

## Presenting The Gospel – How?

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In Romans, chapter 10, the apostle Paul argues cogently for the necessity of preaching and teaching the Gospel, if sinners are to be saved. In the tenor of the text, Paul asserts that sinners are saved by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus and believing in Him. The act of *calling* on the name of the Lord Jesus adds *content* to the obedient believer's *faith*! That much is quite clear. But the question is; how can men and women call on Someone in whom they have no faith? And how can they have faith in Someone of whom they have never heard? And how can they hear of Christ unless someone tells them? Paul concludes his argument: "So faith comes by hearing the preaching of Christ" (Rom.10:13-14, 17). This passage of Scripture is written for the '*already saved*' in Christ; this passage was not written for the unsaved, unredeemed person!

Paul's argument implies that there must be *solid content* and *substance* to our evangelistic proclamation of Christ. It is our responsibility to set Jesus Christ forth with *all* the authority of sacred Scripture, in the fullness of His divine-human person, and His *full and complete* saving work on the Cross, so that through the "preaching of the Gospel of Christ" Almighty God may create faith in the hearts of the hearers, and the Holy Spirit *will convict* the hearers—and move them to repentance and obedience (see John 6:44, 65; 16:8-9).

Such evangelistic preaching is far removed from its tragic caricature, which is all too common today, namely an emotional, anti-intellectual appeal for "decisions" when the hearers have but a nebulous notion of what they are to decide about or why.

Allow the New Testament to invite us to consider **the place of the mind** in evangelism, and allow the New Testament to supply *two* reasons for a thoughtful proclamation of the Gospel.

The *first* is taken from the example of the Apostles, after they took the Gospel Message to the world of the Greeks and Romans; Paul summed up his own evangelistic ministry in the simple words "**we persuade men**" (2 Corinthians 5:11). Now "persuade" is an intellectual exercise. To "*persuade*" is to marshal arguments in order to prevail on people to change their minds about something. To *persuade* is to bring about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral consideration. And what Paul does, Luke illustrates in the pages of the book of Acts. He tells us, for example, that for three weeks in the synagogue at Thessalonica, Paul "*argued* with them from the Scriptures, *explaining* and *proving* that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead," and saying, "This Jesus, whom I *proclaim* to you, is the Christ." As a result, Luke adds; "some of them were *persuaded*" (Acts 17:2-4).

Paul was pointing people to the Christ, mentioned in Old Testament “prophecies,” (written 400-700 years before Jesus Christ was born) and Christ in “fulfillment” of all those prophecies. Paul told the Christians at Corinth;

*“ . . . I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received and wherein ye stand. . . . For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures ”*  
(I Cor. 15:1-4).

In the Book of Acts, Luke used several verbs to describe Paul’s evangelistic ministry—to argue, to explain, to prove, to proclaim, and to persuade—are to some extent “intellectual” words. They indicate that Paul was teaching a body of doctrine and arguing towards a conclusion. He was seeking to convince in order to convert.

The fact that after we go on a mission trip, we tend to say, “Thank God some were converted” is a mark of our departure from New Testament vocabulary. It would be more Biblical to say, “Thank God some were persuaded.” At least that is what Luke said after Paul’s mission in Thessalonica.

Paul stayed eighteen months in Corinth, longer than in any other city, with the single exception of Ephesus (Acts 18:1-17). Luke gave Paul’s eighteen months work in Corinth 17 verses. Paul was “. . . teaching the Word of God among them” (Acts 18:11). He taught the Word of God with *substance* and *content* (see 1 Corinthians 2:2). His most notable converts were Crispus, who was actually the ruler of the synagogue, and Gaius (I Cor. 1:10); and among the general public in Corinth, Paul had good success.

The reasoned nature of Paul’s evangelism, explains the long periods in which he stayed in some cities, notably Ephesus. His first three months in Ephesus were spent in the synagogue where he “spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God.” Later he withdrew from the synagogue and “argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus,” which was, presumably, a secular lecture hall which he hired for that purpose. Luke tells us that, Paul argued there “for two years.” And it is not surprising that, “. . . all the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord” (Acts 19:8-10).

Ephesus was the capital city of the province of Asia. Nearly everybody in Asia would come to the city at some time, to visit the Temple of Diana, or to worship the *goddess-Diana*, in the Temple, or to do some shopping, or visit a relative, etc. And evidently one of the accepted things to do was to go and listen to this Christian lecturer, Paul. You could hear him on any day. Many did so, and many were persuaded of the truth of his message. And went back to their villages and cities spiritually reborn. So the Word of God spread throughout the province.

