

Basic Faith and Practice 8: SHARING JESUS WITH OTHERS

Introduction

In this study, we're talking about one of the most basic and important areas of the Christian life—witnessing/evangelism/sharing our faith. But as basic and important as it is, evangelism is something Christians often find difficult and struggle with. So evangelism is sometimes something we think the other guy should do. Shouldn't it be left to the professionals? Shouldn't it be the responsibility of those gifted as evangelists? Or we can get discouraged if we don't see what we would consider success for our efforts. But God has called us all to be his witnesses. It is the basic mission of the church. Let's start with some basics about evangelism.

- What is evangelism? → Sharing the good news about Jesus Christ and seeking to lead lost people to trust in him as Lord and Savior.
- Who should do it? → Every Christian.
- Why should we share our faith?
 1. God commands it. (See below.)
 2. Love demands it. We want to save people from Hell!

– Atheist Penn Jillette: “I’ve always said that I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward—and atheists who think people shouldn’t proselytize and who say just leave me alone and keep your religion to yourself—how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? I mean, if I believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that.”

3. Honesty and integrity. If you live for Jesus, then honesty and integrity will bring that out in your life.
4. The professionals and the gifted won't reach everyone. There are some people who may only have an opportunity to hear the Gospel through you. This will be due either because of access (Billy Graham types can't get to everybody!) or disposition (your acquaintances will likely better hear the Gospel from you than a stranger). You are God's missionary to their world.
5. By sharing Christ with others we increase our own faith. As we testify to the hope within us, we are strengthened in that hope. All of us can witness (tell “our story” and share the gospel) even if we are not gifted as evangelists. All of us should be witnesses for Christ if we love others God brings into our lives.
6. It increases our joy!
7. It glorifies God.

I. The Great Commission

A. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20

1. Context: Jesus has been resurrected and is now giving his final instructions to his disciples.

- What does Jesus command? And what do these things mean? → See below

2. Jesus made a declaration to all His followers to:

a. “go” - this takes initiative and leaving our comfort zones.

- What is difficult for you about “going”? What is your comfort zone?

b. “make disciples” (grammatically, the main command governing the others) – leading others to become disciples of Jesus, that is, to believe in him and follow him, seeking to obey everything he has commanded.

c. “baptizing” – Pretty straightforward. Once someone trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he should get baptized, formally proclaiming his faith and that he is a disciple of Christ.

d. teaching obedience to all Jesus has commanded – The Church is to teach those who come to Christ to obey all that Jesus commanded. When someone becomes a Christian, he begins this lifetime process of learning and growing.

- How can we possibly hope to accomplish such a huge, all-encompassing mission? → Jesus Christ promises us that “all authority” has been given to Him and that He is with us always. He will empower us for the task!

B. God’s Desire → has always been to have a people (not just special persons) to be a witness for Himself, starting with Adam and Eve, and coming to rest especially on Abraham and his descendants, Israel. God is the great missionary as is his Son!

1. Genesis 1:27 → Adam and Eve created to image forth God

2. Gen 12:1-3 → All nations would be blessed in Abraham

3. Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 43:8-13; 44:8 → Israel was to be a saving testimony to the world

4. The book of Jonah is a testimony to this. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh, not out of fear, but because he didn’t want those non-Israelite people (his people’s enemies) to repent (see Jonah 4:1-5, though summarizing for the group is fine; no need to read it out). Jonah knew full well that God delights in compassion. By disobeying God, Jonah broke with the purpose of the Jewish people in the earth – to be a witness to all nations.

5. 1 Peter 2:9-10; Acts 1:8 → the Apostle Peter proclaims the culmination of God’s desire in the work of Jesus setting up a new Israel (the Church) to “proclaim the excellencies of Him”.

C. 2 Corinthians 5:17-6:10 - In this passage, it is hard to tell if Paul's comments about evangelistic ministry are speaking specifically about himself and other apostles in their gospel ministry or if he is speaking about all Christians. But we can at least apply principles from apostolic gospel ministry to our own call to spread the gospel. While some may be especially gifted at certain types of evangelism, all of us are to be ambassadors, witnesses, and ministers of reconciliation for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

– What does this passage indicate we are (i.e., what our identity is) in gospel ministry (v 20)?

