

Ten Mistakes of Modern Evangelism

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sermonaudio.com

Preached On: Tuesday, July 30, 2013

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When I was conducting my research on the Great and second Great Awakenings, I was shocked by the vast dissimilarity of the preaching in those days compared with the preaching of our day. I read the sermons of Jonathan Edwards and his contemporaries of the 18th century and then I studied the sermons of Asahel Nettleton and his contemporaries of the 19th century and I noticed that God seemed to be pleased to bless the messages that were preached in those centuries with tremendous outpourings of his grace and revival and spiritual awakening and I look around today and all I see is deadness everywhere in the churches and it's tied directly to our preaching of our day.

There's been a sad declension in the great doctrines of the Bible and evangelism in our day. We want to see God move in revival like he's done in former times but the problem is, we aren't willing to preach the same messages that former men of revival preached. Part of this may be due to the fact that we're living in a day of great spiritual declension that knows little about vital Christianity. These are the days of the lukewarm church and, unfortunately, much of the preaching is lukewarm as well. It's neither hot nor cold, it's just room temperature because the pastor doesn't want to turn the temperature up in the room and upset any of his hearers. We invite a lot of people to walk an aisle and repeat a prayer but there is little evidence of true conversion in the churches in our day.

The problem with much of the evangelism is that we present a Jesus to people who aren't interested in him because they feel they just don't need him. Everyone needs Christ but their eyes are blinded and they are dead in sin. Old time preachers knew how to use the Word of God to awaken sinners to their lost estate and ruined condition. After a sinner was awakened and convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit, then the remedy for sin was applied in the person of Jesus Christ. But today we offer the remedy to people who just don't realize they are sick and in need of it. We must realize that a sinner needs to be awakened before he can be converted.

But sadly, much of the preaching done today is shallow and shallow preaching leads to shallow conversions and shallow conversions lead to shallow congregations and shallow congregations leave the devil alone, leave the lost astray and lead the nation into moral bankruptcy so the end result of shallow preaching is a long line of people going straight to hell.

I don't blame the White House for the problems of our hour. I don't blame the courthouse for the problems of our day. Rather, I place the blame on the pulpits of our land that have conformed to the pagan society that they were meant to reach and instead of preaching to the lost a pure Gospel of the Son of God, the pulpits water down the Gospel so it can be more easily swallowed and we have swallowed this diluted Gospel which lacks true spiritual nourishment and we are sunk.

This message is a call for the pulpits of the land to return to the old paths of preaching the great doctrines of the Bible whereby men are awakened to their sins and alarmed about their lost and ruined condition before a just and holy God. My message today is entitled "Ten Mistakes of Modern Evangelism." I will first list them and then elaborate upon each of them as we proceed.

1. Modern evangelism has shrunken God down to our size.
2. We have taken salvation out of the hands of God and placed it in the hands of men.
3. We fail to preach the Gospel in its purity and proper order in preaching the doctrines of ruin and redemption and repentance and regeneration.
4. There is a failure to show man his duty of repentance.
5. Modern evangelism has failed to preach the utter strictness and severity of the law of God.
6. We have failed to proclaim that man first has to be lost before he can be saved; a man needs to be awakened to see his need of Christ before the remedy can be applied.
7. Modern evangelism makes false converts by mistaking a physical act like walking an aisle and repeating a prayer as true conversion.
8. We have failed to warn sinners to flee from hell and describe hell and its terrors.
9. We have failed to preach up the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
10. Modern evangelism has miserably failed in its portrayal of what the Christian life is to a new believer; we paint it as all red roses and honey blossoms and neglect to inform our hearers about the demands of discipleship in following a crucified Savior.

Each of these ten mentioned items is of immense importance to the salvation of a soul. Things have gotten so bad in our country that when I visit churches and I visit countless numbers of them all the time, I seldom hear what I consider to be a full presentation of the Gospel message. In fact, I hear very little preaching. It's mostly teaching being done in our pulpits today; teaching informs, preaching transforms. It is little wonder that so few are being saved today in our land because of our meager attempts to preach the true Gospel message to a generation of hell-bound sinners.

