

## Non-evangelistic Evangelicals

Christians in America today do not personally engage in evangelizing others. They won't do it. They can't do it. Some are horrified at the very thought of it. Why? What's going on? Let's understand three things about Gospel outreach: First, it's biblical that we all should be involved in evangelism in some way. Second, I can suggest why that's not happening. Third, I offer a solution to this terrible state of the Church. And I finish by explaining why evangelism is central to Christianity. We've been called to serve Christ. And His explicit will for this is calling and preparing others to be in the coming Kingdom, to be eternally blessed. In other words, evangelism. That's why this lesson is so exceedingly important.

I. Surely every Christian is at least aware of the Great Commission (Matthew 28). Let's think about what it says. Jesus addressed this to His eleven disciples, but He prefaced it by saying that "all authority in heaven and earth" was given to Him. Why say that? Because, going into all the world to make disciples of every nation would only be possible by a multitude of people over a long period of time, all of whom would be working at this under His authority. In biblical times, a disciple voluntarily committed himself to his master, and such commitment could only be justified if there was sufficient authority. And Jesus ended this commission by saying He'd be present with His disciples until "the end of the age." That must mean the disciple-making process would continue for a protracted period of time. So the intention in this command is, every disciple makes other disciples, creating a long chain of instructed and obedient followers of Christ, throughout (undefined) time. Jesus' work was limited to Israel for just 3 years, but the disciple-making, teaching work would be on-going, world-wide and prolonged. A world-wide mission means that the disciples would be from all the nations of the world. And it would all be carried out under the authority and personal supervision of the resurrected Jesus. Notice how many times Jesus says, "all," four times in 3 verses. This is universal power for a universal project, involving everyone who obediently follows Jesus.

Every believer is on mission. We reproduce ourselves! The Apostles personally reproduced themselves, and those then did the same, and so on all thru the era of the Church Age. Going, baptizing and teaching within a personal relationship is how the mission proceeds, how disciples are made. It's what we *do*, not merely what we know. We've been given the New Testament Scriptures, especially the four Gospels, to make explicit the component that's to be taught. The goal is obedience, not passive, casual hangers-on.

Jesus came to install the promised Kingdom for Israel. But having been rejected by His own people, the Kingdom has been postponed. In the interim, all who follow Him are here to continue His ministry of calling and preparing people from all over the world to enter the Kingdom and for blessing, when it does come.

Here are 4 reasons I argue that all believers are on mission: (1) "Evangelism" is an enablement by the Spirit for every follower of Jesus to do Gospel outreach and teach what Christ instructed and commanded. It's not an office or role for only certain ones to fill. (2) Acts 1:8 is there in Scripture for *every follower* of Christ. That's because the command to go is linked to the gift of the Spirit, which is for every believer. (3) Paul states (Romans 15:16) that evangelism is a priestly ministry. As every believer is called to be a priest before God (1 Peter 2:9), evangelism is a ministry for all of us. And (4), in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul affirms that if we've received the reconciliation (and if we're a believer, we have received it), then we're agents of reconciliation to others. And in Philippians 2:16, Paul states that we, believers, "hold forth the word of life." It's inescapable: all believers are responsible for sharing the Good News of Jesus.

II. Here's my list of ten reasons Christians don't personally do outreach, not in any order. (i) I suspect that many people who profess to be Christian simply aren't. They're pew-sitters; they're not following Jesus, they don't love Him, and they have no intention of obeying Him. They agree with the Gospel in the abstract but haven't appropriated it for themselves because, well, they're already good people, not sinners in need of some form of rescue. They would never dream of telling anyone else about a God who entered history by means of a virgin birth, was rejected by His very own people, and rose from the dead and visibly ascended up to heaven. That's too incredible a story for them to share with anyone who doesn't already believe it. (ii) Many Christians don't really know what the Gospel is. If they hear it preached, they agree with it, but they couldn't say in their own words what it is. (iii) Many Christians are fearful of the shame that would come to them if what they were doing was discovered by people who knew them. (iv) I suspect that some Christians have tried to share the Gospel but perceived the experience to be a failure. So, discouraged, they've abandoned the effort. (v) I believe many Christians suppose that evangelism is a gift; they don't have it, so they leave outreach to those who do have the gift. Or, they believe that their part in the evangelistic ministry of the church is to put money in the plate so that the church's professionals can do it. Or that their "ministry" is to sing, or to serve donuts and coffee. (vi) I suspect that most Christians are busy pursuing other things in life that they regard as of higher priority or