1. We are ambassadors of Christ! (5:20)

a. What is an ambassador? → An official representative

b. How could it be said that we are official representatives of Christ? That's what apostles were. → We are united to Christ and identified with him. We belong to him and are part of his family. And when we share the gospel, we are carrying out the task he gave us and sharing the message he gave us. So, there is no question of whether it is his word. We share the message he has officially set forth through the Apostles.

– In this passage, what has God given us? What is our goal?

2. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation; we are to help people become reconciled to God (5:18, 20).

– How do we help people become reconciled to God?

3. We are to appeal to people and urge them to be reconciled to God (5:20; 6:1).

II. What do I share with others? (or, on what basis do I urge people to be reconciled to God?)

A. The Gospel (good news)

1. What is the gospel? → Paul summarizes it here; see esp. 5:17, 19, 21; 6:2; cf. 1 Cor 15:1-5; Rom 10:9-10. It includes both Jesus's death and resurrection.

2. Memorize the basic gospel and consider using a standard gospel tract, such as Cru's *Would You Like to Know God Personally?* or Billy Graham's *Steps to Peace with God* or the one we have on our website, Matthias Media's *Two Ways to Live*.

3. Go over the tract *Would You Like to Know God Personally?* with the class. Make sure everyone understands the gospel and has trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Memorize the 4 main points together.

4. Seek to make any and all of the main points of the gospel with unbelievers as appropriate (such as the four main points of *Would You Like to Know God Personally?*). Aim your conversation here. Beware of rabbit trails in conversation.

– When should we share?

B. 2 Cor 6:2 → Now; this is urgent!

C. Share your story! → Mark 5:19-20

– Why is this important? –What does it accomplish?

a. It gives lost people a relevant, practical, compelling, living picture of the gospel that they cannot easily dispute because it is your genuine experience and comes from the heart.

b. Include the gospel message within your testimony.

c. It is helpful to write out your testimony or otherwise prepare it for use as a brief presentation of and invitation to the gospel.

– According to 2 Cor 6:3-10, how else can we commend reconciliation with God?

D. Give no legitimate cause of offense, but a pure, sincere, determined heart for God and others (lot to ponder here, but a simple summary might be, righteous living). We will talk about that more next time (in part 2).

Conclusion to Part 1: We have seen that evangelism or sharing Jesus with others is sharing the good news about Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection for our salvation, seeking to lead lost people to trust in him as Lord and Savior. This is something that every Christian is called to do. It is God's command and the natural outgrowth of love for others. We are ambassadors of Christ seeking to bring lost and dying people to be reconciled to God and saved from sin, death, and Hell, and brought into eternal life. In leading people to Jesus, we are seeking to make disciples, people who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, who follow him and seek to obey all that he has commanded. In pursuing the mission to bring lost people to saving faith in Christ, it is good to share not only the gospel, but also our own testimony of how God saved us through the gospel. But in all of this, let's be careful not to discredit ourselves through sinful behavior, but commend the gospel with our very lives.

Introduction to Part 2: Last time, we looked at the concept of evangelism, sharing the gospel with the lost and seeking to bring them to become disciples of Jesus, trusting in him as Lord and Savior and following him. We saw that this is something God has called us all to do and the natural outgrowth of love for others. In evangelism, we are ambassadors of Christ seeking to bring lost and dying people to be reconciled to God and saved from sin, death, and Hell, and brought into eternal life. This is the Great Commission Jesus has given us, and there is an urgency to it. We also looked at what the gospel that we are to share with others actually is and noted the helpfulness of sharing the testimony of our own salvation with the lost. In this study, we will look at a biblical model for witnessing, talk about key elements of evangelism, consider some practical advice for witnessing, and if there is time, have a Q & A on evangelism and practice evangelizing each other with some role play.

III. A biblical model for Witnessing—1 Peter 3:14-16

A. Overview

1. What is the biggest personal obstacle to witnessing? → Fear (3:14)

– Why? What is there to fear? → Rejection, disapproval, persecution, threats, consequences, etc.

– So how can we overcome fear and witness faithfully and boldly for the Lord?