Let's begin with Mistake #1: Modern evangelism has shrunken God down to our size. I was sitting in a large Baptist church and the minister in the pulpit made the following remark. He said, "Friends, I can't wait to get to heaven because when I die and go to heaven I want to walk up to Jesus and grab his hand and shake his hand for all he has done for me." Well, I guess this seminary trained pastor was not familiar with the passage

from the Book of Revelation where the Apostle John encounters a risen Christ and he falls down as dead. No, this foolish minister thinks Jesus is just his pal; he can just casually walk up to the Lord of Glory, grab his hand like the hand of a deacon and shake it because Jesus is just his buddy.

I'm afraid that this is a majority mentality in our pulpits today. Many have taken out their pocket knives and whittled out a god that suits them, a god they feel comfortable with, one they can worship according to their idea of him. They've shrunken God down to their level of reason to where he's on their level, he thinks like they do, he acts like they do. Why, he wouldn't send anybody to hell because he just isn't like that anymore.

Our evangelism today presents a God who is our size or smaller, a far cry from the reality of the living God of the Bible, the Ancient of Days, of whom the prophet Isaiah when he caught a glimpse of him fell down as dead and cried out, "Woe is me!" But the God of modern day evangelism doesn't make anybody cry out, "Woe is me!" because we have shrunken him down to our size so he won't intimidate anybody. But turn in your Bibles and see the Jews before Mount Sinai with God's presence upon it as the mountain quaked and trembled with all smoke and fire like a great furnace, a sight so terrible that even Moses could not endure it. There are very few pulpits all on as smoke today.

So, point #1 is: We have shrunken God down to our size. Preachers of wiser days refer to God as the Almighty or the Great God, now we refer to him on our terms and our level. This is a great mistake. We must preach an exalted view of the Almighty. Isaiah 57:15 declares, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Mistake #2: We have taken salvation out of the hands of God and placed it in the hands of men. A favorite Bible verse of modern day evangelism is Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and let me in, I will come in and sup with him." Today's evangelist presents an impotent Jesus standing at the door of a man's heart unable to even turn the doorknob, waiting helplessly with his hat in his hand like an insurance salesman who's come to your front door. Will you let him in or not? But in reality when the Christ of the Bible saves a man, he enters in with authority and majesty. Man cannot save himself. Salvation comes from God. It is he who regenerates the heart through saving faith that Jesus declared, "No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me draw him."

The Orthodox revival man of the 18th and 19th centuries knew that salvation was of God, that man did not regenerate himself, only God could transform the heart and he could give saving faith or withhold it and still be God. But, today's evangelist has taken salvation out of the hands of God and made it something you can do and it is something you can have any time you want it. I've heard preachers say, "Just open your heart and receive Jesus and he will come in."

Listen friends, a dead man cannot open his heart. Only God can open the heart of man through regeneration. In Acts, we read of Lydia whose heart the Lord opened. God is sovereign in salvation yet we must not fail to call lost sinners to come to Christ. George Whitfield used to beg lost sinners to fly to Christ.

Mistake #3: We fail to preach the Gospel in its purity and proper order. Men like Jonathan Edwards and Asahel Nettleton knew better than most of us today. They knew that the Gospel must be proclaimed in its purity and proper order. God must be first magnified and exalted. The law must be preached to show man that he's a ruined sinner under a curse and unable to help himself or alleviate his misery. That a man must be awakened to his lost condition and perilous position outside of Christ. The only way to be reconciled back to an offended God was through the blood of Christ resulting in a repentant and humble heart.

We fail today to preach up the great doctrines of ruin, redemption, repentance and regeneration. Our Puritan fathers knew better than these men today, for they knew that there was a preparatory work in the sinner's heart by the Holy Spirit who acted like a surgeon bringing conviction and compunction upon the sinner's heart. Conviction of sin and an awareness of it. Compunction, bringing a sinner to a place of humility over his sins and offending a holy Creator. Study the works of Thomas Hooker, John Shepherd and Solomon Stoddard to learn more about the preparatory work in the process of salvation. We, today, have made numerous false converts because of our great ignorance of how the Spirit of God works upon the sinner's heart in the act of salvation.

