the Spirit of God. If we can at least persuade them to open the Bible and read it, then the Spirit of God is using the material that the Spirit of God wrote to work in their hearts and we're content to leave the discussion there if they say, "I need to read Scripture for myself." Then we've got an entryway. If they're slammed and rejecting the authority of God's word, then, you know, I don't know how you're supposed to communicate an authoritative Gospel apart from the source that gives rise to it. So the bigger point being is that we press and we hold and we stay on the authority of God's word; we never abandon that position for a moment. We have to stay there because that's our strength. That's our power. That's what God has revealed. This is how we manifest our love for God by being faithful to his word even when it's being rejected by those that we see in the flesh.

So what do we do? We openly acknowledge that our belief stems from our commitment to Christ and our confidence in the authority of God's word. With the Apostle Paul, it's settled in our minds and you have to settle this before you get into the discussion. You think through this in life and you say, "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. They may be. They may hate it. They may mock it. They may reject me. I may lose friends and family over this, but do you know what? I don't care by comparison because I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. I know what saved my soul. I know the price that Christ paid for my redemption. I know the sweetness of God's word. I'm never going to abandon that, and if the world is against the Bible, then I'm against the world." That's how profound our commitment is to this precious word. That's what determines our course of action.

Now, obviously, unbelievers react against this. Some of us once were in that camp, weren't we? Where we joined in the mocking. We were like the thief on the cross that mocked Christ and then our heart was turned and we said, "Lord Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," and there was a turning that took place in our own lives. So we understand the reaction that unbelievers have against it and here's the question as we transition into our second point: why? Why do they reject the Scripture? Why do they mock a reasonable presentation of the faith that's offered to them in love

seeking their eternal well-being? Why is it that they don't repent at the first sound of the Gospel? Here's our second point for this morning: not only remember the sufficiency of Scripture which we've covered now, secondly, you remember the seriousness of sin. You remember the seriousness of sin. You know, we tend to think of sin in behavioral terms, you know, that I need to be morally pure; I shouldn't lie; I shouldn't steal. We tend to think about it in those kinds of external behavioral things without understanding all of what Scripture says. What will make you confident in evangelism, what will give you the ability to persevere in the midst of rejection and hostility and an unresponsive spirit is this: is when you remember the seriousness of sin, you realize that sin affects the core of how an unbeliever thinks. A sinner will not inevitably repent if he just gets the right arguments presented to him. That's not true because it's more than a cognitive problem. There is darkness in his heart that needs light. There is death in his soul that needs new life from above and there is a core of unbelief that governs the way that he thinks and you need to remember that if you're going to be confident in evangelism.

Look at John 3:19. The Gospel of John 3:19, this is such an important verse. "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." Notice in this passage that there is a threefold response, there is a threefold motivation that's going on here. First of all, going from the outside in, you see that there are sinful deeds in the life of an unbeliever that he doesn't want exposed and so there's that outward problem. Secondly, you see the affections of his heart, that he loves darkness rather than the light. His affections, what he loves, what he wants out of life, is rooted in darkness that gives rise to the evil deeds that he loves and what's the result of that? It restrains his volition. It restrains his will. Verse 20 says he does not come to the light, why? Because he's motivated by fear that his deeds will be exposed. So that's what's going on in an unbeliever's heart. He realizes that an authoritative presentation of the Gospel is a threat to his self-autonomy. It is a threat to his love for sin and that governs the way that he responds to it.

Look over at Romans 1:18. Scripture is so clear on this and if you're going to be effective and confident in evangelism you need to understand this. Romans 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." What do they do? They "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." The truth comes to them and they push back. They push down. They push out. They fling it away from themselves. That's what they do with the truth. That's what Scripture says that unsaved men are like.

Verse 21, "even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." Jesus said they won't come to the light because they love their evil deeds. Paul says, speaking as an authoritative representative of Christ, they suppress the truth. They would rather worship creatures than give thanks to God. That's what's going on in the heart of an unbeliever.

So when you understand that, you realize that what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2 must be true. He says, 1 Corinthians 2:14, we won't turn there, "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." And so whether his rejection comes from a spirit of aloof detachment or condescending remarks or outright hostility, it's all rooted in the same aspect of the unbelieving heart that says, "I don't want this truth to rule over me."

