

Ten Things the Church Must Understand about Evangelism

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God's people will never be evangelistic until we have a biblical understanding of evangelism.

-1- Evangelism requires right understanding.

Evangelistic efforts must stem from a biblical understanding of evangelism. There are many ways to go wrong in evangelism—fear, vain ambition, competition, pride. You can undoubtedly add to the list. If we do not begin with a biblical understanding, we get off course. Begin by understanding that biblical evangelism is sharing Good News, teaching the gospel, with the aim to persuade.

-2- Common thinking about evangelism often includes things that are not evangelism.

Evangelism is the label given to things that are not evangelism. We must not confuse sharing the gospel with related activities or the fruit of the gospel in our own lives. Is sharing your testimony evangelism? Is defending the Christian faith evangelism? How about doing good deeds for the oppressed? These are good things that serve and support evangelism, but they are not evangelism itself.

-3- Evangelism is sharing the Good News, teaching the gospel.

Evangelism means teaching the gospel. God teaches us the gospel through his Word; we do not "figure it out" on our own. It stands to reason that we must speak and teach the gospel to others—the truth about who God is, why we're in the mess we're in, what Jesus came to do, and how we are to respond to him. Paul often described his evangelistic ministry as a teaching ministry.

-4- Evangelism is natural.

When one receives good news, it is natural to share it. When you find a product that works, everyone you see hears about it. Sharing good news is natural—the birth of a baby, a new job, a promotion, the cancer is gone! Evangelism is natural. If not, is it because we do not realize how good the news is?

-5- Evangelism proclaims and persuades.

Evangelism is proclamation. Evangelism seeks to persuade. We want to see people move from darkness to light. That goal helps us know what things to talk about and what things to leave out. Evangelism is not data transfer; we must listen to people, hear their objections, and model gentleness because we know that souls are at stake. And we know what it means to truly convert: a true Christian has put his complete faith and trust in Jesus, so much so that he has repented of a lifestyle of unbelief and sin. This understanding guards us from false conversions, which are the assisted suicide of the church.

-6- Evangelism requires a right spirit and right motivation.

Evangelism is undergirded by love and unity. Jesus said that love is the evidence of discipleship. He prayed that his disciples would be unified "so that the world will believe that you have sent me." Jesus says the love we have for one another is evidence that we are Christians. When we are unified, we show the world that Jesus is the Son of God. Love confirms our discipleship, and unity confirms Christ's deity.

-7- Evangelism requires right thinking, right actions, and right attitudes.

A culture of evangelism is strengthened by right practices and right attitudes. We must see evangelism as a spiritual discipline. We intentionally pray for our non-Christian friends and we must be intentional in sharing our faith with them. The gospel is the Good News of salvation; it is also the center around which we align our lives to God.

-8- Evangelism is not the work of professionals—evangelism is the purpose and work of the church. Evangelism is designed for the church and the church is designed for evangelism. A healthy church with a culture of evangelism is the key to great evangelism. Jesus did not forget the gospel when he built his church; in fact, the church is meant to display the gospel. The gathered church displays the gospel: we sing the gospel, we see the gospel in the Supper, and we hear the gospel when we preach and pray. A healthy culture of evangelism does not have to remake the church for the sake of evangelism. By simply being the church, we highlight the way God designed the church to display and proclaim the gospel.

-9- Evangelism is common in a church culture that recognizes the priority of evangelism. Evangelism flourishes in a culture of evangelism. Many churches give instruction about personal evangelism. That is good since we are each called to make disciples. But when people are working together to share the gospel, a culture forms that leads us to ask "Are we all helping our non-Christian friends understand the gospel?" rather than "Who has led the most people to Jesus?"

-10- Evangelism programs will kill evangelism. We must replace evangelistic programs with a culture of evangelism. Programs are to evangelism what sugar is to nutrition: a strict diet of evangelistic programs produces malnutrition. I feel a healthy unease about evangelistic programs. Use them strategically and in moderation, if at all.

Conclusion

Finally, I write a word to church leaders—elders, preachers, ministers. Evangelism must be modeled and mentored. One of the greatest needs in our churches today is for church leaders to boldly model what it means to be an ambassador of the gospel. Pastors and elders must lead the way in sharing their faith, teaching others how to be ambassadors for Christ, and calling their congregations to do the same.