

# The Big Four in Evangelism

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God in His word devotes a lot of time to telling us what sort of people we are to be. However, these commandments aren't just an unrelated jumble of different decrees. Instead, all of the different commandments fit together, so that when we put them together, they make up an interlocking system of ethics. Obviously, at the top of this ethical pyramid, we find love. Jesus Himself tells us that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbor. Every other commandment logically follows from the overall command to love.

In addition to love, though, there are three other basic things that Christians are commanded to be. They aren't quite as important as love, but, judging from the frequency with which they occur in Scripture, they are more important than the rest of the commandments. First, Christians are commanded to be wise. God expects us to know His word and use it to make good life decisions. Second, we are commanded to be holy. Because God is holy, we are to be holy and righteous in all our behavior like He is. Third, we are commanded to be persevering. Christianity is a marathon, not a sprint, and unless we have the determination to endure until the end, we will not receive what has been promised.

When we put these together in a list, we have the four main pillars of our faith, and we should constantly evaluate our life in these four areas. If we succeed in being loving, wise, holy, and persevering, we are certain to inherit eternal life. However, these four things also tell us how to operate in any one area of our lives. If we want to have a good marriage, for instance, if we practice love, wisdom, holiness, and perseverance in that marriage, we're doing our part.

This is also true about seeking and saving the lost. Many Christians flounder when it comes to personal work, but if we practice these four ideals, we will be effective soul-winners. Let's look, then, at the Big Four in evangelism.

## Love and Wisdom

The biggest of the Big Four, of course, is **LOVE**, and unless you are a new member here or like to sleep through sermons, you should have a pretty good idea that love is important in evangelism. After all, we spent all of last year talking about "agape evangelism", and *agape* is just the Greek word for selfless love, like the love that Christ has for sinners. Today, *agape* should be just as important in our lives. First of all, we should be moved to win souls by our love for God. Look at John's commentary on the connection between love and action in 1 John 5:3. Loving God is not just about singing praises to Him. It's about putting that love into action by obeying Him even when it's hard.

Certainly, evangelism can be hard. However, we should be willing to invest that effort because God cares about it so much. Every single human being out there is precious to Him. They hurt Him terribly with their sins, but He loves them so much that He sent His Son to earth to die the death that they have earned. When even a single sinner repents, it makes God so happy that heaven is filled with the rejoicing of angels. Don't we want God to be that happy? Don't we love Him enough to give back to Him after all He's given for us? If so, we will work to help sinners repent.

Likewise, we should be motivated in evangelism by our own love for the sinner. Once again, this is not a words-only thing. Look at John 3:18. We can talk all we want about how terrible it is for the people of the world to be eternally lost. We can offer up these beautiful, eloquent prayers for the salvation of these poor, suffering sinners. However, if we aren't working in our lives to bring those lost people to their Savior, if we aren't constantly looking for opportunities to reach out to the sinners whom we know, that's all that our love is. It's just talk.

Love isn't about fine words. Love isn't about good intentions. Love is about action, and if that action isn't evident in our lives, the absence says something fairly ugly about us. It says that we love ourselves more than we love others. It could be that we're afraid. We fear that evangelism will have such negative consequences—for us—that we aren't willing to make the attempt. However, as John says, perfect love casts out fear, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. It could be that we're arrogant. We regard the sinners in our lives with such snobbery and contempt that we don't want to lower ourselves to their level. Before we get too impressed with our own righteousness, though, we'd better remember Jesus. He was infinitely more righteous than we will ever be, but He still lowered Himself to our level. He spent His ministry preaching to the lowest elements of Jewish society, tax collectors and prostitutes, because He loved even people like that. We must learn to love like Jesus and be willing to reach out to the lost like He did.

However, **WISDOM** is nearly as important to evangelism as love is. The first element of wisdom in evangelism is knowing how to use the word. Let's consider Paul's instruction to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15. In other places, the Scripture is compared to a sword. Here, it's compared to a tool, and we are to know how to use that tool. In my life, I've met several men who were really good with their hands, and I think that's true of both of our elders here. Joe makes some of the most beautiful furniture I've ever seen, and if there's anything that John Meyer can't make or fix by himself, I don't know what it is. We need to have that level of ability when we use the word. If someone has a spiritual question, we need to be able to point them to the answer. There's some talent associated with that, but by and large, it's a skill. Just

like using a saw or repairing a tractor, it's something that you learn how to do by doing. If we want to be unashamed workmen, the only way for us to get there is by studying the word on our own and then using the word to teach others. If we do that, we will find that the Scripture will be more useful in our lives than we had ever dreamed.

