

## **Bible Study for February 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Only the sheer rapture of being lost in the worship of God is as exhilarating and intoxicating as telling someone about Jesus Christ. Yet nothing causes an eye-dropping, foot-shuffling anxiety more quickly among a group of Christians like myself than talking about our responsibility to evangelize. In fact, I'm sure I don't know a single Christian who would boldly say, "I am as evangelistic as I should be."

The main idea I want to communicate is that Godliness requires that we discipline ourselves in the practice of evangelism. The reason many of us don't witness for Christ in ways that would be effective and relatively fear-free is simply because we don't discipline ourselves to do it.

### **Evangelism Is Expected**

All Christians are not expected to use the same *methods* of evangelism, but all Christians are expected to evangelize. Before we go further, let's define our terms. What is evangelism? If we want to define it thoroughly, we could say that evangelism is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people, in order that they may come to put their trust in God through Him, to receive Him as their Savior, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church (*J.I. Packer*). If we want to define it simply, we could say that New Testament evangelism is communicating the gospel. Anyone who faithfully relates the essential elements of God's salvation through Jesus Christ is evangelizing. This is true whether your words are spoken, written, or recorded, and whether they are delivered to one person or to a crowd.

Why is evangelism expected? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself has commanded us to witness. Consider His authority in Matthew 28:19-20. In John 20:21 Jesus said, "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

These commands weren't given to the apostles only. For example, the apostles never came to *this* nation, and the apostles will never come to your home, your neighborhood, or to the place where you work. For the Great Commission to be fulfilled, for Christ to have a witness in that "remote part" of the earth, a Christian like you must discipline yourself to do it.

### **Evangelism Is Empowered**

If it is so obvious to almost all Christians that we are to evangelize, how come almost all Christians seem to disobey that command so often? Some believe that they need a lot of specialized training to witness effectively. They are afraid to talk to someone about Christ until they feel confident that they have an adequate amount of Bible knowledge and could deal with any potential question or objection.

The problem is that confident day never comes. Sometimes we are unable to speak of Christ because we are afraid that people will think we are strange and will reject us. In some cases, the method of witnessing we're asked to use causes our evangelophobia. If it requires approaching someone we've never met before and striking up a conversation about Christ, most people will be terrified and indicate it by their absence. I think the seriousness of evangelism is the main reason it frightens us. We realize that in talking with someone about Christ, Heaven and hell are at stake. The eternal destiny of the person is the issue. Many Christians feel too unprepared for this kind of challenge.

What is success in evangelism? Is it when the people you witness to comes to Christ? Certainly, that's what we want to happen. But if this is success, are we failures whenever we share the gospel and people refuse to believe? Was

**Legislators' Weekly Bible study meets each Tuesday (except following a Monday holiday) and Thursday in Capitol Annex Room 436 from 12:00-12:30 pm. It is the same study both days to allow flexibility for everyone's committee schedules.**

Jesus an “evangelistic failure” when people like the rich young ruler turned away from Him and His message? Obviously not.

We need to learn that sharing the gospel *is* successful evangelism. We ought to have an obsession for souls and tearfully plead with God to see more people converted, but conversions are fruit that God alone can give. In this regard we are like the postal service. Success is measured by the careful and accurate delivery of the message, not by the response of the recipient. Whenever we share the gospel (which includes the summons to repent and believe), we have succeeded. In the truest sense, *all* biblical evangelism is successful evangelism, regardless of the results.

The power of evangelism is the Holy Spirit. From the instant that He indwells us He gives us the power to witness. Jesus stressed this in Acts 1:8. We are not all empowered to evangelize the same way, but all believers have been given power to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. The evidence that you’ve been given the power to witness is a changed life. The same Holy Spirit power that changed your life for Christ is the power to witness for Christ. So, if God by His Spirit has changed your life, be confident of this: God has given you Acts 1:8 power, and the Holy Spirit may grant much power to your witness in an evangelistic encounter without giving to you any *feeling* or *sense* of power in it.

We can be confident that some will believe if we will faithfully and tenaciously share the gospel. It is the *gospel* that is the power of God for salvation and not our own eloquent power or persuasiveness. God has His elect whom He will call and whom He has chosen to call *through the gospel* (Romans 8:29-30, 10:17).

There is also a power for evangelism in the one living a sincere Christian life. Paul describes the power of Godliness in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, which says that the Lord empowers the life and the words of the faithful believer with a power of spiritual attraction. The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God’s Word by one who is living God’s Word.

### **Evangelism Is a Discipline**

Evangelism is a natural overflow of the Christian life. We should all be able to talk about what the Lord has done for us and what He means to us. But evangelism is also a *Discipline* in that we must discipline ourselves to get into the context of evangelism, not just wait for witnessing opportunities to happen.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Any Christian who has heard biblical preaching, participated in Bible studies, and read the Scriptures and Christian literature for any time at all should have enough understanding of the basic message of Christianity to share it with someone else. Even so, many Christians don’t actively witness.

Isn’t the reason we don’t witness because we don’t *discipline* ourselves to do it? Yes, there are those wonderful, unplanned opportunities “to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15) that God brings unexpectedly. But most Christians haven’t disciplined themselves to act on these opportunities. So, the point is not how many unbelievers you see every day, but how often you are with them in an appropriate context for sharing the gospel. Despite the important work-related conversations you may have throughout the day, how often do you have meaningful conversations with coworkers where spiritual issues can be raised?

That’s why I say evangelism is a Spiritual Discipline. Unless we discipline ourselves for evangelism, it is very easy to excuse ourselves from ever sharing the gospel with anyone. You’ll have to discipline yourself to ask your neighbors how you can pray for them or when you can share a meal with them. You’ll have to discipline yourself to get with your coworkers during off-hours. Many such opportunities for evangelism will never take place if you wait for them to occur spontaneously. The world, the flesh, and the Devil will do their best to see to that. You, however, backed by the invincible power of the Holy Spirit, can make sure that these enemies of the gospel do not win.

Regardless of how shy or unskilled we may feel about evangelism, we must not convince ourselves that we cannot or will not verbally share the gospel. Often it is the message of the Cross *lived and demonstrated* that God uses to open a heart to the gospel, but it is the message of the Cross *proclaimed* (by word or page) through which the power of God saves those who believe its content. No matter how well we live the gospel (and we must live it well, else we hinder its reception), sooner or later we must communicate the *content* of the gospel before a person can become a disciple of Jesus.

This study adapted from chapter six of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney.