Notes on Evangelism

It would not be possible to define exactly how, or where, or with whom we should share the good news of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, there is no right "style" of evangelism. No special context is necessary, other than love. Evangelism may be done in the context of any activity inside the church or outside of it. The Spirit will move as He wishes.

The important thing is that we are ready for, and obedient to, the Holy Spirit when He leads us to share our faith. He will lead us. This is an essential point of the text of scripture. This was the reality behind the practice of Paul and the other apostles. We observe an especially instructive case with Philip (the evangelist, not the apostle) and the Ethiopian in Acts 8. The Spirit told Philip to go up to the Ethiopian's chariot and stay near it. Philip obeyed and very soon a way was opened for Philip to proclaim the gospel to the man. This is how we should conduct ourselves.

When we proclaim the gospel to crowds, we should do so as the Spirit leads us. The Spirit leads us in evangelism as He leads us in all ways of life.

We ought not to be formulaic or mechanical in our proclamation. We ought to be relational, yet the heart of our good news is clear. We are witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

Abraham went out at the bidding of God, having only the promise that God would be with him. Jesus has now given us the Great Commission, and we have the promise that he will be with us (Matthew 28:18-20). When we are tempted to be fearful, and the devil will undoubtedly do this, we should remember that the Lord said very succinctly that we are blessed when we are persecuted because God will give us the great blessings of the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:17). We should confess our fears to other believers and ask them to pray for us, like Paul did (Ephesians 6:19-20). As we are obedient to the Lord's commands, he shows himself to us (John 14:21).

We should not resort to carefully reasoned and learned defenses of our faith. We are tempted to temper the stumbling block of the gospel by seeking, even though it is only an illusion, common ground in the humanistic studies of philosophy, history, science and so forth. Such defenses obscure the true nature of faith, which is nothing less than a miracle! Paul himself sets an example for us of "knowing nothing" except the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2:1-5). We are just witnesses. We are witnesses of the presence of God and of the presence in the Church of His son Jesus Christ, and we have observed the kingdom of God by faith. We are just witnesses; we are not like lawyers who argue their cases. We proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in a straightforward manner and make room for the work of the Holy Spirit who alone can bring people to faith in Jesus Christ. A word of advice to the apologists-- just get out of the way! The whole history of rationalistic and evidential apologetics is a blind alley. Its legitimacy is refuted by Jesus' teaching to his disciples that the real hurdle to faith is the devil himself who steals the word away from people's hearts (Luke 8:12). In evangelism, only the Spirit can overcome the devil (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). We repeat: Satan is an impossible hurdle to faith except for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Van Tilian presuppositional apologetics has no merit either. This type of apologetics is broken because of its reliance on the theology of general revelation. This type of apologetics is also broken because it relies on the doctrine of the revelatory nature of all of scripture, which is a misunderstanding and a distortion of what scripture is. Presuppositional apologetics accomplishes nothing. The gospel must still be proclaimed, and the Holy Spirit must still overcome the devil's complete domination over the hearts of human beings. Presuppositional apologists have lost sight

of the goal of evangelism. If they were racers, what they would do is stay at the starting line after the gun has gone off and talk about all kinds of things with anyone who was nearby. This type of apologetics is a contradiction of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. More criticism of the doctrine of the revelatory nature of all of scripture is forthcoming in the next chapter.

Beware of being defensive or judgmental in evangelism. We should just tell what God has done for us. We will be tested at times by those who demand that we prove by analysis that the gospel is true. Resist analysis if you have understood that our Lord is himself the truth-- he is the truth-- and the Spirit reveals him to whomever God Almighty chooses. All the arguments and analysis that have been churned up relentlessly throughout the last several hundred years in the history of Western Christianity are irrelevant to the task of evangelism. Understand that I am not undermining the humanistic studies themselves. Neither am I saying that Christians should not study the humanities. I am merely insisting that they do not form a basis for evangelism. The basis of evangelism is faith, and the results of evangelism are in the hands of God alone, and evangelism that results in faith is nothing less than a miracle. Indeed, if you have come to faith in Christ, you know that you have experienced a miracle because you have witnessed the presence of Jesus Christ in your life. Faith has a divine origin. The origin of faith is the Holy Spirit alone (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

If the word "fideism" is a derogatory term in anybody's vocabulary, we point out that it is not only 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 that puts such strong emphasis on faith and the Spirit's power-- other contexts do the same. Anyone who thinks that fideism is incorrect is one very small step from being seen as a false teacher. Mark these words carefully: Rationalistic, presuppositional, and evidential apologetics are a denial of the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul insists that faith has a divine origin in the power of the Holy Spirit alone. According to the apostle, human wisdom has no part-- none. We remind everyone that it was Schleiermacher who demoted faith to a position beneath reason and feeling. If anyone thinks that this procedure is correct after all, then you may join his school and see where it leads you. Someone will say, "We don't want to demote faith; we just think reasoned arguments have a role in evangelism." Reason has a role in the heart of the Christian, although faith occupies the central position. In the heart of the unbeliever, the devil has complete control, including reason, feelings, everything (Luke 8:12). The devil can only be overcome by the Spirit. You claim not to be demoting faith, but any diminishment of the power of the Spirit is a denial of the divine origin of faith. Does the Spirit need help? You have demoted faith and have enrolled in the school of Schleiermacher. If you think rationalistic, presuppositional, or evidential arguments can play a role in evangelism, you are in direct contradiction to the teaching and practice of Paul, who did not want faith to rest on human wisdom at all, but only on the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5). Your teaching has reached the goal line of false teaching. A clear call is being made to the churches to lay aside rationalistic, presuppositional, and evidential apologetics in evangelism and follow the teaching and practice of Paul.

Commercial products and books are available that we can explore in our search for methods and approaches to evangelism. At the end of it all, Jesus calls us to be just witnesses and tell what we know. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting concerning what you should say. This sensitivity to the Holy Spirit requires a life that is spiritually formed. This is why we should see evangelism as one of the many Christian practices and disciplines that we practice: prayer, worship (which includes Holy Communion), Bible study, resisting temptation, love, service, caring for those both inside and outside the Church, peacemaking, giving forgiveness, seeking forgiveness when we have offended someone else, giving generously, fellowship with other believers, sharing our faith, solitude, meditation on the scripture, and confessing our sin to God. If we want to commit ourselves to evangelism, then we need to commit ourselves to practicing all the practices. Evangelism actually begins by practicing all the spiritual practices in which we seek to be engaged

by the presence of the living God, for whom there is no substitute, and by the presence of His son Jesus Christ through the fellowship of the Spirit who is as near to us as our own heartbeat, and we do know Him (John 14:17). This is how we really start-- we cultivate our fellowship with the Holy Spirit through the Christian practices. We "sow to the Spirit" in the words of Paul (Galatians 6:7-10).

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