Mistake #4: Failure to show man his duty of repentance. One of the greatest heresies to plague the church in the last 50-60 years has been the "Only Believe Gospel" invitation which omits the necessity of repentance to come savingly to Christ. Jesus declared, "Unless you repent ye shall all likewise perish." And thousands have entered hell from the neglect of this command.

The failure of modern day evangelism has been the neglect of the need of repentance in coming to Christ. How can one ignore God's Word which clearly states that God now commands all men, everywhere to repent. If a man does not preach faith and repentance, he's just not preached the Gospel, friends.

We have failed as preachers to show man his duty of repentance and in the process we have cheapened the Gospel and diluted it to be more pleasing to man and in the process, we have offended God. Sin is rebellion against God's authority and God will have no rebels in heaven. Unless one repents, they will indeed perish into a burning everlasting hell.

Brother preacher, we must open up the great Gospel duty of repentance and show man his duty to repent toward God and be like the Apostle Paul who declared that a Christian is one who comes to God exercising repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. I fear that the "Only Believe Gospel" has filled our churches with unconverted sinners who are on the church roll but not on the Lamb's roll, the Book of Life. We must tell lost sinners it is their duty to repent now, right now, for you must repent in this world while the Spirit

is striving with you or you will repent in the netherworld of hell but it will be too late then. The main reason you don't hear many sermons today on the need for repentance is that our theology today in evangelism is: God loves everybody, therefore, there is no need to repent; all you have to do is just come to Jesus and walk an aisle.

Listen friends, man is an enemy of God because of his sin nature and he lives in rebellion to all that God stands for and a lost sinner must throw down his shotgun of rebellion and surrender to the King of kings and repent. Jesus said, "For I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." True Gospel repentance involves turning from your sins and turning to God. Jesus never preached a sinning religion but a self-crucifying one.

Mistake #5: Modern evangelism has failed to proclaim the utter strictness and severity of the law of God. Every man will be held up against the holy law of God and all will fail that test. I know I'm a sinner and I need a sin substitute in the person of Jesus Christ. All are the children of Adam and come into the world in a miserable state and ruined condition. The law of God brings a true knowledge and conviction of sin so every mouth will be stopped. The law must be preached in all its strictness and severity and be plainly presented and well understood in order for men to know their own character as sinners and to embrace the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

When the law is effectively preached and understood in its true impact, the sinfulness of mankind revives to see they are wholly dead in trespasses and sin. The preaching of the law is used by the Holy Spirit to arouse a sinner out of his sleepy security by applying the divine law to the conscience. When God descended atop Mount Sinai, it was altogether on a smoke and the threatening sounds of the law bring alarm to the unconverted as he sees his proper standing as a law-breaker and guilty criminal before a holy and just God. The law of God is a slayer of the flesh for all mankind has broken it through sin and all will be held accountable to the strictness and severity of the law of God when God judges the works of man in the future judgment.

Listen friends, every person when he will be held up against the utter strictness and severity of that holy law will fail that test. All have broken that law. God must punish sin. That's the first message of the cross, that God is a God who punishes sin and when you believe that, you can come in with the second message of the cross which is the substitute for sin, Jesus Christ. But today we've got it all backwards. We present the remedy before people know they need it. God will pour out his wrath upon sinful man who has broken his law and the only ones who will escape that punishment are those who stand not in their own merit but in the merits of another, Jesus Christ. Christ bore our sins on that bloody tree. We are law-breakers and deserve damnation but as saved sinners we are under the blood and escape God's wrath for sin.

Men of older days knew better in regard to preaching the law. Both John Wesley and George Whitfield, even though they disagreed on their theology, they both preached the law before grace. Man must see that he is in need of a Savior before the remedy can be applied. But in our day, we present the remedy before a man even knows he's in need of it. We make false converts by the multiplied thousands by our weak preaching today

whereas George Whitfield always said, “A sinner must first be brought to Mount Sinai before he can be brought to Mount Zion.” We must warn sinners about the strictness and severity of God’s holy law because each will stand alongside it at the future judgment.