Now, what does that do for you as you're sharing Christ? You understand. All of a sudden you have a perfect context in which, and an authoritative context in which to understand those times when people are hostile and reject you. It's not because it's somehow you didn't know the right argument to make. It's not because that somehow you were personally offensive. It's that the truth itself is the offense. You are simply an outward manifestation that brings them the truth and they're rejecting the truth, so when there are problems, when there is rejection in the Gospel presentation, you say, "I know where this comes from. I can understand. I have a place to process this. It's not that I need new information from second century sources to prove to them about witnesses to Jesus. We've already got the best witness to Jesus right here in the 66 books of the Bible. That's the best. That's the most reliable. That's not it, the problem is their own sinful heart." And what you have to remember if you're going to be confident in evangelism is this: the sinner in front of you is not an equal partner in the pursuit of truth. Let me say that again: the sinner is not an equal partner in the pursuit of truth. How many times have you heard people say, maybe you've said it yourself, "You know, I just don't understand why he rejects it. I just don't understand. You know, he understood the facts but he still rejected it and I just don't get that." Well, the reason that that seems like such a conundrum to you is that you're thinking, you're assuming that they want the truth just like you do and Scripture says that's not true. Scripture describes unbelievers in exactly the opposite truth. They suppress the truth. They reject it. They refuse to come to the light. So they're clever enough, the human heart is able to come up with all kinds of false excuses to reject it. Give me one unbeliever who just says, "I don't want this because I don't want my life to change," and I say, "Okay, now we can have an honest conversation about it." You see, the unbeliever who is unresponsive to your words of the Gospel, listen, he has a vested interest in rejecting the conversation because he loves sin, he loves his self-autonomy, he wants to be his own master, he doesn't want Christ to reign over him. He says, "I will not have that man reign over me."

Think about it this way: the sinner is like a judge, a judge who has taken a bribe before the trial ever begins. A judge who has been bribed will never process the evidence rightly. He will never interpret the law accurately. He already knows the outcome that he wants and so he will take whatever is necessary, whatever you present to him has already been determined in advance by his prior commitment to love of sin and love of self. Once a judge has been bribed, the outcome is certain and the most articulate attorney with the best facts aren't going to be able to persuade that judge when money has already persuaded him to an opposite result. That's the picture of the sinner responding to the Gospel.

So when you share the Gospel, you must remember that sin distorts his ability to understand and respond and so what do you do? You're patient. You confront it directly. You say words to the effect of, "My friend, you're a sinner. You have broken God's law. His judgment is upon you and only Christ can save you." And you keep the basic fundamentals of the Gospel front and center. Why? Because that is what God is going to use if he chooses to work in someone's heart. That's the power. That's the Gospel power that works in a heart. So you appeal to their conscience to awaken their need for a Savior and yet you're mindful of this – watch this and we'll talk about this more next week – you're mindful of the fact as you say these things that ultimately the Spirit of God must be the one who overcomes that bias in their heart. The sweet Spirit of God must bring influences to bear on their affections and on their understandings to help turn them away, to help break the chains of the bias that they have so often kissed over the course of their life. Remember, the sinner is in chains to sin and he kisses the chains that bind him. He likes it that way.

So we realize that what cuts the chain, what's the bolt cutter in the chains of sin, is the clear presentation of the Gospel. We take no confidence, we rest no confidence in the heart of the sinner to respond rightly. We are confident in the sufficiency of Scripture and the power of the Spirit of God to work in a heart when he so chooses to do so. You can understand, can't you, why the Apostle Paul said, the Apostle Paul. If anybody knew the Gospel, if anybody was trained to deal with the arguments, and if anyone had the human capacity to lead a man to Christ out of human power of intellect, it was the Apostle Paul. And what did he say? In Romans he said, "Brethren, my prayer to God is for their salvation." He said, "This is beyond my ability to make happen." He said, "I must have the help of the Spirit of God or it is all in vain."

So confident evangelism is not that you can with certainty lead any given person to true faith, it means that you're equipped for the discussion. It means that you understand the spiritual dynamics that are at play and that you are satisfied simply to be a faithful witness of Christ and to trust him for what he does as you share his great love with those who do not know him.

We'll have more next time. For now, please bow your heads with me.

Some of you may not yet know Christ, let me just say to you what has undergirded the simplicity of this message today: the Bible alone is the authority of truth and you are a sinner before a holy God. Jesus Christ is the only Savior and he died and rose again to take away the sins of everyone who would believe in him. He's gracious toward those who turn to him. Oh, my unbelieving friend, he offers his love to you even as we speak. Won't you repent of sin, receive him and escape the horrible wrath of God that is to come?

Our heavenly Father, for the rest of us, we simply pray that you would make us good witnesses. Some of us are eager evangelists, some of us, Father, are reluctant and realize that we have fallen short. Lord, we ask that in the coming year, in the coming day, in the

coming hour, you would us good witnesses for Christ; that our lips would ever be ready to affirm the authority of Scripture and testify to the saving power of our Lord Jesus Christ. To do so without fear of rejection. To do so in confidence that ultimately what we want is simply to please you and to see you work in the lives of those that you bring into our path. So help us to that end and we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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