

XIX. L.E.A.D. in Biblical Perspective
Lifestyle of Evangelism and Discipleship
“Hindrances #5—Overcoming a Lack of Evangelism Clarity”
I Corinthians 3:1–10
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This is my last study on the hindrances to the work of evangelism. This study will cover a fifth hindrance where we will deal with a lack of clarity in two areas. So what are the two areas that hinder our ministry of making evangelism a lifestyle whereby we live the Gospel out and share the Gospel verbally with others? One is a lack of clarity of the Gospel message. What is the Gospel message in terms of its delivering power? Secondly, is a lack of clarity of the Gospel act/work of evangelism and that is how does the Gospel in evangelism get into the lives of others?

We will first look at the lack of clarity of the Gospel message and I highly commend to you John Stott’s outline of the Gospel where you start with the doctrine of God (who God is), then the doctrine of man (unregenerate, who man is), the doctrine of Christ (God’s solution to man’s problem), then the work of grace (why this provision has been given on our behalf) and then the call to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ with the warning of a heaven to gain and a hell to lose. This outline can be traced through the Scriptures and it is very helpful.

I’m going to give the definition of the Gospel through the short-hand definition that the Apostle Paul uses. We will be looking a couple of passages as we go through this study and I will give you some expositional thoughts on each text as we look at this matter of the Gospel message. I Corinthians 1:17 says [17] *For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach (proclaim) **the** gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

According to this text there is something definitive called *the* Gospel. When Paul says that Christ didn’t send him to baptize he is not saying that baptism is not in the Great Commission. He was fully aware that it was and that baptism was one of the sacraments of the church as the sign and seal of the New Covenant replacing circumcision from the Old Testament, the way the Lord’s Supper replaces the Passover from the Old Testament. These two bloody signs had not be abrogated and altered because of the fulfilling work of Jesus Christ. Christ is our circumcision having cut away our sin record and He is our Passover Lamb so that we now have bloodless signs and seals of the covenant. Baptism is the initiary sign of the covenant for believers and their households and then the Lord’s Supper.

Paul is saying that the Gospel is foundational here and if you don’t get the Gospel out and in place with clarity and integrity then sacraments become meaningless rituals that are followed. In other words the wellbeing of the right use of the sacraments in the church is dependent upon the prioritized and clear ministry and preaching of the Gospel in the church of Jesus Christ. So Paul says he is focused upon preaching this Gospel.

Then Paul says he doesn’t do it with words of eloquent wisdom. I would love to transpose you back to the first century to help you understand why this is important. The cross of Christ, when preached, was considered foolishness to the Greek mind. Corinth is like a suburb of Athens which is the philosophical capital of the world yet it is the reigning philosophies of Aristotle, Socrates and Plato. The platonic world and life view said the physical

is evil and the spiritual is good and the whole point of salvation is to escape the physical. Then they would say what you need is Sophus (wisdom).

If you're a preacher and you want to go somewhere to preach and contextualize the Gospel there is a very fine line between communicating the Gospel in the terms, words and mechanisms that the culture can understand to dismissing the Gospel by communicating the Gospel in the terms, words and mechanisms that the culture accepts. This is what has to be avoided. The Greek culture despised preaching and the cross for it made no sense to them. They even more despised the resurrection. Why would you want that body back? To them the whole point is to escape it. That's one of the reasons the burning of bodies is a mechanism of burial and was embraced by that world and life view. The Greek philosophy was that man was not a seeker of the truth and this stands in opposition to preaching.

Here Christians are preaching an atoning death on a cross that in His body He bore the sins of all of His people to pay for them for all of eternity and the method of proclaiming that. I used to get once every two to three weeks some email on what Bill O'Reilly where the person sending it to me would say 'isn't this wonderful how he defends the Christian philosophy of the faith?' The fact is, Christianity does not present itself as a philosophy. A philosophy by definition is the product of man's search for truth.

When I preach I'm not announcing man's illumination of truth but I'm announcing God's revelation of truth. We are proclaiming what God has revealed as truth – His Word. So this is the Apostle Paul's way of telling you that when he'd preach the Gospel he would not bow to the pressures of the culture to become a philosopher nor a rhetorician. He was absolutely committed to the proclamation of the Gospel of truth. Preaching is a verb that has been developed from noun that depicts the man that stands in the watchtower to cry out 'All's well' or 'All's not well.' The whole point is that preaching is a proclamation (of the Gospel) to a people of that which is true.

Then Paul gives a short-hand statement of what he preaches. He identifies the Gospel as the cross of Christ. We get the English word 'crucial' from the Latin word *crux*, which is a translation of the Greek word translated in the Bible as cross. The cross is the crucial point of all of history. The cross is the focal point of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's look to see how this is consistent. Paul's shorthand for the Gospel is the cross, the Word of the cross, the message of the cross, the cross of Christ.

I Corinthians 1:18 says [18] *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are **being saved** it is the **power of God**.* Romans 1:16 says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the **power of God** for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* The Gospel is the power of God and 'being saved' is something that is happening to you and not something that you are doing to yourself. You are saved by Christ through the Holy Spirit with the Word of the Gospel that Paul calls the Word of the cross. Again, the focal point of the Gospel message is declared to be the cross.

