

**Con.text: Weaving the Gospel and Culture**  
**The Process of Evangelism in a Contemporary Context**  
August 9, 2017

### What Went Wrong?

The revivalist tradition (e.g. Jonathan Edwards and *The Way of the Master*, by Ray Comfort) stresses giving the bad news before giving the good news.

The downside of this approach is that it tends to present God as an angry judge eager to punish sinners.

**1 Timothy 2:3-6** *This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.*

The revivalist tradition suffers from the principle of diminishing returns.

Example: We are much like the 19th century "Burned-Over District" of central and western New York that had experienced so many revivalists and revivals during the Second Great Awakening that it could produce very little fruit. People had become gospel hardened.

### How Can We Do Better?

1. Apply the biblical principle of sensitivity (to the audience).

**1 Corinthians 9:21-23** *To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

Paul had two very different evangelistic approaches: one for the Jews in the synagogue and one for market-place pagans. Jews, Acts 13:13-41; pagans, 17:22-31.

**Acts 14:15-17** *"Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."*

2. It is important to discern the spiritual profile of our post-Christian American audience.

They are hedonists (they work to play)

They are moral Relativists ("Don't judge me, you hater")

*Even those who deny moral absolutes have moral principles they believe are universal such as tolerance, freedom of expression, and the wrongness of bigotry and genocide. -- Norman Geisler, Twelve Points that Show Christianity is True*

*The basic moral law is discovered, not by how we behave, but by how we desire others to behave toward us. -- Norman Geisler, Twelve Points*

They are utilitarian (want things to work)

They are spiritual syncretists (etymology: *to unite together*, this is buffet religion)

The biblical parable that best fits Americans is probably the prodigal son. Americans largely are impervious to guilt and, so, are in denial until they hit their wall. It is helpful to note the level of cocaine consumption in the U.S.

In the parable the father does not berate the son when he returns.

3. Rely on the three theological virtues for evangelism: faith, hope, and love.

**2 Peter 1:5** *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue,*

Virtue refers to a thing's excellence.

**Colossians 1:3-5** *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people —the faith and love **that spring** from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel.*

Faith, hope and love are called "theological" virtues because they come from God.

Hope precedes and is the source for faith. This biblical truth has often been overlooked.

Acts 14:17 (again) *...He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy...*

### **Three Simple Things to Do for Process Evangelism**

1. Commit to pray for opportunities.
2. Own your faith when someone hits the wall. Extend hope through your story for their next step.
3. Weekly invite someone to a group or gathering.