

The Theology of Evangelism

Evangelism 101

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This evening, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Corinthians 15. As you're doing so, over the course of the last 20 or so minutes, whether you realize it or not, we collectively have made some pretty bold claims. We've stated emphatically that it is sweet to our soul in life to trust in Jesus, that he gets us through whatever has gone behind us and whatever may lie before us. Then on the other end, we've just heard the declaration that there is coming a day where those who are deceased in Christ and those who are alive in Christ will meet the Lord together in the air. Those are some pretty bold claims. In 1 Corinthians 15, beginning in verse 12, we have the biblical explanation of why and how we can make those claims. It says in verse 12,

12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: 14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. 15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. 16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

That statement regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the fact by which we base the entirety of our faith and tonight as we continue on Sunday evenings studying a subject matter known as evangelism, the proclamation of the gospel, the preaching forth, the telling of the good news of Jesus Christ, you understand that our telling people to be saved is a vain procedure if Christ be not raised from the dead. So tonight, we're going to discuss the subject matter of evangelism as it relates to theology.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, tonight as we take that concept which is so practical, simply telling a lost and dying world that they can be saved, they can be forgiven, there can be everlasting life through Christ Jesus, tonight, Lord, as we study that very simple concept, may we grasp from your word that it is not rooted in our hopes and desires, it is rooted

in the fact and the truth of your word. So Lord, tonight help us to understand that when we share your message of hope with the world, that it is rooted in everything that your word claims that we are to believe. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Tonight, we're going to study the subject matter of evangelism or the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ as it applies to theology. Now when you hear the term theology and evangelism, that may not sound like compatible terminology. After all, we often think of theology as the studying of the deep truths of God, and we think of evangelism as actually going out and speaking the truths of God. And so tonight, I thought I would begin by addressing this subject matter from a very unique perspective.

I know that currently as we're meeting tonight, it is not what we call the Christmas season but I'm going to read for you the lyrics of one of the best known Christmas carols of all time. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Now you hear that title and you think of the music of the Christmas season, what you may not know is that "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" is known as one of the great Christmas carols but it is also known as probably the most theologically rich hymn that was ever written. And so I want you to hear these words not in the tune of the Christmas song but think in terms of the richness of theology and biblical truth. Listen to the lyrics. It says,

"Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful, all ye nations, rise;
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim
Christ is born in Bethlehem!

Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!
Christ by highest heav'n adored,
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of a Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!
Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n with healing in His wings.

Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.

Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!"

One of the reasons that I shared those lyrics with you is not just because it happens to be my favorite of the Christmas carols but because when we study theology, when we look at the concepts of humanity's sinful nature, soteriology or the doctrine of salvation, or even eschatology, the study of end times, all of those concepts are rooted in a song that we never dreamed that we'd find them. We do not think of our most theologically rich songs as simply being Christmas carols that we hear during that season, and so tonight when we talk about evangelism, when we talk about sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, we typically don't think of it in terms of theology but yet you're going to discover tonight that a proper evangelism comes out of a biblical theology, and a bad theology can produce a very lackluster evangelism.

Tonight, I want to begin by describing what I call as a holy tension. Too much theology can lead to no evangelism, and too much evangelism can lead to no message. Allow me to explore that. We can become so heavenly-minded that we're no earthly good. We spend so much time getting in the weeds of what we believe and our theology that we never share with anybody what we actually believe and how it can change their life, and at the same time we can get so passionate about seeing people's lives changed, we forget the message that we're supposed to communicate.

One of the great thinkers of the past century, C. S. Lewis, a believer late in life, stated in his classic work "Mere Christianity," "They all say the ordinary reader does not want theology, just give him plain practical religion. I have rejected their advice. I do not think the ordinary reader is such a fool." In other words, our theology, that which we believe and our evangelism, that which we preach and we speak, must be complementary. They must co-exist. They cannot be separated. One out of balance will cause the other one naturally to become out of balance as well, and a healthy evangelism is a byproduct of a solid theology.

So tonight, I just want to walk through some of the central doctrines, the basics of the faith, not only where they are rooted in "scripture" but how they impact our ability, our desire, our willingness and our effectiveness to share the gospel. I'm going to walk through several of these that are very simplistic in name and then we're going to end with those that seem somewhat complicated.