I Corinthians 1:19–21 says [19] *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."*

[20] *Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [21] For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.*

Paul is saying that the overall deliver of the Gospel is not something that is up for debate but it is something that is given out as a calling and a warning. What does this Gospel message

do? It saves us from our sins. It is not that everything that is wrong with this world will be eradicated before Jesus comes back. Although we praise God for every injustice that is righted, every mercy ministry that is done, every policy that is enacted that is consistent with the Christian world and life view that brings flourishing to humanity and for all of that but the thrust of the Gospel is the Word of the cross and it's a message of salvation, of deliverance.

Paul goes on to say in I Corinthians 1:22–25, [22] *For Jews demand signs (miracles) and Greeks seek wisdom (philosophies), [23] but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, [24] but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

I Corinthians 2:1–5 says [1] *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming (preaching) to you the testimony of God with lofty speech (an orator) or wisdom (a philosopher). [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (the Gospel). [3] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, [4] and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

Now I want to address the Gospel message. It is not come to Jesus and everything gets better. In fact, many came to Jesus and had to die. Everyone who comes to Jesus will suffer. Philippians 1:29 says [29] *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.* There is nothing more glorious than to know Jesus. We gladly embrace those moments in life and ask God for the strength that as our days are so shall our strength be. The Gospel message is the Good News that what was impossible in you and for you has been gloriously secured by God through His Son Jesus Christ and brought to you by His Spirit through the Gospel message to your soul. It is the glorious message that God has, is and will deliver you from your sins through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

We are getting ready to come into the Christmas season and I love this season. In the Christmas season there is a predominate color and there is a reason why. It is an attempt by symbol the whole purpose as to why Jesus was born. He lived to die. He was born to die on the cross. As we come into the Christmas season you will see the color red everywhere. He came to shed His blood that we could have eternal life. I praise God for the virgin birth and even more concisely the virgin conception, but the focal point of the Gospel is not the manger.

I praise God for the empty tomb and the resurrection, but the resurrection's meaning is a declaration to the world that God's atoning work in His Son Jesus has satisfied the justice of the Father. And that's why He was raised. The Bible says in Romans 4:24b–25, [24b] *It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, [25] who **was delivered up (to the cross) for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*** This is why we rejoice in the resurrection.

I also love the ascension of Jesus and ascension Sunday. I'm not a slave to the church calendar but I love singing those ascension hymns. I also enjoy celebrating the next Sunday which is Pentecost Sunday, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon His people in the New Covenant as promised by the Father. Jesus is coming and I'm ready to go. I praise the Lord for the second coming of Christ but I'm not saved at the manger or the empty tomb or at the ascension or at the resurrection but I was saved at the cross. At Calvary, there my sins were rolled away. This is why the Gospel always brings us back to the cross.

The sacraments even take us back to the cross. The sacraments assume the virgin birth, a resurrected Jesus, a coming of the Lord Jesus where at the Lord's Supper we eat this meal until He comes again and they are all built into it. But where does baptism and the Lord's Supper bring us? They bring us to the death of Christ, His body and blood for it is there that the holiness of God and the love of God kissed to save sinners by the grace of God to the glory of God. It is at the cross where the love of God and His Son kissed the holiness of God and made the atonement to deliver us from our sins.

About 16 years ago I was invited to a debate that was hosted by some of our Greek orthodox friends. It was me (a Presbyterian minister), a Catholic priest, a Greek orthodox priest and a Southern Baptist preacher. As the debate went on it became obvious that the Catholic and the Greek orthodox kept quoting the church fathers and me and my southern Baptist friend kept quoting the Bible. Then we opened it up for a Q & A. A man stood up and said 'Why should I serve a God who is a child abuser, for according to what you just said His Father killed His Son?' I jumped to answer that question. I said 'My friend would you please forgive me for it's obvious that I have not been clear. The cross is not the abuse of God upon His Son but the cross is the outpouring of the righteous judgment of God that should have fallen on me but He gave His Son who gave Himself and He ran to the cross for me. That's what you need to hear.' This is the atoning, delivering death of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel effects everything in this world. It changes husbands, wives, marriages, families as Gospel discipleship takes place. It changes the way we live as citizens. It changes our view of others which such things like racism which have no place in the life of a believer with a Biblical world and life view. I praise God for those glorious consequences of Gospel discipleship but the Gospel message is at the cross which is where Jesus delivers you from the judgment of God, rescues you from hell and secures you for all eternity with His shed blood that paid for your sins and with His perfect righteousness that makes you acceptable for heaven.

I remember when that last part really sank in. I was already saved but I'll never forget that I knew that I was forgiven and not going to hell. But what I didn't realize was what it meant to be accepted through the righteousness of Christ that clothes us. One of the toughest things to deal with is the parenting of Jacob with Joseph and the way his parenting created some problems for Joseph's brothers and everybody goes after the coat Jacob made for Joseph. I don't go after the coat when I preach on that because I know that coat is there to tell me about the love of God the Father for me, who has given a coat to wrap me up – a festal and glorious celebration. That is the perfect righteousness of Christ that is for those who know Christ as Lord and Savior.