2. Set your heart on the blessing of the Lord (3:14; notice the put off fear/put on . . .)

3. “sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart” (3:15)

– What does this mean?

a. To set apart Christ as Lord; consider, honor, exalt, submit to him, and fix mind on him as Lord

– What does lordship imply for our lives?

b. Righteous living

c. When you witness be more concerned about Jesus Christ's reputation rather than your own. Don't be out to take scalps but to see Jesus glorified. If you've been faithful, even if the person doesn't convert, you have glorified God by lifting Jesus Christ up.

4. "make a defense" - We will discuss this in a moment.

5. "to everyone who asks you"

– Does this mean that we can't try to make a conversation happen or that we cannot initiate? → No, but we should never force ourselves on someone and cram the Bible down their throat. We are not out to coerce but to persuade. We pray that our conversation, questions, and behavior will provoke them to ask us.

6. "with gentleness and reverence" – We are to treat all people with respect, reverencing them as persons made in the image of God. (This goes for our enemies too, by the way.)

– What does this look like?

– Why is gentleness and respect important?

– What has turned you off when others have witnessed to you?

7. "keep a good conscience" – This has come up more than once in one form or another, such as

– Why would this be important? → Don't give anyone the opportunity to write off your witness due to hypocrisy in your own life. When you sin be honest and repentant about it. May we live lives of such holiness that people will have to make up slander about us.

– Why is witnessing in deed (i.e., righteous living) so important? → It shows God powerfully since righteousness is defined by his character and will. It shows his value as we treasure him and his righteousness. It shows the reality of our faith and God's transforming power.

B. "Defense"

1. "Apologia" is the Greek word used here, which does not mean to apologize but to make a rational or reasonable argument. Peter is calling us to be ready to explain why we are Christians. While no one can "prove God" to everyone's satisfaction, we should be able to show the reasonableness of the faith and present solid evidence for the faith. Christianity is of the mind as well as the heart.

2. How do we do this? How can we prepare for it?

a. Study the Word – The more you read and dig in to the Bible the more you will be able to articulate the Faith. (Remember our study on learning and living the word of God.)

b. Pray – Ask God to give you wisdom to pull down the strongholds of worldly thought.

c. Teaching – Get into good teaching from other brothers and sisters. This includes Sunday

preaching, Bible studies, audio and video resources, and books. Glean the wisdom of the Body of Christ.

- d. Rely on others - You will undoubtedly be asked things from time to time you cannot answer. Admit your ignorance, then go dig for an answer. Ask for help. Even bring a more knowledgeable friend into the witnessing relationship if appropriate.
- e. Conversation - Throw questions around with other Christians. This is stimulating and answer-getting.

IV. Key Elements of Evangelism

A. Witnessing is Especially Verbal

- 1. Romans 10:8-10, 14-15 – We need to bring the word near to the unbeliever
- 2. Why is it important to witness verbally? → Someone can't believe the gospel if he does not know what it is.

B. Community – John 13:34-35; 17:20-23; Acts 2:42-47 (note specifically v 47)

- 1. They will know that we are Christians by our love for one another. Our church life is a powerful testimony to the truth of the Gospel and vital to biblical witness, though sadly it seems neglected in the American church. (Remember our Basics study on “Community.”)
- 2. How does community testify to the gospel? → It shows God, who is love. It shows God's values. It shows God's power and his transformation of our lives. It shows the blessedness of God's way. Healthy community is attractive.
 - How might people be able to see our community in order for it to be a witness to them?
 - Obviously, visiting church; group evangelistic outreach as a church; seeing and/or hearing about our involvement in church, church relationships, the church's impact on us, etc.; inviting people into community activities outside of church meetings, such as cookouts, sports, etc.
 - Beyond being a witness itself, how else might community contribute to individual witness?
 - Supporting one another in witness in various ways, such as prayer, advice, encouragement, etc.
 - What have you seen of the power of community witness?

C. Good Works – Matthew 5:14-16

- Beyond what we have already said about witnessing in deed/righteous living, how do good works aid in evangelism? → They are good, and that is attractive. It is all the more so for the person who benefits from our good works. Social outreach, justice, and service can break down walls and barriers and make a way for the gospel to come into a person's life. These reveal and glorify God more powerfully than words can.