more interesting than Gospel outreach. In fact, they're so occupied with those other matters that doing evangelism doesn't even occur to them. (vii) I suspect that some Christians, though not necessarily Calvinists, hope that God will sovereignly somehow see to it that the elect are saved. They don't need to be personally involved. The Gospel is on the radio and telly, for example, so let unbelievers hear it there and believe it if they want to. Or let unbelievers go to church and hear the Gospel there and be saved. (viii) Some Christians suppose that they need special training, especially to be able to give good, persuasive answers to skeptics and, as they don't have that expertise, they shouldn't be doing outreach. (ix) I hesitate to suggest this, but I fear it's true. Some Christians really don't believe in hell. They hope that God, in love, will take everyone into heaven, so they don't need even to bring up the need to trust Christ, or to believe the Gospel, or to be personally involved in outreach. (x) It's likely that some Christians are intimidated by the responsibility. They fear saying the wrong thing, or fear being unloving, and so might turn people against the Gospel. Or they know that the person they wish to reach has seen them living in an un-Christian way, thus vitiating their Gospel witness. Or they feel as if they're manipulating (or humiliating or insulting) others by accusing them of sin and scaring them about hell, so they won't share the Gospel.

Every one of these is reprehensible. Except for (i) above, they are nothing more than excuses believers offer because we simply don't want to be obedient servants of God. We want the privileges of salvation without the responsibilities.

**III.** There is one thing that every believer can and should be doing. That's giving out Gospel literature. A slick, professionally written and printed tract is OK, but they're all too brief to say all that needs to be said. Every believer has a testimony and should know who Jesus is and what He's done and will do. So everyone could easily write out and make copies of what he or she would say to an unbeliever who was interested. There should be Bible verses on it, and of course an invitation to attend a Gospel-preaching church. And then, simply (and prayerfully) pass out those copies to neighbors, people at random on the sidewalk, whoever is encountered in a parking lot, and elsewhere. Give them out by the hundreds, by the thousands. Those copies also could be mailed to neighbors (or to anyone), and the postal service will deliver it to the addressed mailbox. It can be done anonymously. Will there be a response of faith? That's for God to bring, not us. We may not know of any results until the day we're with Jesus.

Something else every believer can and should be doing is funding those who are already involved in full-time Gospel outreach. Christian radio and TV broadcasts can reach unbelievers in distant parts of the world with the Gospel and Bible teaching. Missionaries and church planters in various parts of the world need support, and there are many good Christian organizations that carry out this work. Give generously, give sacrificially. And pray! Pray for each country of the world. Pray that people in Muslim, Hindu, and Communist countries will be able to hear and respond to the Gospel. Pray for the Gospel to reach God's elect wherever they are. Pray for indigenous evangelists. Pray that those doing outreach will be fruitful. Pray much. Pray with sincerity. Pray with love.

**Now**, the essence of Christianity is evangelism. We need to understand something so basic almost everyone misses it. God is a unity of three Persons whose love and goodness generates life. So God created a family. Adam was His son. (Sonship means obeying the father, being exactly like the father, and honoring the father.) Adam and his wife were to mirror God by being a unity and generating life. (That's what marriage means.) So all their offspring were (are) siblings. (Siblings are one in love; they look out for each other, take care of each other.) God wanted earth to be filled with His image and likeness, filled with His sons, filled with His glory. The Fall necessitated redemption, and redemption *heightens*, amplifies God's creational intent. Taking Israel as His nation was taking a son (an adopted son; adopted sons have all the rights and responsibilities of a natural son) or a bride. (Covenants are to be understood in terms of family relationships.) Like Adam, Israel too failed. So in love, with God's own life to offer, the Son came to earth to gather to Himself sons (adopted sons), or a bride, to take to the Father for blessing. God wants His house filled with sons. All the sons together are a unity, bonded in love for each other and for the Father.

So, in this era of the Gospel, Jesus' Spirit indwells each believer, joining all believers together and into Himself in a unity of love, joy and peace. Believers have the life of God dwelling in them. And so the love of God impels them to reach out to others, siblings all, to bring them too into the fellowship of love and goodness with the Father. That's the Gospel offer, and the Gospel is Jesus – everything Jesus. Reaching out may involve great personal sacrifice, just as it did for the Son. It may involve suffering, as it did for the Son. Nevertheless, this is the rationale for evangelism. As sons, we're obedient to our Father, we're striving to be exactly like Him – or like the Son, and our obsession is to honor Him and, of course, His great purposes. It's what Christianity is. It's why we're here.

In sum, there is much we all can be doing to participate in God's great work of evangelizing the world. And if we love Jesus, we'll do it. Doing nothing is appalling disobedience, a rejection of sonship. So, let's be faithful while we still can.