

EVANGELISM AS A PROCESS—PART I

Session #7

Note to Leader: This outline contains the major points to be covered in this session. Use the outline to formulate a lecture, or design a discussion, or some other type of interactive lesson.

GOAL: For a disciple to understand the necessity of seeing evangelism as a process

I. Introduction: Past tendencies in evangelism

- A. Much evangelism has been event-oriented.
 - 1. This evangelism is revival-based with emotional pressure for a decision.
 - 2. This method is not as effective now as it once was because there is a greater ideological distance between Christians and non-Christians
- B. Most evangelism training is decision-oriented
 - 1. There is aggressive sharing of the gospel with pressure to make a decision now, with no ongoing contact.
 - 2. We call it “raiding party mentality” - Send out a group of evangelists, throw the Gospel at a few people, bag a few and scurry back to the safe haven of the church.
 - 3. But there is a problem: What if the people are not ready to respond to the Gospel? The average believer has heard the gospel seven times before responding.

II. Factors that affect how we do evangelism

- A. There have been changes in the values and presuppositions in Western culture.
 - 1. Examples
 - a. People no longer assume that there is a God or that the Christian view of God is correct.
 - b. Christian values are attacked rather than reinforced by society (e.g. taking “under God” out of the pledge of allegiance).
 - c. The present younger generation is looking for authenticity and genuineness in people.
 - 2. Because of these changes, our culture does not prepare the way for our evangelism as it once did. Now, people are generally farther away from Christ than in the past and more skeptical about Christianity.

- B. We sometimes have misperceptions (wrong thinking) about non-believers.
 - 1. Often Christians are afraid to get too close to non-believers for fear of catching their “diseases” (immorality, greed, drugs, materialism, etc.).
 - a. We already have them (“diseases”), but we also have a remedy.
 - b. There is some danger. The question we need to answer is, “Who is influencing whom?” If non-Christians are influencing us more than we are influencing them, then we need to increase our Christian fellowship and decrease the time we are spending with non-Christians.
 - 2. Christians have a tendency to see non-believers as the enemy.
 - a. Non-believers are not the enemy. The spiritual forces of darkness are (Ephesians 6:12). Non-believers are blinded by Satan but are not the enemy (II Corinthians 4:3-4).
 - b. It is generally wise to stay away from truly evil people, but they are the exception and not the rule.
 - 3. Christians sometimes fear that non-believers will reject them. Scripture says to fear God, not man (Proverbs 29:25).
 - 4. The instruction and example of Jesus
 - a. Jesus was willing to involve Himself in people's lives, whether rich or poor, publican or sinner (Mark 2:15-17; Luke 7:34; John 3:1-8).
 - b. Jesus sent us to do as He did (John 20:21).
 - c. He promises to protect us as we obey Him (John 17:15-17).
- C. Sometimes we build barriers, rather than bridges, between ourselves and non-believers.
 - 1. We tend to associate with non-believers only when we are witnessing to them which sends the message that they only have worth if they give a positive response to our message.
 - 2. We sometimes feel it is wrong to do things that bring us into social contact with non-believers, thus limiting our opportunities to share the Gospel.
 - 3. We appear self-righteous if we refuse to socialize with non-believers while, in reality, we struggle with the same types of problems they have.

III. We need to change our approach to evangelism.

- A. We need to change the way we relate to non-believers.
 - 1. We must spend more time preparing the way for the Gospel by building relationships with non-believers, showing them that we are real and our faith is real.
 - 2. We must build relationships with non-believers, whether or not they are interested in the Gospel (Matthew 22:39).

3. Suggestions:
 - a. Treat everyone with respect and kindness.
 - b. Be honest and transparent about struggles.
 - c. Talk about your relationship with Christ in a natural manner when it is appropriate. (E.g. sharing an answer to prayer)
 - d. Put yourself in social situations with non-believers (e.g. a fitness club, in sports, PTA, school functions, a computer class, etc.)
 4. Jesus created interest in spiritual ideas by creating “positive confusion.”
 - a. “Positive confusion” is created when a Christian makes an intriguing statement or question that generates curiosity, opening a door for further conversation about spiritual issues.
 - b. Example: Jesus, in His discussion with Nicodemus, created an opportunity to share the Gospel by saying that one had to be “born again” in order to enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3).
 - c. Example: Jesus again created an opportunity to share the gospel by saying to the woman at the well, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10).
- B. We need to understand that salvation is a process.
1. A person comes to Christ over time.
 - a. It is a mistake for Christians to give up on a relationship with a non-believer just because he does not show interest in spiritual things at first.
 - b. There is a point at which a person makes a decision for Christ and becomes a Christian, but there are many important steps that lead up to that decision.
 - c. Having a relationship with a genuine Christian may be an important part of that process.
 2. God often uses crises to speed up the salvation process.
 - a. Every person has a belief system. A crisis often shows that the belief system is inadequate, thus creating a crisis of faith.
 - b. When a person can no longer rely on his belief system, he will often become open to new ways of thinking. If he is in a relationship with a Christian, the crisis may offer the opportunity to introduce the person to Christ.

Summary: To effectively reach our culture for Christ we must understand evangelism as a process. In the next session we will develop this idea further.