Let's begin with the doctrine of scripture. It's difficult to be a promoter of the goodness and the grace of God if you do not believe the Bible contains the goodness and the grace of God. When we talk about the doctrine of scripture, we state that, number 1, that it is complete. In fact, the Bible states of itself all scripture is inspired by God. Let me remind

each and every one of us, the word "all" means "all." It doesn't mean the ones that are culturally relevant, it doesn't mean the ones that are politically correct, it doesn't mean the ones we like versus the ones that we do not like. And so a proper evangelism is necessitated to be rooted in a proper view of scripture, that from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, that it is inspired, it is preserved of God, and it contains the commandments of God both revealing that which we fall short on, that which is to convict us, and that which we are to celebrate and to share.

Quite naturally when we discuss theology, we must talk about what that word "proper" means. The term "theology" technically means "the study of God," and if we're going to express to a lost and dying world that they can have a vibrant, real relationship with the God of the universe, then we must have a proper understanding of who the Lord is. Now it goes without saying that according to scripture, that's why we began with the doctrine of scripture, that God is Creator. The very first verse, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Hebrews 1:3 it says all that we know of the creative order is kept in place by the word of God. And in John 1 it says that nothing was created apart from Jesus Christ himself.

If we're going to share the good news of Jesus to a lost and dying world, it begins with stating the fact that there is a God who created them, who established them, who sustains them, but look at this next adjective: he is holy. He is without sin. He is without blemish. And you and I, as we're going to see in just a moment, are much the contrary but he is a God of love. That famous verse, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." You see, in our common sense, one who created us and we rebelled against him, it would make common sense for him to eradicate us, remove us, and be done with us, but it is his love for us that desires to redeem us, to forgive us, and to save us. You see, without a proper theology, we do not have a proper evangelism. If we do not see God for who he is as revealed in the scriptures, then we cannot share who he is to a lost and dying world.

Speaking of a lost and dying world, how about the doctrine of what we know as salvation. If you want the technical term, we call it soteriology, the doctrine of how one is forgiven, how one is saved, how one is placed in a right relationship with the Lord. Now I'm going to ask a very rhetorical question. The question is this: what is the gospel? Now you would think that the Vacation Bible School answer, you would think that that is on the level of maybe first to second grade Sunday School, however in our world today if you were to ask a group of people what is the gospel, you would get a plethora of different answers. And allow me to share with you a very simple mathematical formula. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not too much and it's not too little. Allow me to explain. The gospel is not Jesus plus something and it is not Jesus minus something. You see, when we speak about the gospel, there are some who have an erroneous theology that believe that the gospel is Jesus' substitutionary death plus something that humanity must somehow fulfill on their end. On the other side, there are those who would say, well, it's not about a substitutionary death, it's about this aspect, this ethic, this morality, whatever it may be. So when it comes to a doctrine of salvation, we ask the question what is the gospel, you

might be surprised how many people add to what the Bible says, and how many subtract from what it says.

So in very simplistic explanation, what is the biblical theology of salvation as revealed in scripture through the character of God? 1. It is the person of Jesus Christ. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ. He is the beginning, the middle, the end, and all parts contained therein. Salvation is not found in institutions. Salvation is not found in human endeavors. Salvation is in the person of Jesus Christ.

2. This is the good news for a lost and dying world. You do understand that the word "gospel" means "good news." In fact, I love how what we know as the gospel of Mark begins, it says the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is good news. We know the end of the story, that because of his life, his death, and his resurrection, we can be forgiven, we can be saved. According to Ephesians 2, not based on our works or deeds but on the totality of the person of Jesus Christ.

So it is the person of Jesus, it is good news, and it's that which is revealed both in the Old and the New Testament. What we know as the doctrine of salvation is not simply a New Testament concept. In fact, all the way back in Genesis 3 when humanity endeavored to think that we knew better than God, we stepped out on our own, we decided to consume of that forbidden fruit, in the midst of revealing the consequences of our sin, there in verse 15 of Genesis 3 the Lord made this statement that one day the seed of the woman would crush the seed of the serpent. We call it the protoevangelium or the very first gospel. The message of the good news that a Messiah would come for the redemption of our sin does not begin in Matthew 1. It actually begins all the way back in the book of Genesis and what we know as the Old Testament is a prophetic testimony of the Lord bringing salvation through the person of Jesus Christ and offering the redemption of his blood for humanity.