Jesus was born to go to that cross. At the cross He delivers us. The resurrection announces the victory at that cross. The present intercession of Christ is because of the satisfaction of the cross and then Jesus is coming to consummate what He has secured at the cross.

Now what about our ministry of evangelism. Let's look at I Corinthians 3. Paul is realizing there is significant problems in the lives of the believers in that they still have a lot of the world hanging on them where they still have this carnal way of thinking and living. He wants them to move to being spiritual or mature. By the way, as I studied this text I have a prayer request I'd like for you to pray for me. As I preach there are unbelievers, brand new Christians, Christians who ought to be mature but they're lazy and there are PhD Christians so I want to be able to challenge them but speak to all of them where they need to hear the Word. I am fully aware of my incapacities and inabilities here so I need your prayers as I preach the Word. The Apostle Paul obviously had that wisdom to know how to speak to these people.

I Corinthians 3:1–10 says [1] *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. [2] I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, [3] for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? [4] For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?*

[5] What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. [6] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. [7] So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. [8] He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. [9] For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

This past Saturday I went to spend some time with some people in Chattanooga, Tennessee and 44 years ago I had the opportunity to lead one of them to Christ. Eventually I led the young lady to Christ and then I had the privilege to marry them up. There was another couple that was there that I also had the privilege to lead to Christ. God has given me that great privilege in so many situations, but I have never yet prayed with someone who gave their life to Jesus and that was the first time somebody had talked to them about the Lord or I was the first one who had talked with them about the Lord. There was always someone else like a grandfather, mother, aunt, friend, etc.

This is what you need to realize. Conversion is an event from God. Evangelism is a process of people serving God. Sometimes you're planting. Sometimes you're weeding. Sometimes you're watering. Sometimes you're cultivating. Sometimes you're in the process. You will never convert anyone. How are your converts doing? Any of the people I have converted are not doing well at all. The Lord is the One who does conversion. He does so through the means of His servants. Here in this text His servants are Paul and Apollos.

Paul says he showed up and planted and Apollos came behind him and watered. Paul tells them that he and Apollos are not to get their allegiance and affection. You can certainly give appreciation for those who labor among you for that's Biblical but allegiance and affection goes to Christ so don't divide up the church around us (Paul and Apollos). We, like you are dependent upon the Lord and we were here to serve the Lord. Notice that we have different roles, responsibilities and times.

Sometimes you get the opportunity to reap the commitment for Christ. Sometimes you get the opportunity to harvest the commitment to Christ. But most of the time you're in the process. That's what I want to challenge you to do today. Get the Gospel message to people. Proclaim the love of God that has satisfied the holiness of God at the cross of Christ through the sinless Savior who died for you that you can have eternal life. Realize that sometimes you're planting, watering, cultivating, weeding or sometimes you may have the opportunity to pray with them and God will use you to harvest the commitment to Christ. What a glorious moment that is but go give them the Good News.

This illustration I'm about to share kind of crystalizes where I want to end these past five studies on the hindrances to evangelism. It has been good to go through this but the fact is when you love Jesus, you know Him, and you're saved then you know enough to get in the game and start telling other people about the Savior. But you have to realize how great that message is about amazing grace, how much people need the Lord and that God has called you to bring them the Good News. Here's my illustration.

I have a friend in the pastorate who sent this article to me. The article is about two people that are in his church. Their names are Ralph and Christine Davis. For a number of years they have served as newspaper carriers. They have been well known for never missing a day but around September 23 or 24th they went and got their papers, filled up their car and got on the on ramp to the interstate in Ashville, North Carolina. As they were heading up the on ramp another car going faster than they were hit them from behind sending their car into a concrete barrier and rolling off the ramp onto the traffic below. They both were seriously injured.

When Ralph saw all the newspapers scattered his first words were 'Help me get the papers we've got to get them delivered.' The policeman said 'Sir, those papers are full of glass. They're not usable. Besides you're going to the hospital.' They took both of them to the hospital around 12 midnight that night and at 3:30am they dismissed themselves from the hospital. They found their manager, got a car and some more papers, rolled them and delivered those papers before 8am that morning. This couple said 'Those people we deliver to are dependent on us for the news and we wanted to get it to them.'

My friend who sent me this article said 'Isn't it nice to know people who have a work ethic like that?' Here's what I thought about. If someone has that kind of commitment to get the news of this world to people then what should be our commitment to get the Good News to people? Our commitment – roll it up, find a car and take it to them. Bring that glorious Good News message. We have a helpless world, a hopeless world and you can bring them the power of God and the message that Jesus loves to save sinners. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father for the glorious Gospel message and the privilege we have to be a part of the process. Father, cause us to rejoice in it and to engage in it. I think of the number of people and ministries in our church who want to be a part of this evangelism to communicate the Gospel. Father, would You raise up an army of ambassadors of Christ who will take the Good News – plant it, water it, cultivate it – and then Jesus bring the growth, bring the increase, cause the response and then we who plant and water will unite with those who are converted by Your grace and praise Your Name forever. Praise Your Name now, for Jesus' sake, Amen.