

Christ in Evangelism

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We're looking at Christ in all, in the city, in culture, in work, and today in *evangelism*. In an age where we're told to find "what's true for you," is evangelism even *plausible*? If it is, "What should gospel persuasion look like?" And what's the real power behind it? Evangelism. Is it plausible? Can it be persuasive? Where's its power?

Is Evangelism Plausible?

We had just moved to America's oldest seaport, Gloucester, Massachusetts when I heard a rap on the door. A couple people introduced themselves with big smiles and asked if I believed in God and if I wanted to talk. So I invited them in for a chat. As we talked, I felt uneasy. Beneath the veneer of kindness, there was a pressure to cave into their beliefs, say I do, and read their scary Watchtower magazine. Many people feel the same way about Christians who evangelize. Evangelism is often seen as a way for religious people to dominate others with their doctrinal beliefs, coercive, narrow. Perhaps you can identify? You see the good in Christianity but does it really have to be pushed on others? Say you're talking to someone with a struggle or issue and to help you recommend they see the problem in different light, or point a book, wouldn't you be challenging their beliefs? If your friend is particularly bad off (anxiety, addiction, depression). You might actually insist they heed your advice, get help, intervention. What are you doing? You're trying to convert them to your way of thinking. You're evangelizing. The question is *why*, in this instance would you try to be so persuasive? Because you care, because you love this person and want them to experience healing and freedom. Everyone evangelizes. We all, at different times and places, try to convert people to our way of thinking. Is it plausible? Absolutely. Is it believable, that's another matter. Just because Jesus & St. Paul were motivated by love, does that mean we should believe them? Wouldn't Jews say they're compelled by love? For Christian evangelism to be fully plausible, you have to consider not just why but *what*. What is Christianity trying to convert you to? Paul says it's "[that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ](#)" (4:3). Now what's *the mystery of Christ*? Earlier in chapter one he explains the mystery as "[Christ in you, the hope of glory.](#)" So why Christ in you hope of glory worth converting to? Because deep down we all have a hope of glory (means weighty). We all want weight to our lives, our person. but when that glory is about us, it's self-centered. And the alternative is *you in you*, the epitome of selfishness. One philosopher called it "*finding satisfaction in the lovely Idea of ourselves.*" Hell bent on self-glory. And we can't truly work our way out of that. We'll just try to pull other glories. In an autobiographical short story Ernest Hemingway describes a soldier who has been injured and sent to a military hospital. There he meets other soldiers who have been injured in combat and awarded various medals. They ask why he got his medal, and it becomes apparent that *they had done very different things* to get their medals. His was an accident. Theirs was valor. As a result, he is treated differently and after cocktails at night he would "*imagine himself having done all the things they had done to get their medals.*" Do you ever imagine yourself having done things that people have done, in parenting, in education, in career, in social good, in character? Looking at someone's Facebook feed? Now why is this wrong. These are good things but they're not our things. When we imagine ourselves in someone's place, we cross the line from valor to vanity. The bend glory inwards. You can't

assign yourself weight. You need someone from the outside to do that. This is exactly what Paul is saying the glory of Christ liberates us from. We don't have to grab lesser glories or find weight in *a lovely new idea of Self* **because there's a glory outside of us that has come to live in us.** Christ, the hope of Glory. And he has done the greatest thing by sacrificing himself to give us his glorious life. His cross for our resurrection. His injury for our reward. No imagining. Pure grace. *You don't have to do what everyone else has done.* Jesus pins his medals to your chest. He grounds you in his glory (3:11). Christ in you, not you in you, *is* the hope of glory. Jesus Christ gives you more weight as his follower than anything else. This is the *what* of evangelism. But it is very hard to tell someone about the glory, beauty and freedom of the light of day when you live in the darkened cell of self glory. **You won't tell others about the liberating truth of the gospel when you're imprisoned by the heresy of self-fulfillment.** To express that hope, you have to live in your beliefs, you have to take in the weight of Christ not skirt around it. When we don't, Christ is on a far up shelf, undesired and small, but when we come to realize just how selfish we can be, and we look upon the crucified Christ, he becomes large and full of glory, right front of us.

Nature of Persuasion

We've thought about the why and what of evangelism (love + hope of glory), now let's turn to the *how*. This is where a lot of well meaning people get off. Many Christians have been trained in evangelistic *technique*, learning a script like you would a sales job. It's how I felt when the JW's got into their shtick. While God can use technique, there aren't examples of it in the Bible. Our modern preoccupation with technique Guinness says: "*misses the independence of the biblical way of thinking and the brilliance and depth of the way of Jesus.*" I want to show you the biblical way, the brilliance and depth of Jesus in his disciple, the Apostle Paul. He says: "[Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person](#)" (5-6). This isn't technique it's meaningful, dignifying conversation. Three things stand out: *Walk in wisdom. Always be gracious. Answer each person.* What does gracious speech look like? It is seasoned as with salt. In other words, it has variety and life. It is interesting and engaging. No pat answers or rehearsed presentations. You are a person who is deeply interested in others—their lives, jobs, hobbies, and beliefs. So you [ask questions](#). Listen to Story. Francis Schaeffer was asked how he would spend an hour with someone who wasn't a Christian. He replied, I would listen for 55 minutes and then in the last 5 I would have something to say. Today we flip it; we want to talk 55 minutes and then call for a response. Or we don't say anything at all. Just listen...leave people in the dark, locked up without the hope of glory. Always be gracious but don't stop there. **Walk in wisdom** toward outsiders. One way to walk wisely towards those outside the faith is to identify with them. [Close the distance between us and them.](#) *While they may be on the outside of Christ, those of us on the inside need Christ just as much.* Religious people tend to project the opposite. One way to do this is to **share the gospel with yourself out loud.** Instead trying to convert people to Christ's way of thinking first, you might show them *why you're converted to Christ's thinking.* I was chatting with a skeptic who was struggling with the big questions of life. "Jonathan, do you ever doubt?" I replied, "Well, it depends on what you mean by doubt. I don't doubt the basic claims of Christ, but I do struggle with *unbelief.*" He looked at me weird. I explained, "For example, earlier today I posted something on Twitter that I thought was pretty insightful. I checked an hour later