D. Signs and Wonders

- 1. Acts 3:1-10, which provides opportunity for Peter to preach to the people around; Peter and John get

arrested, but Acts 4:4 reports more positive results (see all of Acts 3:1–4:31 on your own for the full story and context).

– How can signs and wonders aid in evangelism? → The miraculous can open up people to hear the proclamation. It shows God’s power and truth.

2. How can we apply this to evangelism? What should we do with this principle? → Pray for unbelievers in evangelism and let them know you are praying. Offer to pray for them, to put them on our church prayer chain, etc. Be open to using your spiritual gifts in relating to the lost and give the glory to God if there is opportunity. Some spiritual gifts might not be good for this, such as speaking in tongues, but many would be, such as the gift of service.

– What others can you think of?

V. Practical Advice on Witnessing (So much could be said, but here are some particularly helpful points.)

A. Regard others as pre-Christians.

– How can this aid evangelism? → This can help us to respect them and enthusiastically pursue their well-being and to approach them hopefully.

B. Step on the mat. – When you go into a grocery you step on a mat that opens the door. Don’t come on like gangbusters with a person (particularly a stranger). Ask a question, make a comment, then see if the door opens (do they respond by inviting you to tell them more about the Lord or your perspective?). Then walk through the door to further conversation.

C. Take time. – Don’t expect every conversation to produce instant conversion. Be willing to meet with people again and again and for the conversation to span years of relationship whether in an ongoing way or just every so often. Don’t try to tackle every argument or area of need at once.

D. Take advantage of natural areas and be intentional. – That is, the best witnessing is found on your own turf. Ask God to show you how to bring Jesus to family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

E. Ask God for opportunities. – We have not because we ask not. If we would pray more often for witnessing we would get them.

F. Pray

1. Beforehand when specifically going into an expected time of witnessing or when hoping to witness. Pray for God to give opportunity, to open hearts, to give you the words to say, for the Holy Spirit to work.

2. At the time you are witnessing. Don’t leave God out of your conversation.

3. For the person after the conversation. The Holy Spirit can continue to minister to the person when you are no longer with them. And he can use things you said, seeds you planted. Concerted prayer is the best thing for them. A good prayer is St. Augustine’s, “Lord, make them restless until they find their rest in you.”

G. Ask questions and listen. Don’t be too quick with answers to questions you haven’t been asked. Get to know the person, be attentive to their needs, find out what they believe, etc.

– Why would this be helpful?

1. Asking questions can show interest and love.
2. Asking questions can get someone to think through things and see problems in his beliefs for himself.
3. Listening is humble, loving, and shows love.
4. Listening can help you to know how to address the person's concerns.
5. Asking questions and listening can show respect and gentleness and prevent turning someone off by being too forceful or controlling. Of course, the way you ask questions can still be disrespectful or overly forceful or controlling, so be careful to avoid that.

H. Seek to bring people to a point of decision if possible/appropriate (“close the deal”).

I. Rejoice in the Lord and his gospel.

– How might this impact evangelism? → If the gospel is good news to you, then that makes the gospel attractive. If the gospel is not good news to you, no one will want your gospel.

J. Cultivate a lifestyle of evangelism.

K. Do your part and not the Lord's

1. This is one of the most important truths of all for evangelism. Only the Holy Spirit can save people (consider Jn 16:8-11). Once you've said your piece, don't be afraid to leave people in His hand. Remember also these two truths:
2. Isaiah 55:10-11 – If we have faithfully spoken God's Word then it will, in time, produce good effect.
3. 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 – We all have our part to play in the saving work of God. Though we might not see the conversion, our planting or watering was no less valuable.

VI. Q & A (If time)

VII. Role Playing (If time)

Conclusion

We have a great privilege. God has chosen to use the humble and lowly to proclaim his glory. He displays his worthiness through the unworthy. He shares with us the responsibility of broadcasting the Good News to all the earth. God has called us to witness for Jesus Christ and his salvation in word and deed. Let us trust the Lord and be part of the answer to the prayer of Jesus – “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”