Second, wisdom teaches us to know when and how to use the word. Let's read together a passage we've seen before in this context, Colossians 4:5-6. We aren't going to be effective personal workers if we walk up to total strangers and just start beating them over the head with the Bible. That might demonstrate our knowledge, but it doesn't demonstrate wisdom. Instead, we should look for opportunities. Some opportunities arise on their own; others are opportunities we create through love and good works. Then, once opportunity knocks, we should make the most of it. That's not the time to be crass and offensive. Instead, we must speak with graciousness and humility. Our goal must never be to prove how right we are. We should only seek to help the other learn how to become right with God. This doesn't require some kind of Einstein-level intellect. We don't have to lean, and indeed must not lean, on our own cleverness of speech. Instead, we should have enough wisdom simply to point them to the gospel and let it do its work.

### **Holiness and Perseverance**

Just as we must practice wisdom in our evangelism, so too we must also practice **HOLINESS**. This holiness should manifest itself in two main ways. First, we must learn to be holy ourselves. Peter exhorts us to righteous living in 1 Peter 2:12. We think that we have a big problem today with those who believe that all Christians are hypocrites, but in reality, the image problem of the church was far worse in the first century. Back then, many non-Christians believed that during the Lord's Supper, the early Christians killed other people, ate their flesh, and drank their blood. Just imagine trying to teach the gospel to someone who thought you were a murderer and a cannibal! That was the sort of rumor that couldn't be overcome by mere denial. Instead, the first-century brethren had to show by their conduct that all the accusations made against the church were ridiculous. Of course, all of the philandering preachers and child-molesting priests who wear the name of Christ don't do us any favors today. Plenty of people in the world assume that we get drunk like they do, cheat on our spouses like they do, tell dirty jokes like they do, and that the only difference is we get together and lie about it on Sunday. Friends, if we want to save a single soul, that had better not be true of us. We must live blameless lives if we wish to convince others that we are genuine disciples of Christ.

Second, our love of holiness should make us want to lead others to be holy. Let's think about Paul's words in Acts 17:30. As we said above, we don't want to be unnecessarily abrasive or offensive in our dealings with others. We need to meet people where they are and work with them there. However, we should not allow that graciousness to become tolerance or acceptance. People have the right to make their own decisions, but it is fundamentally not OK for them to practice evil. God doesn't wink at all the wickedness in our society. It grieves Him and disgusts Him. If all of those wicked people continue in their wickedness, they're going to suffer eternally for it. We should never become so comfortable with the sin around us that we forget that. Instead, just like Paul was provoked by all the idols in Athens to preach, the evil we see should provoke us to speak out. The goal here isn't just to vent. That accomplishes nothing. Instead, we should so desire to lead others to be holy that we look to persuade them to fear and obey God.

The final ingredient of our recipe for evangelism is **PERSEVERANCE**. We won't get to heaven ourselves without it, and we won't get others to heaven without it either. First, we should learn to persevere in our efforts to teach others. Paul encourages this kind of steadfastness in Galatians 6:9. Sooner or later, if we keep plugging away at leading others to Christ, somebody is going to obey the gospel. This is true first of all of our efforts with any particular person. Sometimes, we think that if we try to talk to somebody once and he doesn't listen, we've done our job, and we can shake the dust off our feet and move on. Usually, though, that's not the way it works. As we've seen over the past several years from the members here who have had success teaching others, those were people who didn't give up. They never got tired of raising the issue. They never got tired of presenting the gospel in a loving but straightforward way. Eventually, that kind of teaching sank in, and they had the joy of seeing their son or daughter or grandson obey the gospel.

Secondly, though, even if we find ourselves in such confrontations over the truth that it's obvious that this particular person is never going to put on Christ, that shouldn't lead us to give up on evangelism altogether. Even if the one heart we're trying to reach is hard, there are other hearts out there that aren't. We need to keep looking.

In addition, we need to be persevering with those who do become Christians. The Hebrews writer advises this in Hebrews 3:13. Here, of course, he's talking about all Christians, but this is especially important with new converts. The Bible calls those people babes in Christ, and just like we give a physical baby an extra level of care, we need to give a spiritual baby an extra level of care. They need more support, teaching, and encouragement than a mature Christian does.

This is something that every member of the congregation can help with. As I've said before, I know evangelism is intimidating to many brethren, and if you're not ready for full-blown saving the lost, take a few baby steps by learning how to keep the saved. Make an effort to form friendships with those who are new to the congregation or new to the Lord. Talk to them. Have them over for dinner. That can have a dramatic effect on the course of a soul too.