In summary, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 probably summarizes it best, that Jesus Christ died according to the scriptures, he was raised from the dead according to the scriptures, and that over 500 have witnessed and testify of seeing him in his resurrected state. That's why in chapter 15, it says later that if Christ be not risen from the dead, our faith is in vain. If we were to just pause for this moment, you understand that we have barely touched the throes of a theological understanding but everything we've talked about is based on a scripture account, everything we've talked about is based on who the Lord is in his character and what he desires of his creation, and it is rooted in the opportunity for salvation through Jesus Christ alone. Do you see how that any misstep theologically can lead us to a misrepresentation of what the gospel truly and really is?

So what is this good news of what the Bible calls the kingdom of God, this relationship that we can have, this salvation through Jesus Christ? 1. It's the news of victory. The news of victory. No, that does not mean that we "reign on the earth." It does not mean that we, the body of Christ, become those who are in control of the endeavors on earth. It is the news of victory, victory over sin. You see, you and I are incapable of gaining victory over sin. There's all kinds of programs, there's all kinds of things that we can do

to assist us with our ill behavior but victory cannot take place apart from the forgiveness of our sins.

It is the forgiveness of our sins that leads to the victory in this life and ultimately reconciliation. You see, when we use that term "reconciliation," it means to take two parties that are at great odds with each other and allow them to co-exist once again. Is that not what humanity and the Lord have been throughout time? There was a time in the garden where we co-existed and walked in the cool of the day, but then we sinned, we violated his commandments, we trespassed, iniquity was found in us, but through the resurrection of Jesus Christ we can be reconciled. A holy God and an unholy creation can again be in a right relationship with him.

Now those are the simple terms. We're about to get into some of the, kind of the difficult words here. I want to begin with the term "substitutionary atonement." I know that's one of those big words but what it simply means is this, that when Jesus Christ offered the sacrifice of his blood on Mount Calvary, he took the punishment that was rightfully due for you and myself. In fact, in 1 John 2 and in chapter 4, there's this great word, by the way, it's also used in Romans 3, it's my favorite word in the Bible outside of "but," and those of you that know me well know why I love that word in the Bible. But the word is "propitiation." It says that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins meaning the one who bears the punishment for, that when Jesus Christ went to the cross on behalf of your sins and mine, he bore the punishment that was rightfully due all of us. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 5, it says he who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might become a new creation with him.

What does this call for? Substitutionary atonement calls for the fact, the necessity of repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 says that God desires for all to come to repentance. Not only do we acknowledge our own inherent sin condition but our desire to realize that it was our sinful state that caused him to go to the cross on behalf of us, we repent of that sin. It says he desires all to repentance.

Next, I want to deal with a word that's become very rare not just in our culture but "in our circles of faith and in our churches." The word is "hell." It's not used as a simple colloquialism or statement phrase, it is actually, according to your Bible, it is a place. It is a place that Jesus spoke of twice as much as he did heaven. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus makes this statement regarding hell, that it was a place formed and created for the devil and his angels. Established for their initial rebellion, which is important. That means that hell as described in the Bible was not designed for humanity, it's not desired for humanity, and here's the better news: nobody ever has to go. Because of his substitutionary atonement, because he took the punishment for our sins, we do not have to ever dwell in a place that the Bible describes as hell. I know it's not vogue to talk about hell nowadays but Jesus talked about it twice as much as he did heaven so we ought to talk about it as well.

When we talk about substitutionary atonement, it does not mean that we as believers go from being bad to good but from being dead to alive. According to Ephesians 2, you and

I are dead in our sins and our trespasses. We are walking dead men. Do you find it ironic that we live in a world and culture today that wants to sensualize what we call zombies, walking dead people? And yet every one of us is truly biblically a zombie. That's who we are. It's just a matter of time before our outside appears as they do in those movies, in those shows. But understand that when Jesus Christ bore the punishment for our sins and we repent and believe on him, it doesn't now make us good people, it now takes us from being dead in our sins to being alive in Christ Jesus.

