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A Culture of Evangelism – Part 3 Various Texts

Introduction: We come back tonight to consider for a few minutes this idea of a culture of evangelism. We have had the joy of considering some key thoughts about evangelism so as to grow in building this culture of evangelism here at Newton Bible. We first spent some time defining this culture of evangelism in the church. And we were challenged from Scripture with the centrality of the Church in God's plan to save the lost. We saw that evangelism is God's work through us to redeem the lost and build the Church. Then last week we spent some time considering the developing of this culture of evangelism. This was an attempt to answer what we should be pursuing as a church to grow in our pursuit of the lost. We saw that we must be compelled by Christ love for us and we must be conscious of God's Worth and unashamed of the Gospel and mighty in the Scriptures and accountable to one another and fervent in prayer. It was quite the challenging list to seek to develop! But as the Lord grows us in these things, we will see the growth of true community and fellowship around this most important task.

What I want to do in our few short minutes together tonight is to consider defending this culture of evangelism. As it is developed it must also be defended – and obviously there is a lot of overlap here in those ideas. But what I want to address is one of the greatest threats to our evangelistic efforts. If this cancer is not constantly fought with the chemotherapy of the Word, it will consume the church and make her too sickly to be of any good to the lost and dying world. It is the threat which we all know so very well in so many facets of life. We know it is a problem and yet it is ever growing in the dark spots of our heart if we are not shining the light of the truth upon it. The problem is the fear of man. We all know the sweaty palms and the increased heart rate when a conversation turns spiritual and we fear what people will think if we stand firm on Gospel truth. This fear of others comes out in questions like – What will they think of me? How will I answer their tough questions? What right do I have to meddle in their personal spiritual state? Who am I to tell someone else what to believe? They seem fine believing as they do, do they really need me to talk to them? They won't listen

anyway, will they? They probably won't be born again so why bother? What if I mess up and make them more confused and deceived than they already are? What if I say something and it totally affects my relationship with them? You get the idea here – we are prone to fear others. And this fear paralyzes our efforts to reach the lost and before you know we are no longer as concerned for the lost as we used to be, and spiritual apathy and carelessness settle in.

So, how do we fight against this fear of man? I want to spend the rest of our time looking at the boldest evangelist I know of and peer into how he fought this fear of man. So, turn with me to Romans 1.

“Paul had been imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:23, 24), chased out of Thessalonica (Acts 17:10), smuggled out of Berea (Acts 17:14), laughed at in Athens (Acts 17:32), regarded as a fool in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:18,23), and stoned in Galatia (Acts 14:19), but he remained eager to preach the gospel in Rome – the seat of contemporary political power and pagan religion. Neither ridicule, criticism, nor physical persecution could curb his boldness.”¹

I want that kind of boldness! And we can be that kind of bold as we know what Paul knew. I want to point you briefly to 4 things that Paul knew which compelled him to boldness in evangelism as he conquered his fear of man.

1. Paul Knew His Standing

a. Slave – vs. 1

- i. He was positioned under his gracious master. He was far removed from the posture of slave before his master. He owned nothing and he had no rights to demand and command his life. He was a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was completely owned and accountable to his one Lord.

b. Called – vs. 1

- i. And this is because he was called by God – first to be a disciple of Jesus and then to be an apostle of Jesus. On the road to Damascus Paul was born again as he was confronted with the living Christ. This calling is a life-changing and loyalty altering reality. This is the nature of everyone who knows Christ as Savior and Lord. The only way you can is if you are called by God from death to life and from darkness to light. Paul knew this standing before God as one called by God. And being called

¹ *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*; Nelson, 2005: pg. 1505.

to salvation meant for Paul that he was also called to be an ambassador of his Savior.

- c. Set Apart – vs. 1
 - i. And so, he also describes his standing before the Lord as one set apart for the gospel of God. This was his unique standing before the Lord as an apostle, but this is also true for all of Christ's followers. We have been set apart from the world and made holy so that we as the church protect and proclaim the message of the Gospel.
 - ii. Notice how these are identifiers of Paul's view of himself. He is letting them know who is writing and this is how he wants them to know him because these things define him best. He is a slave of Christ, called by God, and set apart for the gospel.
2. Paul Knew His Message
 - a. This Gospel was promised by God – vs. 2
 - i. This was God's Gospel promised from long ago. This is not man's creation or man's vain imagination. This is not Paul, the spiritual guru, coming up with some self-help gospel. No, this is God's gospel promised from long ago.
 - b. This Gospel was Prophesied in Scripture – vs. 2
 - i. And it was prophesied in Scripture. The promises of long ago are made known to us in prophetic texts like Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 53. The thousands of unfulfilled prophecies about a Messiah were brought to fruition at the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul knows those prophecies well and he is equipped to proclaim the message of the Gospel which was prophesied in Scripture.
 - c. This Gospel concerns God's Son – vs. 3-4
 - i. It is also a message which concerns God's Son. Notice the descriptions of the Son's qualifications in verses 3-4 as proof that he is fulfilling the prophecies of Scripture. He was descended of David. He was the Son of God. He was specifically declared to be the Son of God through the resurrection of the dead by the power of the Spirit of Holiness. Therefore, this Son of God is this Jesus of Nazareth and He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Promised One, and He is our Lord – the Sovereign Ruler over us. This gospel Paul knows and is emboldened to proclaim is a gospel concerning God's Son.
 - d. This Gospel is powerful to save – vs. 16-17