Mistake #6: Man must become lost before he can be saved. This is the biggest fault of modern day evangelism, we just don’t get men lost. Man must be awakened to the fact that he’s lost before he can be converted. We foolishly tell people to believe John 3:16 and they will be saved and they believe a verse and go to hell. And we get people to believe the fact of Christ’s dying on a cross for us, but I fear many today just believe in the death of Christ rather than believing in the Christ who died.

Our evangelism is deficient and our watered-down presentation of the Gospel is insufficient when it comes to saving men from sin. God must get a man lost before he can save him. Man must be brought to the place where he sees his ruined and hopeless condition apart from God. He has to be brought face-to-face with the reality that he is on the wrong side of God and under the condemnation of God and standing in a perilous position outside of Christ. That without saving faith, he is doomed to an eternal hell. Man must be awakened to his lost condition before he can seek the remedy in the person of Jesus Christ.

People just don’t realize they are lost today and when you offer them Jesus or ask them to believe John 3:16, they just don’t feel there’s any need for him because they are fine without him. But once a man is awakened to the fact that he is lost and ruined without God in the world, that God is against him because he is a sinner and a rebel and an enemy of God and that God can cut him down any time and send him to hell and be a just God because he is a sovereign Lord and he will have no rebels in his Kingdom.

You see, friends, once a man gets lost then he has hope, then he can become a seeker of the Lord. Once a man gets desperate for God and realizes his great need of him in salvation, then that person enters the place of the person spoken of in the Gospel: the hungry, the weary and the thirsty. Once you realize you are lost and hungry for God and weary of your sins and thirsty for Christ, then you become a seeker and an object of grace for the Gospel is for the hungry, the weary and the thirsty.

But today, we cast our pearls before swine and the Bible forbids us to do that. We offer, today, Jesus to people before they see any need of him. Our job as evangelists is to present the sinner with the law of God and inform him of his duty of immediate repentance, that God requires repentance from him. Then and only then, once a person sees his need of Christ, do we tell them about the pearl of great price. We do it all backwards today. I repeat, we must preach the Gospel in its purity and proper order so a man gets lost before he can be saved. A man must be awakened before he can be converted.

Mistake #7: We tell people they are saved because they have walked an aisle or repeated a prayer. Conversion is not something we do but it’s something that God does for us. God changes the heart of stone into a heart of flesh. Conversion is when a lost sinner

experiences change. He is a new creation. God has given him a new disposition of holiness through the Holy Spirit. We are not converted by walking an aisle or reciting the Sinner's Prayer. I can't even find that in my Bible. And our great mistake in today's evangelism is when we see a person do some physical act like that, we then walk up to them, slap them on the back, shake their hand and tell them they're now saved and a Christian.

But God says otherwise. In Titus 3:5 we read, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." True conversion occurs when a person has a principle of spiritual life implanted within by the Holy Ghost. The implantation of this divine principle is called regeneration and it is a supernatural act of God done in a person whereby a sinner is actually turning from the power of sin to God. It's a principle of life which gives one spiritual knowledge of divine things.

True conversion means a very great change has happened in a man. The whole temper of the heart is quite altered and when the saving change takes place, a man has a new appetite. New appetites for spiritual things and things of eternity for the Spirit of God has affected a change within the person giving him a new disposition which is described by the following verse from 2 Corinthians, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things have passed away. Behold, all things are become new."

He is now savingly united to Christ and has entered a vital union with a living Lord. But much preaching today just doesn't cover what true conversions is. You can just listen to some men in the pulpits and though they have a degree from a seminary, they lack the understanding as to how God saves a person by doing a work which he wroughts upon the heart. Our error is that we foolishly tell people they are saved when we have no clue as to their true spiritual condition. Listen brother preacher, only the Holy Spirit can tell a person they are now saved.

