

The Pastor's Quarry

First Baptist Church of Granite Falls, MN
February, 2010

Sharing the Gospel, Part 3: Presenting the Gospel

When you are in a spiritual conversation with an unbeliever, and you have the opportunity to share the gospel with him, just how do you do it? Here are a few thoughts that I hope will both encourage you and equip you for these priceless conversations.

Remember that the gospel is a message. The gospel is a message God has given us in the Bible. It is the good news that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (Joh 3:16)¹ You ought to be able to explain this message by opening your Bible and showing various passages that relate to it; as you grow in maturity, you will learn how to do this. But if you are not able to do so, either because you are still a babe in Christ, or because you do not have a Bible with you and cannot quote enough of it, or for any other reason, you can still share the gospel. Do not forget that up until the printing press was invented, most people did not have their own Bibles. Many led their neighbors to Christ by sharing the gospel message in their own words. You can do the same. If you are a Christian, you know the gospel message, so tell it!

Do not assume too much about what the other person understands. To be sure, there are some things you can reasonably assume. For example, if a person tells you that he is a Muslim, he probably does understand the basic concept of sin. If a person tells you that he is a Roman Catholic, he probably does understand the concept of the Trinity. But be careful not to assume too much. For instance, you know that every sin is worthy of eternal punishment, but the person you are talking to may think that only *some* sins are. You know that one who dies in unbelief is condemned, but he may think that there is a second chance to believe after death. You know that "by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast," (Eph 2:8-9) but he may think that there is still something he has to *do* before he can have faith, like reforming his life, praying a certain prayer, walking down the aisle, or getting baptized. So as you share the gospel, be thorough and explain yourself as much as you can.

Keep it simple. While you should thoroughly explain the gospel itself, this is usually not the time to talk about deeper matters of doctrine, like the *ordo salutis*, the hypostatic union of Christ, or how Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek! If the person believes, he will understand such things in time as he grows in the faith. For now, stick to "the elementary doctrine of Christ." (Heb 6:1) By the way, this means that you can share the gospel with confidence even if you yourself do not fully understand the deeper doctrines. While you should be growing in such understanding, never put off sharing the gospel until you know everything there is to know in the Bible – you never will! Be humble, admit there will always be questions you are not ready to answer, and boldly share the simple gospel: God created us for his glory, but we have sinned against him. Our sin deserves eternal punishment, and nothing we can do will ever change that – neither attending church, nor baptism, nor communion, nor any other good work. God is a perfect judge, who can never overlook even one sin; every sin must be punished. But God loves us so much that he has provided the one and only way to escape this punishment and be at peace with God. Our one God is made up of three persons, and one of those three took on the form of a man named Jesus, who took our guilt upon himself and paid the penalty for us on the cross. He rose again, and all who have faith in him will have their guilt washed away and will receive his righteousness. No longer enemies of God, they are adopted as sons of God!

Wait upon the Lord. Only God can open the heart and mind (Joh 6:44; 1Co 2:14; Tit 3:5), so do not manipulate anybody into parroting a confession of faith. Yes, it is biblical to exhort people to believe, as Peter did when he cried, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" (Act 2:40) If he believes, rejoice with him! But if not, be patient. Do not entice him to "ask Jesus into his heart" or repeat the "sinner's prayer." Such clever devices may satisfy your desire to quickly conclude that he has faith, but they are not biblical, and can cause terrible confusion. Simply wait upon the Lord, and keep sharing the gospel.

Mark Your Calendars

Sun., February 28: Music and Education Committee meetings are canceled.

Sun., March 7: Choir practice following communion service.

Fri., March 12, 7:00 P.M.: Music and book discussion at the house of Dale and Mary Streblow.

Sun., March 14: DST begins. Turn your clocks ahead one hour the night before! Education Committee meets following the afternoon service.

Fri., March 19-21: Conference on the Passion of Christ with Dr. Douglas Bookman, held at First Baptist Church in Marshall. Dr. Bookman has devoted himself to studying the land of Israel and the life of Christ. This, along with a refreshing emphasis upon the humanity of Jesus, allows him to deliver what might be the most profound presentation you will ever hear of Christ's passion week. Sessions: Fri. 7:00-8:30 P.M., Sat. 9:30 A.M.-2:30 P.M., Sun. 9:30 A.M.-12:00 P.M.

Quote of the Month

It is my opinion, brethren, that the silent Christian has something wrong with him.

A. W. Tozer

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God be in my Head

Anonymous (16th Century)

God be in my head,
And in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes,
And in my looking;
God be in my mouth
And in my speaking;
God be in my heart,
And in my thinking;
God be at my end
And at my departing.

A Bit of History

Not long ago, I took part in an ordination council. The candidate under examination was openly Calvinistic, and it did not take long for someone to ask him if his Calvinism somehow made him less evangelistic. After all, if God has predestined some to salvation, then won't they come to faith no matter what we do, and shouldn't we be careful lest we evangelize those who are not elect? The candidate patiently refuted this caricature of Calvinism; he explained that God predestines, and God uses evangelism to draw his elect to him. In doing so, he took his place alongside not only Calvin, but Augustine, as well.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.), the great teacher of predestination in the early church, answered the question this way:

But they say that the explanation of predestination is opposed to the advantage of preaching,—as if, indeed, it were opposed to the preaching of the apostle! Did not that teacher of the heathen so often, in faith and truth, as well commend predestination, as without ceasing preach the word of God? . . . Doubtless, our Lord Himself commanded men to believe, and said, “Believe in God, believe also in me:” and yet His judgment is not therefore false, nor is His explanation idle when He says, “No man cometh unto me”—that is, no man believeth in me—“except it were given him of my Father.” Nor, again, because this explanation is true, is the former precept vain. Why, therefore, do we think the explanation of predestination useless to preaching, to precept, to exhortation, to rebuke,—all which things the divine Scripture repeats frequently,—seeing that the same Scripture commends this doctrine?²

Why, indeed! “But what,” another tired old question goes, “if you share the gospel with those God has not predestined?” Augustine answers:

For as we know not who belongs to the number of the predestinated, we ought in such wise to be influenced by the affection of love as to will all men to be saved. For this is the case when we endeavour to lead every individual to that point where they may meet with those agencies by which we may prevail, to the accomplishment of the result, that being justified by faith they may have peace with God.³

We have no idea who is predestined to salvation, so we should evangelize everybody! Augustine reassures us, “For we need not fear . . . if in our ignorance he to whom we preach is not a son of peace.”⁴ Centuries later, John Calvin agreed wholeheartedly.⁵

“But, really,” the objector asks, “can a Calvinist *really* be *that* evangelistic?” In answer to that question, I offer the words of Charles Spurgeon, who himself wrote a defense of Calvinism, yet preached:

Oh, my brothers and sisters in Christ, if sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies; and if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay, and not madly to destroy themselves. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.⁶

Yes, Calvinism and evangelism go hand-in-hand. From Christ, to Paul, to Augustine, to Calvin, to Spurgeon, the answer remains the same.

² Aurelius Augustine, *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, Vol. 15, ed. Marcus Dods, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Wallis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1876), 202. *On the Gift of Perseverance*, Ch. 34.

³ *Ibid.*, 114. *A Treatise on Rebuke and Grace*, Ch. 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, Vol. 1, *The Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. Henry Cole (London: Wetheim and McIntosh, 1856), 135.

⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Wailing of Risca,” #349, sermon preached at Exeter Hall, Strand, Dec. 9, 1860. Online: <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0349.htm>.

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