The *second* New Testament evidence is that evangelism should be a reasoned presentation of the Gospel. Conversion is described in terms of a person’s response to *The Truth*, God’s revealed Truth—as revealed in Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Becoming a Christian involves “*believing The Truth.*” Paul even describes, the Roman Christians as having “become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which [they] were committed” (Rom. 6:17). It is plain, from these verses, that in preaching and

teaching Christ, the early Christian evangelists were teaching a *body of doctrine about Christ and The Truth*.

The Gospel is for everybody, no matter what their nationality is, their educational level, or lack of it. The kind of evangelism for which we are pleading, is the setting forth of Jesus Christ in all His fullness as God—Incarnate in Human Flesh—which is relevant to all kinds of people; children as well as adults, the uncultured as well as the cultured, the rich as well as the poor, the unregenerate, as well as the degenerate.

All human beings think, because God made human beings thinking creatures. And man can reason *cognitively* through what he *knows*. The teachings of Jesus Christ, although beautifully simple, certainly made His listeners think. He presented the great truths about the living God, about man’s problem of sin, shame, and guilt, about his need for redemption, about the value and worth of man, about Christ-Himself, about His kingdom, and about this life, and the next, etc.

What is our duty? Our duty is to avoid distorting or diluting the Gospel message, and at the same time, to deliver it and make it plain. We are to teach, and proclaim the Word of God’s Truth in its simplicity so that people can understand it and follow it (2 Tim. 2:15-16), lest “when any one hears the Word of the kingdom *and does not understand it*, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart” (Matt. 13:19). I fear that our inept, and incomplete, and clumsy handling of the Word of God today sometimes gives the devil this very opportunity. We are to declare the *whole* counsel of The Living God.

There can be no evangelism without the power of the Holy Spirit. A reasoned presentation of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit convincing the alien sinner, go hand in hand. Paul told the Corinthian Christians, “The wisdom of this world does not lead men to God” (1 Cor. 1:25 ff.). Instead, Paul resolved to preach Christ and Him crucified, and instead of just using human rhetoric, he relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to persuade. But Paul still used doctrine and reasoned arguments in his presentation of The Gospel.

In Galatians 1:1-4, the Apostle Paul accused the Galatians of folly and senselessness, which is to be lacking in intelligence –about the work of Christ. They were believing a distorted Gospel which was totally incompatible with what they heard from Paul and Barnabas. Then, Paul reminded them about what they had heard and what was presented earlier –about the true message of the Gospel. He presented the *Cross of Christ* to the Galatians ‘*as the object of personal faith.*’ Paul’s purpose was to *persuade* them to come, and put their trust in Christ as their crucified Savior.

Gresham Machen expressed it well in his book: “There must be the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit of God in the new birth,” He also wrote, “Without that, all our arguments are quite useless. But because the arguments by themselves’ are insufficient; it does not follow when they are unnecessary. What the Holy Spirit does in the new birth is not to make a man a Christian regardless of the evidence, but on the contrary, “The Holy Spirit clears away the mists from our eyes and He enables one to attend to the evidence,” as He did in the conversion of Saul (Acts 9).

John Stott, said something similar: “An otherwise unconvincing message cannot attain the power to convince simply by appealing to the Holy Spirit. . . Argumentation

and the operation of the Spirit are not in competition with each other. In trusting in the Spirit, Paul in no way spared himself from arguing.”

### **Summary:**

So then, in our evangelistic proclamation of the Gospel, we must address the whole person (mind, heart, soul, and the will) with the whole Gospel (Christ incarnate, crucified, His finished work on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, His justification, His sanctification, His reigning, His second advent, and all the rest). We should reason with mind and plead with heart in order to move the will, and we should put our trust in the Holy Spirit throughout.

Christians today have no liberty to present a partial Christ (His Manhood but not His God-hood, His life but not His death, His cross but not His resurrection, Him as Savior but not as Lord). We are called upon to present Christ in *all* His fullness, work, and glory (Ephesians 4:13b). But we do not have the liberty to ask for a partial response (mind but not heart, heart but not mind, either or both without the will). No! Our objective is to win the total man for a total Christ, and this will require the full use of his mind, soul, heart and will!

Let's pray that the living God will raise up a generation of Christian laymen, Pastors, Ministers, and Evangelists who, with absolute loyalty to the Biblical content and substance of the Gospel; with an unwavering confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit; with a deep understanding of the *power of the Cross of Christ*; will declare the Word of God with its relevance, simplicity, authority, and without compromising. Let's pray that men and women, who are faithful servants of Christ, will use *their minds and hearts* to reach *other minds and hearts* for the risen, and living Christ!