

Bible Study on Evangelism – Handout 4

Developing Biblical Understanding

Grace Bible Chapel

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Pastor/Teacher Jim Bryant

This session we will continue the focus on the “what” of salvation in relation to understanding of the Bible’s definition of the content of evangelism. An understanding of true conversion is essential in the formation of a biblical perspective for evangelism.

What takes place where there is true conversion?

- The initial call of God is essential and therefore must be considered as such by the person planning an evangelistic approach.
 - Col 1:13-14 “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” 1 Pet 2:9 “Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” It must be essentially understood that the evangelist is not the one initiating true conversion. God is always the Person that initiates the call to salvation. Without the true call of God, there is only a religious exercise taking place.
 - How does God determine to initiate this true conversion? “preach the gospel to you (evangelize) that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and all that is in them” Acts 14:15. It is through the preaching of the gospel.
 - In these passages and in others the verbal proclamation of God’s Word always precedes the work of God in the heart (Rom 10:9-10).
 - The instrumentality is always the Word of God (Deut 30:15; Rom 10:17; 1 Thess 2:13; Rom 9:6). It is never gimmicks, human logic, or strategically applied emotions and pressure.
- Man’s corresponding reaction to God’s call where a true conversion takes place always includes repentance or a turning. This is man’s response to what God is working in the heart. It has with it the very character of a life changing lasting decision.
 - If there is no lasting testimony than the conversion was not real (1 John 5:19; 1 Pet 1:7; Phil 1:6).
 - “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). The word “repent” *metanoeo* – means “to think differently.” The word “return” *epistrepho* – means “to literally, or morally revert, convert or turn about.” “That you should turn from these vain things to a living God” (Acts 14:15) – the same word (*epistrepho*). The idea of “vain things” are those things that do not please God, and have no true spiritual value. In evangelism, those involved in practicing evangelism should be formulating their effort around true change, not theoretical, religious, or even invisible positional change.
 - In Acts 26:18 the same word for turning is also used “turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.” Paul is quoting Christ, and states clarity of what this turning (repentance) entails. It is a turning from darkness (having to do with the darkness of one’s thinking, their blindness) to light (one’s thinking, their understanding of the truth) and dwelling with the mind in the place of truth (the Bible). He also describes it as a change from the dominion of Satan (Eph 2:2; 1 Thess 1:9) to the dominion of God. This change is a radical change of masters - associated with will, devotion, commitment, thinking, and actions. It is therefore real and lasting.
- Is conversion instantaneous or a process? The moment of conversion is seen in the Bible as instantaneous. It must begin with the new birth (John 3:3 “unless one is born again he cannot see,” Acts 13:48; 16:14; Eph 2:5-9), followed by faith, and repentance. However, these things appear for practical purposes to be simultaneous at that moment of actual conversion.
 - Terms that would indicate that conversion is instantaneous rather than a process over time:
 - Blind to seeing (John 9:39; 2 Cor 4: 3-4)
 - Darkness to light (Isa 8:20; 9:2; 2 Cor 4:3-4)
 - Death to life (Eph 2:5; Rom 4:17)
 - Lost to found (Luke 15:6-7)
 - Perishing to saved (1 Cor 1:18)
 - Old to new (2 Cor 5:17)

- There are passages in the Scriptures that indicate there are processes contributing to the ultimate moment in time of the conversion of a sinner (that is God uses His Word whether instantaneous or providentially as seeds are planted):
 - Prov 9:10; 22:6; Ps 1; Mat 7:13; John 8:31-32; 1 Cor 3:6-7; 10; 2 Pet 1:19.
 - In 1st Tim 1:12–16 at the conversion of the apostle Paul he was a religious man, and no doubt his knowledge of the Scripture was thorough although he was blind to real understanding. God no doubt used Paul’s vast knowledge once his heart was opened on the road to Damascus as the catalyst for his conversion. It is stated that he “immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues” (Acts 9:20-22). In addition he is seen immediately “confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.” His ability to communicate such arguments immediately undoubtedly came from his vast knowledge of the Scripture which upon conversion he understood in the light of Christ.
- True salvation is always a real work, and a revolutionary work, but is it always manifested as such immediately, and if so how? There is a point of time in conversion whereby the conversion is real, and should be identifiable as such by the manner of life that follows (Mat 7:16-20).
 - In Acts 8 we have the account of Simon who is stated to have believed and was baptized (Acts 8:13). However, when we get to verse 19–21 we find that his conversion was not real. Peter states “your heart is not right before God” (Acts 8:21). He elaborates this even further in Acts 8:23. This brings to mind the following:
 - There are differing levels of belief (James 2:19). The fact of true conversion requires a new birth – meaning a work of God in the heart (John 3).
 - The act of conversion before others can be manufactured by any sincere person.
 - Just because someone goes through the motions stating belief, and desiring to be baptized does not mean that God has effectually worked in the heart creating the new birth.
 - It does also mean that God is not obligated to create a new heart based on someone’s confession, or actions of going through the motions giving the right answers.
 - It further must mean that when someone is truly converted, there is immediately (although not perfectly) the indication that a major change in the heart has taken place (Acts 8:23).
 - True conversion is revolutionary in changing the heart (2 Cor 5:17), but it does not mean the heart is mature. The sanctification process (growth in Christ) must not be confused with the reality of true conversion (Rom 12:2). A passages context should be studied carefully to avoid the so-called “carnal-Christian” error often confused with someone yet unregenerate.
- There are however, often processes over time contributing to the ultimate conversion of a sinner, and the Scripture admonishes the evangelist to continue presenting the Word of God, as it is always through the Word that God works to draw sinners.
 - The evangelist is not admonished from the Bible to make confessions, but is to make followers (that is true conversions with a change of nature characterized by a desire to follow Christ).
 - The spiritually dead cannot worship God, seek God, or do good works.
 - Gimmicks, religion, relationships, lifestyle, apologetics, nor service will open the eyes of the spiritually blind. God the Holy Spirit works sovereignly as the Word is proclaimed (1 Pet 1:23).
 - This also means that specific actions prompted to evoke a personal decision indicating the person now is embracing Christ such as alter calls, prayers, phrases, card signings, or hand raisings, etc. are not biblical or necessary. If God has worked in the heart in true conversion, as the Word is presented, the person will be converted. That same conversion is to be made publicly known by the converted person through the ordinance of baptism (Mat 28:19; Acts 2:38; 8:12; 1 Cor 12:13).