Speaking of some big words, how about the word known as "anthropology"? Anthropology is a study of humanity, its origins and such. When it comes to a theological anthropology, we need to discuss our sin nature. 1 Corinthians 15, among many other places, describes the fact that in Adam, in that first human expression, we all are in sin and we all die. Now this is about to be as politically incorrect as you can be but I'm going to go there because it's biblical. We are not born righteous. We are not born good. We are not born holy. We are not born anything but dead in our sins and our trespasses. I've made this statement before and I'm going to continue to say it until you host my funeral. If you don't believe me, volunteer in the nursery. Why? Because the last time I checked, the overwhelming majority of babies' very first word is, "No!" Because we have a desire even when we cannot articulate with complete sentences, we have a desire to please our flesh, gain what we want to gain, and not do what we do not want to do. Anthropologically, we, as humanity, possess a sin nature that necessitates the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ.

This leads us to an understanding of what we formally call hamartiology. This is the doctrine of sin. You know, there's a lot of words that the Bible uses. One of the most famous expressions is found in Romans 3:23, it says, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Kind of the illustration there is actually an athletic illustration. A sport that was obviously very popular 2,000 years ago, still to some degree today but not near what it was back then, what we know as the sport of archery. The idea of falling short was to miss the mark, not to hit the bull's eye. I like to use the basketball phrase for all have sinned and air-balled the glory of God. You know, you think about an air-ball in basketball, it doesn't matter if you miss by one inch or if you miss by 100 feet, you still did not hit the rim. And when it comes to a biblical understanding of sin, please hear me clearly, we don't have the biblical right to say, "Well, they're not as sinful as that person." Oh no, the consequences may be more grave but doctrinally speaking we've all sinned, we've all trespassed, we've all, as Romans 3 says, we've all missed the mark. Some of you have missed it just barely. Some of you have missed it by a whole lot and that leads us sometimes to a pretty poor theology. We believe that if we haven't missed it by much, then there's no need for Jesus. If we miss it by a whole lot, well, then there's no hope in Jesus. But when you come to a proper theology that whether you've missed it by one inch or missed it by one mile, we've all fallen short, then we see the necessity for that which he has accomplished on our behalf.

The next theological term is one that you may or may not be familiar with, it's called "eschatology." This is the formal term for what we know as the Second Coming, the fact that Jesus Christ, he came, he lived, he died, he rose from the grave, but as it says in Acts

1, when he ascended on high there is coming a day where he will return again. When we speak of the Second Coming, I know there's a lot of different opinions, there's a lot of different ideas, but I want to simplify it tonight in two very simple concepts dealing with the Second Coming or a theology of it. Number 1 is this: our desire. Last time I checked, the overwhelming majority, if not everybody I've ever spoken to, when you ask them to pick between the two, they want to go to heaven and not hell. That is the desire of humanity so much so that humanity seems to default into this position that everybody "goes to heaven." We'll deal with that in just a moment. The second very simplistic aspect of eschatology is reality. There is a heaven. There is a hell. There is a day where Jesus Christ is physically returning and not everybody will end up in that place the Bible calls heaven.

We spoke earlier that hell is mentioned twice as much as what we know as heaven, that hell is twice as much. There is, as I've stated tonight, there is no room for what we call universalism. You say, "What is universalism?" What the word means, the universe, the totality. There is the idea by some that no matter what has occurred, what has happened, who you are, or who you're not, that eventually because God is so good and graceful we all end up in heaven. God is good and graceful but he is also just and he has given of himself for the salvation of our souls and his just-ness necessitates that those who reject must bear the consequences and those who believe get the privilege and the benefits therein. In 2 Thessalonians 1:9, it speaks about dying without Christ as an everlasting destruction. Much like John 3:16 talks about everlasting life, it speaks of everlasting destruction.

So what must be rejected? And this is really in our culture where the rubber hits the road. We love to talk about soteriology, we love to talk about the doctrine of sin, but at the end of the day when we're dealing with somebody who either is about to or who has breathed their last breath, we are very prolific at making excuses to "get them into heaven." Allow me to deal tonight with three of the most common excuses that we deal with to "put people in heaven that according to scripture are not."

Number is the doctrine of pluralism. Pluralism, since the word "plural" meaning "multiple," means that there are actually multiple ways that you can get to heaven. You can get to heaven through Jesus. You can get to heaven through your good works. You can get to heaven through another religions figure. You can get to heaven through whatever you deem as your path. Some of you have heard this story but years ago, I had a neighbor in another state who we got in a gospel conversation and when asking her what she believed would "get her to heaven one day," she said, "I was a Boy Scout leader for over 20 years. If that doesn't get you into heaven, nothing will." That's a pluralistic mentality. She created in her own mind a path to heaven that if you do a certain deed for a certain amount of time, you gain access. Amazing how often we take somebody's life postmortem and we fabricate a path to heaven of their life that is not biblically centered, much less on Christ Jesus.

The other idea that needs to be eliminated from our vocabulary is the idea of annihilationalism. I know that's one of those big, hug, Scrabble words but it means that

eternal punishment or the concept of a biblical hell is to be rejected, that if one believes in Jesus Christ they get the privilege of going to heaven, but if they reject Jesus there is no hell, they simply cease to exist. To claim that is to deny all of the theological precepts that we've discussed up until this point.

And last but not least, we are to reject inclusivism which basically means that all faiths and all paths are really just different lanes on the same highway. Tonight I want to illustrate the non-biblicalness of that by sharing a story of the very first church that Tracy and I had the privilege of pastoring. It was a church in Gatesville, TX. It was, to use our vernacular, the middle of nowhere. It was a place that was small in stature but a fun place to serve, and there just happened to be a family that lived within walking distance of the church. You know, when you live within walking distance of a church such as that, you get a lot of visits from the pastor because there's time of inclement weather, there's time of timeframes, whatever it may be, that you just kind of stop in, "Hey, you mind if I take a breath?" Whatever it may be. It just so happened that this family had a dog, if you allow me to use the term, that didn't like me. It was a chihuahua and this chihuahua, its name was Snoopy, and Snoopy hated me, hated everything about me. In fact, every time I would drive up, he would literally go and he would sleep or rest inside the wheel well of my car. That's how tiny this little guy was. Well, after a couple of years, you know, that's humorous and I would banter but somebody else moved next door to this family. They had 175 pound Rottweiler. Snoopy thought he was a Rottweiler and he would go up to that fence and he would bark and he would yelp and he would give that Rottweiler everything he had and that Rottweiler would just look at him like, "Seriously?"

Why do I share that story? Because when you equate Jesus to every other religious leader and every other promoter of faith, that is the difference between a chihuahua and a Rottweiler. When Jesus Christ, who overcame the grave, and you equate him to somebody who just had a series of teachings? When you equate Jesus Christ, who the stone was rolled away, to someone who's life has a plethora of misgivings and sins yet claims to be the answer, that is the same thing as that little bitty chihuahua looking up at that big old Rottweiler and saying, "There is no difference between you and I."

We must reject the idea that all roads lead to heaven. We must reject the idea that if you don't believe it's really not that bad, you don't go to hell. But we must also must reject that just because somebody claims to be a religious leader, just because somebody claims to have a series of "spiritual writings," it does not mean that they are equal to the one who created us, sustained us, and rose from the grave on our behalf.

Two final theological terms for you. They're big words but with very simplistic application: ontological and epistemological. Here's what ontological means: what he did. Epistemological means: what we need to know. What did he do? Jesus Christ not only formed and fashioned you but he loved you enough to be willing to be born, to reject all forms of temptation, to die a cruel death on the cross, and to raise from the grave. What do we need to know? It's real simple, Acts 6:31, "Whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved." It sounds so simple that he gave of himself and we simply believe

in response, but that simplicity hopefully you saw tonight is rooted in a plethora of rich and deep theological biblical truths.

So when we share the gospel, when we tell somebody you must be saved, you must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that is not a simple religious trite expression, that is based on the doctrine of scripture, that is based on the doctrine of God proper, that is based on the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, that is based on the doctrine of sin, that is based on the doctrine of all of these concepts. The simplicity is because Jesus Christ, if you'll remember, brought the little children unto him and said, "Unless you are as one of these, you cannot enter." So tonight, evangelism, the sharing of the gospel, is a very simple deed and a very simple message but it is rooted in a very deep theology.