- i. And Paul knew that this gospel was powerful to save, as he makes so clear in verses 16-17. He was not ashamed of the Gospel. He was not ashamed of the Gospel because he knew the power God had vested into the message of saving grace through Jesus Christ. He knew that he had the most powerful, life-giving, eternity-securing, grace-giving, forgiveness-offering message ever known to man. He knew it was God's message, God's gospel. He knew it was God's initiative to save mankind through the sending of His Son to be the Savior of the world. He knew it was the only way that sinful man could be made right with our righteous and holy Creator God. And he knew that though there is only one way, there is a way! And this compelled him to be eager about telling others. I mean, why not?! If we have the one message every person in the entire world needs to hear to be right with God, then why would we not be eager to proclaim it? If we have the one message which God has promised to bless with His power by which he will save lost sinners and make them righteous in his sight, then why would we be anything less than completely zealous for this work?
- ii. Paul was sure that the Gospel of Jesus which he had been entrusted with was from God and of God and about God and would be used by God. He was confident that this message was powerful to save anyone from any walk of life and from any ethnic background – whether Jew or Greek, or anyone in between. He was confident that in the Gospel men and women could be made righteous before God.
- iii. He knew it was not enough to simply have our sins forgiven and have our account put at zero before a holy God. He knew that we needed so much more. We need our account filled with righteousness, and the only righteousness which will be accepted is that of Jesus Christ the righteous. And it is in the Gospel that our sins are forgiven through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ upon the Cross of Calvary, and we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ and made complete and justified before God.

- iv. And this is all received by faith alone. It is the grace of God to forgive us and to make us right with himself through the work of His Son, and we must receive it by faith. We must believe this Gospel of grace. We must take by faith that which God alone can provide. And this faith is a total trust in Jesus Christ alone. It is an abandonment of any and all self-effort to make ourselves right with God. It involves the mind in that we must mentally know and agree with the truths of the Gospel – that God is righteous, that we are a rebellious sinner deserving eternal condemnation, that God provided a sinless substitute to propitiate his wrath against our sin and make us justified before him, and that we must repent and believe in this Jesus to be saved. We must know these facts and agree with them. But faith also moves the emotions in that we are convicted and convinced of these truths. They are not just generically true, but they are true for me and I am moved by conviction of sin and convinced of the truth. And this faith then moves the will to act. The mind agrees with the facts of the Gospel, the emotions or heart, is convicted by the Gospel and convinced something must be done, and the will is compelled to a volitional act in which I commit completely to Jesus Christ alone as my only hope of salvation. This is saving faith!
- v. And this gospel is the grounds of assurance of salvation. This power of God to bring salvation reveals to us the righteousness of God to continue to cause us to live from faith to faith – or in other words, from faith in the beginning to faith in the end. Meaning, the concrete footing upholding our ongoing and persevering faith is this powerful Gospel of Christ. This is the message that Paul knew so well, and which compelled his fervent proclamation.

3. Paul Knew His Audience

a. Called – vs. 6-7, 13

- i. He knew that they too were called by God to belong to Jesus Christ. They were easy to know as those called by God because of their faith in the Lord. They were part of the church by the grace of God. But Paul knew that there were others out there who needed yet to hear. Among all the nations he says in verse

5, he has been tasked with bringing about the obedience of faith.

ii. And then in verse 13 we see his expectation to have a harvest of souls among the rest of the Gentiles. IN other words, he is not just wanting to get to Rome to encourage the church, but also to evangelize the lost. And he knows that not all the Gentiles will be rescued, but he knows that those who are called will. So, this compels his efforts.

b. Loved by God – vs. 7

i. He also knows that this calling is rooted in the love of God for them. They are loved by God and called by God to be saints of God. This is why he has such affection for them even though he has never met them. They are called by God just as he is, and they are brothers and sisters in the same adopted family.

4. Paul Knew His Role

a. Bring about the obedience of faith – vs. 5

i. Lastly, Paul knew his role. He knew that he had been called by God to bring about the obedience of faith. This will only happen as the power of the Gospel brings about the salvation described in verse 16. But for those who know this salvation they will know this obedience of faith in their Lord.

ii. Paul knows that he is not just about professions of faith or just about numbers on his evangelism stats. He knows that he is about the task of making disciples who are obedient out of faith in the Lord.

b. Persistent Prayer – vs. 9-13

i. And he knows that this will only happen as he is persistent in prayer. Notice how he prays fervently for an opportunity to go to Rome – this bastion of worldliness and opponents to the Gospel. He wants to take the fight to the belly of the beast and stand firm in the truth about Christ. And notice that his prayers are evangelistic as well as edifying. He longs for the opportunity to be used of the Lord to see more come to faith in Christ.

c. Obligated to All – vs. 14

i. And he also knows that his role makes him obligated to all. He is the apostle to the gentiles and he here knows that. He is

under obligation to the high society Greeks – the most refined of them all – and to the Barbarians – the worst of the worst. And he is obligated to the wise and to the foolish. To the ones who are well-trained and are worldly wise in philosophy and to the ones who are dumb and obtuse and foolish. Paul is obligated to them all to bring them the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: And so, he says in verse 15 that he is eager to preach the gospel to those who are in Rome. He is eager like a sprinter is leaning into their race trying to get their nose across the line first. Paul is leaning into his obligation to all people. How can this be so? Because he knows his standing in grace, he knows his message of grace, he knows his audience who need grace, and he knows his role to proclaim this grace of the Gospel.

Small Group Questions:

- How would you know if you have this eagerness to tell others the gospel like Paul did in verse 15? Describe what that would look like in your life.
- Share the name of someone you would like the group to pray for as you seek to invite them to Visitor's Sunday and to share the Gospel with. Spend time praying as a group.