and no one had re-tweeted it. I checked again, and still, no comment. Then again, no star, no tweet, nothing. My heart sank. Why? Because I believed the approval of the anonymous Twittersphere is more valuable than the approval of God in Christ. *"I disbelieved that Jesus is better than Twitter.* Instead of imagining myself better, I showed myself as equal. In equal need of God's love. How can you share the gospel with yourself out loud? *Walk in wisdom. Always be gracious.* Finally seek to **answer each person.** Don't drop canned answers. Think out the faith in meaningful dialog. **Adapt the gospel to the person in front of you.** The Bible does this constantly. It's not knowledge in a vacuum; it's connected to real people and needs. In it, there are scores of gospel metaphors and scores of needs. The gospel addresses every single one of them. Jesus used desire for harvest with farmers (Luke 13), law with lawyers (Luke 11:37-54), eternal treasure with the wealthy (Lk 13), living water to the thirsty (John 4:1 - 34). In this message, we've matched up the longing for weight with the hope of glory, the desire for approval with the love of a Heavenly Father. **Every single person is longing for something that Christ alone can fully meet.** We need to answer *each* person. Let me share another story to bring all this together. **Hubners:** One afternoon I met an engaged couple at Easy Tiger. One was an atheist; the other a spiritual seeker. They wanted me to talk to me about getting married. *Always be gracious:* I congratulated them and asked how the preparations were coming along. I found out they were doing a stop-motion invitation to the wedding, which I told them was pretty cool. Asked more about them and learned he was in speed metal band. Eventually I said I know you want to talk about getting married, but before we do can I ask where you are spiritually? Because your faith will have a big impact on your relationship, how you raise your kids. She responded by saying she's really loving what she's learning about Jesus but still has questions. We discussed some of them. Then I asked her fiancé where he was with Jesus. He said that he thought Jesus was interesting but wanted to keep his options open. I asked what that meant. He said you know being open to truth in other places. *Walk in wisdom:* I said you've heard enough of my sermons to know I quote from literature, philosophy, and other religions, and that's because I believe there is truth in other places. But you also know that I believe what Jesus said about himself, that he is the unique revelation of God to us. So on the one hand we should be open to truth from many places but on the other hand we have to decide if we're going to accept or reject Jesus' unique claim. He said he wanted to keep thinking about it. I told him I thought it was very important to do. *Answering each person:* Then asked, "As far as I know there are no other women in the picture? They chuckled. So just Ashley? So you're saying you narrowed it down to one? Yes. Well, then, I'd submit that if you're willing to narrow marriage down to one, that God is an even weightier and more important thing to narrow down to one. To make a commitment to. I encouraged him to consider Christ, who wants to wed us with adopting love, and put the hope of glory in us. If you haven't taken Jesus seriously, I hope you will. I hope you see he is your hope of glory.

Power Behind Evangelism

We've looked at the *plausibility of evangelism*; the *process of evangelism*, and very briefly the *power of evangelism*. You can do all of this and nothing happen. You have to come to place where you're content with that, not in a disinterested way but in a way that recognizes *you have no power over people*. You see, biblical evangelism isn't coercive. It recognizes all the the power is with God so we don't have to resort to technique. But it also

recognizes people have a huge need, which is why Paul puts such a huge emphasis on prayer: *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word*" (2-3). Essentially, he's saying the door is closed until God opens it. So pray, continually. Do you have a prayer list? Do you know your neighbor's names? Pray for them? Friends, co-workers. If not, it shows a real lack of love and a misunderstanding where the power comes from. Its not from you. Praying for others is the most loving thing you can do. Why? Because you're taking their needs of others to the most powerful person in the world. Prayer is the power behind evangelism. Lining up with God to ask him to open the door of the heart so the gospel can go through. That's not technique; its love! There will be questions we cannot answer and people we struggle to answer. But that's okay. We cannot impart spiritual certainty. Only the Spirit, who is the fountain of spiritual, gives complete certainty about Jesus. We traffic in spiritual truth not scientific truth, relying on the power of God not the power of reason. So pray. In Hemingway's short story, he meets an injured Major who has lost his wife. The major asks him what he will do after the war is over. He responds by saying he will go to the States and find a wife. The major responds adamantly, "You're a fool! A man must not marry. *He should find things he cannot lose.*" Have you found the thing you cannot lose? Christ in you, the hope of glory? If you have share it. If you haven't considerate it.