D. L. Moody knew better than the rest of us. The main reason Andrew Bonar agreed to work alongside and support Moody in his British campaign was the fact that Moody taught his workers the following: Moody told them, "Listen, when you meet with an inquirer in the Inquiry Room never, ever tell that person they are saved. Only the Holy Spirit can do that." You see friends, Moody knew better.

We base our judgment of their eternal security on a faulty system of them performing a physical act we have asked them to do. We ask them to walk an aisle or repeat a prayer and then we tell them, "Welcome to the family of God. You are now a Christian." When in reality, they may be joining the church because they are lonely or they may be joining the church to make business contacts or they may be joining the church because they just made a mere intellectual assent to an easy believe Gospel and not entering into an experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ whereby they're washed in the blood and born from above.

Let's not tell people that they're saved. Let the Holy Spirit do that. That's his job. The Bible in Romans declares, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear but ye have received a spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Our job is to preach the full counsel of God, call men and women and boys and girls to repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ and then let the Holy Spirit do his work.

Mistake #8: We have failed miserably to warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come and preach up the terrors of hell to this lost generation. How many sermons on hell have you heard this year? How many sermons on hell did you preach this year? God used men like Jonathan Edwards and Asahel Nettleton because they preached on the doctrine of hell and warned sinners not to go there. Jesus spoke of hell and its torments. He said it was a place where the worm dieth not and a place of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Listen friends, weeping speaks of great loss and anguish and gnashing of teeth speaks of great anger and regret.

Old timer preachers used greatly of God always preached on the agonies of hell to awaken sinners and alarm them to their danger. They had to be shaken off their false security of being on a false bottom. But today we just quote John 3:16 and expound the love of God and fail to tell our hearers what the word "perish" means in that much quoted verse. Perish means to perish in an everlasting burning hell, to be an object of God's wrath for all eternity, to be separated from God forever and ever and ever. To perish in perdition. Go through your sermon notes of sermon's you've preached over the last five years and look around for the number of times you've preached on the doctrine of hell. You may be surprised at your lack.

Hell is a place of torment, of great anguish, of terror. Hell is your worst nightmare come true and there is no waking up from it and no exit from its regions. It's a place of unquenchable fire and misery for all eternity. Hell is a very crowded place and someone is being cast there right this instant as you listen to the sound of my voice. If you could open the lid of hell and listen to the cries and shrieks of the damned, it would keep you awake at night. If you went to all the hospitals in your city and took every patient there off his pain medication and just let them scream in agony, it would keep your town up tonight. Imagine the terrors of hell and those there that want to get out and they cannot.

How foolish we are for neglecting to use one of the most effective weapons in evangelism which is preaching on the doctrine of an eternal hell. Men like Edwards and Nettleton knew how to effectively wield the sword in evangelistic preaching and they spoke often on hell and warned their hearers not to go there. They believed if you could not be alarmed, you could not be saved. If you do not believe you're under the sentence of death from God's holy law, then you do not feel your need of pardon and you will not come to Christ that ye might have life. That if a sinner cannot feel the awful conviction of this truth, then they cannot be pardoned nor saved and that God interposes to rescue the guilty sinner by arousing his guilty conscience and showing him the burning hell that awaits all those rebels of God who refuse to repent and believe on his Son.

Listen, hell is a reality and we must warn sinners not to go there. How dare you, brother preacher, be afraid to preach on hell because you're afraid of offending the people that are listening to you. No, you'd rather offend God. Please, warn men not to go there.