What should be presented to the person(s) being evangelized?

- The Bible itself must be presented, and the nature of the Bible is such that it alone brings conviction. Within the presentation of the Bible whether in the Old Testament or New, or within almost every context there are themes that are consistent. There are three essential components repeatedly presented throughout the Bible as keys to a message directed to the lost. These must be presented from the Word of God clearly without compromise, or confusion.
 - Sin has separated all men from God their creator, sustainer, and judge.
 - There is a need to understand the holiness, justice, and judgment of God toward sin.
 - All men have personal sins that have ruined their nature and condemn them (Eccl 7:20; Rom 3:9-12; 23).

- All men are under the curse because they are sons of Adam (Gen 6:5; Rom 5:12-19).
- "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23) - this is the just decree of God and refers to eternal separation from God who is righteous, and will not allow the guilty to merely go free (Ex 34:7).
 - All men are condemned, in their natural condition (John 3:36), to an eternity away from the presence of God and spoken of as hell (a place of severe eternal damnation).
 - The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment in those He sovereignly chooses to convict as the Word of God is presented (John 16:8; Heb 4:12).
 - Without a clear knowledge of personal accountability there can be no true repentance, confession, or forgiveness.
- God has provided a means for man to escape His just punishment. It is through His Son and what He did by dying, rising from the grave (defeating death), and ascending to the right hand of God the Father (Rom 6:23) showing His triumphant work and eternal position of authority.
 - The death of Christ for sin (Is 53:5-6; Rom 5:8; 6:10; 1 Pet 2:24).
 - The resurrection of Christ showing His defeat of sin (Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:20).
 - The forgiveness of God through the death of His Son (Is 53:5-6; 2 Cor 5:21; Col 2:13; 1 Pet 2:24).
 - That God's forgiveness is exclusively through His Son and by grace alone - a free gift that is given and shown through the one receiving it by their faith (Eph 2:1-9).
- There is the requirement of a serious commitment to God in yielding to His right and in accordance to His revealed will (Luke 24:47).
 - The clear command (Luke 24:27).
 - The requirement (Mat 10:38-39; 2 Cor 5:15).
 - The serious nature of (Heb 3:7; 2 Cor 6:2).
 - The aspects of the commitment:
 - Repentance (Is 55:6-7; Mark 1:15; Luke 24:47).
 - Faith in Christ (John 5:24; Acts 16:30-31; Eph 2:8-9; Heb 11:6).
 - Christ is made Lord of the life leading to the bearing of fruit or good works (Rom 12:1; Eph 2:10; James 2:17).

Points of Discussion:

- There is with the whole effort of evangelizing an understanding of one's dependence on God and the super natural nature of the conversion of a sinner. It is God who has determined whom He will save, the means, the timing, and the circumstances.
- There is a need to take the Bible as the exclusive means God has chosen to draw His elect to Himself. As God uses His Word, the Bible must be utilized in the fullest expression of its purpose and ability. It must be presented prayerfully, and accurately. As the Word is the truth, it needs no help (no smoothing, watering down, bridges, or twisting), no additions, and no outside props. Nor does it need to be diminished, or weakened in those perceived areas where it is offensive to man's natural condition. That is not to say that God has not determined that the Word is to be embellished by presentation through men gifted to present its truth in the most passionate means (2 Tim 4:2; Col 1:25; Titus 2:15).
- The action of evangelizing must be one whereby the truth is presented as affectively as possible, but the results are prayerfully left to the work of the Holy Spirit. This means that all manner of human gimmicks focused on getting a person to make a decision, as if the decision of the person is sovereign, is wrong. True conversion radically changes the person beginning within and thereby transforming everything about the person. The effects are immediately seen, and continue the remainder of the life.
- The presentation of the Word may appear as a process. It may plant seeds, and bring conviction for an extended time prior to conversion. Conversion is a point in time, but that point may have been being providentially developed over a period of time in hearing the Word. Growth in the Word beyond conversion continues a maturing process (sanctification) of the one saved.
- A careful examination of the themes of the Word, which ultimately is the story of Christ, show three basic essentials God uses throughout His Word to evangelize the elect – sin has separated man from God for whom man must give an account, God has provided a means of redemption through His Son, and there is a requirement of man to make a life changing commitment to believe and obey the Son.