Mistake #9: Modern evangelism has failed to preach the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Just because a modern day movement occurred in our lifetime whereby a major seminary omitted the necessity of repentance and salvation and preached an "Only Believe Gospel" of heresy, we have swallowed it hook, line and sinker and we're sunk. You cannot come savingly to Christ and be united to him in saving faith without surrendering to his Lordship at the time of salvation. Our modern theology has made two things of this when it has always just been one. You don't come to Christ now savingly and then later on have a deeper experience of him and then surrender to his Lordship to have a deeper walk. One of the most damning heresies of our day has been the omitting of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Listen friends, he is a King, a Sovereign, and he will have none in his Kingdom who are rebels against him living in sin. You must throw down your shotgun of rebellion and surrender to the Almighty, to come to him savingly. You must bow to Christ and his Lordship now or you will bow to it a future day when he puts his foot on your neck. Jesus sits on a throne at the right hand of the Father and he earned that right by way of a bloody cross. He is a risen Lord. You must submit to him in his present office. I fear many today in our churches have never seen a revealed Christ or heard his voice through saving faith. They've never seen the risen Lord and submitted to his authority in their lives. No, but they sure want a Savior who can write them an insurance policy against hell. They don't want to surrender to all his claims and rights on their lives through his Lordship.

Listen friends, Jesus sits on the right hand of the Father and he reigns in glory as Lord and he earned that right by way of a bloody cross. You must take Christ where he is right now and he's a living Lord. Like I said, the biggest heresy of our day for the last 50 years has been the omission of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The devil has used this as a controversy in the church because the devil wants you to remain unsaved and in your sins and his servant and this error has damned countless of thousands. You must bow to his Lordship now or he will place his foot on your neck and make you bow to him then when his enemies become his footstool.

Lastly, Mistake #10 of modern evangelism is: We have failed miserably in telling people of the demands of discipleship in following a crucified Savior. Rather, we paint salvation as all red roses and honey blossoms where your road will be smooth when you come to Christ. Rather, Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." We offer a Jesus who is a problem solver that once you come to him and accept him, you won't have problems anymore: he will fix your finances, he will heal your body, he will bless you with prosperity and health and happiness all your days. Rather, the Gospel paints a different picture for the Christian. Listen to the words of Christ, "If any man come after me let him take up his cross and follow me for whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

How many preachers did you hear proclaim the doctrine of the cross in the life of the believer? Who is preaching sermons on the crucified life today?

Listen friends, becoming a Christian means life everlasting but it also means a present and daily death. Death to self, mortification of sins and self-denial. Galatians 2:20 declares, "I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live. Yet, not I but Christ liveth in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

Believers in other parts of the world who are persecuted for their faith know full-well all the implications of following Jesus. They know that to become a follower of Jesus means at times to lose it all: to lose your home, it may be your friends, perhaps your family, even possibly to lose your very life. They have counted the cost in following a crucified Christ. They know that suffering and persecution for their testimony in Christ is part and parcel of becoming a Christian. So, they carefully weigh and count the cost before they make that decision to come to Christ and follow him.

We in the West fail to preach up the life of discipleship for a new believer in Christ. The Apostle Paul describes the Christian life as enduring hardship like a soldier or striving as an athlete who strives to gain a victory, as a farmer who labors dutifully and hard to bring forth fruit from the ground. The cross in the life of the believer must be preached once again.

Listen friends, these ten great mistakes of modern evangelism have done more hurt than good. We must faithfully preach the full counsel of God. We must preach the Gospel in its purity and proper order. We must preach the great doctrines of ruin, redemption, repentance and regeneration. We must warn sinners about an everlasting and burning hell that is prepared for all who die in their sins apart from Christ. We must awaken a sinner to his lost condition before we present the remedy, the great pearl of great price. We must preach up the Lordship of Christ and show mankind the utter strictness and severity of God's holy law.

Perhaps the next generation of young preachers will be wiser than this generation and preach alarming messages to awaken the conscience to allow the Holy Spirit to convict of sin. Perhaps the next generation of preachers won't fear man and preach peace, peace, when there is no peace for the wicked. Perhaps this next generation of preachers will be wise enough to tarry until they are endued with power from on high so they will have unction and authority and enter a pulpit with the mantle of authority on them when they preach the great doctrines of the Gospel.

O, we need a revival in our land today but let the revival begin in our pulpits in the land. O, pray that our pulpits will have a Holy Ghost revival. We need a revival of sound preaching. We need men on fire for God and who live for eternity. O God, send us such men for this hour, I pray.