

Sharing the Truth in Love with Outsiders

But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

— 1 Peter 3:15

Introduction

We must always speak truth with others, but the message of the gospel is the most important truth we're called to share. Scripture is very clear for all of us: go and tell others about the story of Jesus and the good news of salvation. We all know this. Yet, somehow, we still seem to be struggling in our mission, or at least feel we should be doing better. Why is that? What holds us back? What creates this internal tension that pulls us in two directions?

Satan has done a great job in keeping us from fully completing our mission. We are intimately aware of his work in *personal* temptation and sin, but sometimes we don't stop to carefully consider his efforts to derail our collective mission: evangelizing the world.

Three Ways Satan Sabotages Our Efforts

Dissuade – prevent us from getting started: “It takes too much effort”, “I don't have the time to devote right now”, “I'm not well-versed enough in scripture”, “I'm not good at speaking to other people”, “people don't like for others to speak openly about religion”, etc.

Divert – encourage disunity: allow us to argue about controversies and war with one another; encourage us to split into factions; absorb us in trivial matters; focus our attention on matters other than teaching and evangelism – anything to take our minds off the gospel

Dilute – change the message to make it “not so harsh” and more palatable to the world; encourage a “feel good” gospel for self-improvement; reduce our media footprint to try to reduce persecution; rely only on our examples and never speak about the gospel; focus on community relations and serve mostly social needs and programs (the social gospel), etc.

What Message are we Sharing? Who are we listening to?

Always Ready

Our introductory scripture verse exhorts believers to always be ready to explain their faith in Jesus. This assumes that others see something different in our words and behavior, the “fragrance of Christ” that attracts the world to a life of hope and joy. As we live in Christ each day, we tell others about the hope

He offered us and everyone in the world. When we evangelize, we should do so with gentleness and respect, reflecting Christ's love to those who don't know Him.

Why are we often so hesitant about sharing the gospel? Mostly fear...

Fear of persecution – this is real, and a reasonable expectation - can we do anything about that?

Honestly, yes! It's true that we will face resistance...that is promised. Although most people are basically good, they are also basically selfish and will resist any call to restrain their free will and to serve God. Confronting people about the gospel can be intimidating. But frankly, the best way to drive mankind further away from God is to *remain silent*. That will only *increase* the likelihood that persecution will spread in an attempt to silence the truth. On the other hand, the more the gospel is spread (even by you), the more it will be heard and inevitably draw men toward it. The truth of the gospel will always eventually win...if the seed is planted.

Fear of rejection – we all know about the sting of rejection in this life, and it's painful. Perhaps we've forgotten what Jesus said about rejection of the gospel: "*If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.*" (John 15:18). We have forgotten that this rejection is not a personal attack on *us*, but rather a rejection of God.

Fear of our ignorance & poor interpersonal skills – Will we misrepresent the message because we don't know the Bible well enough? Will we say the wrong thing and offend people? At some point, we will likely say or do the wrong thing, because we are imperfect. We forget: it's the ***gospel's power*** that attracts and saves people, not ours.

Fear of having to deal with our prejudices – it's easy to talk to some people, especially friends. How well do we do, however, when we must talk to enemies, or talk to people with whom we share little in common or even dislike (different lifestyles, cultures, others with strong opposing religious opinions)? If we have a hard time relating to very different strangers, how well can we discuss the gospel with them?

Fear of our bad example – whose fault is that?! Of all the reasons listed here, this is actually the easiest one to fix. It is impossible to ask others to do as we ask when we aren't willing to follow our own advice. We must walk the walk.

Fear of success – some people actually fear being *successful* at reaching souls with the gospel, because it means more personal responsibility and less time for personal leisure and entertainment. Yes...that's a real thing. We have all seen it.

Isn't it interesting that God has already addressed all of these fears? Did we forget about **2 Timothy 1:7**: "*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.*"? If we are still plagued by these fears, we are listening to Satan's lies and not clearly seeing God's promise. When did we lose the joy that comes from serving God?

What Does Scripture Say About Spreading the Gospel?

- "*Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" - **Matthew 28:19-20**

A Gideon Bible in every hotel room is not enough. A televised campus rally is not enough. Another Charlie Kirk clone is not enough. A clever T-shirt or bracelet is not enough. More viewings of *The Chosen* are not enough. People won't know the gospel unless *someone goes to tell them about it*. That's me...and you.

- *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile."* - **Romans 1:16**

When Christians are persecuted, publicly embarrassed, or outnumbered by disapproving unbelievers, it's tempting to hide or "be ashamed" of the gospel. There will be resistance, but we must always remember that *"those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* (from Elisha, in 2 Kings 6:16)

- *"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"* - **Romans 10:14–15**

Talking over others, "out-yelling the competition", and eloquent and intellectual arguments will not save people. The gospel is powerful enough on its own to change lives forever. Believers do not need to have a carefully crafted gospel presentation. If we did, we might be tempted to think it was *our* words that brought salvation (remember Paul's attitude in 1 Corinthians 2:4). We are only the seed planters (and some are the waterers). God's power alone saves souls from eternal death.

- *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."* - **2 Corinthians 5:20**

An ambassador is a representative of another authority. Believers are ambassadors of Christ, representing Him as they take his message throughout the Earth. We have been entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation—one that turns us from being an enemy of God into being His child. We don't create the message: we just report it.

- *"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."* - **2 Timothy 4:1–4**

Although written to Timothy, this charge also has been given to us. Most people are drawn to teaching that suits their preconceived notions and justifies their current beliefs and desires - not teaching that magnifies the truth. Believers should always preach the truth—whether it's convenient or not. To correct, encourage, and admonish others with sound teaching and great patience is what we're called to do.

Three Main Categories

Create Relationships – there are many types:

“Micro-relationships” – these are the brief encounters we have on a daily or regular basis: a well-deserved but unexpected compliment, a brief car ride, sitting next to another person on the bus or in the airport or on a flight, an interview or meeting, an encounter at the grocery store – any moment where a brief conversation could start, and anywhere where busy people are found; for some, these are trivial encounters and only place-holders until the next important situation comes along; for the *opportunist*, these are the secret gold mine of evangelism! *Everyone has a story*, and most people actually love to talk (especially about themselves). If you’ll just take a few minutes or moments to chat and listen, they’ll talk to you about almost anything! Sometimes they’re a pressure cooker ready to burst, just waiting for the right person to help release that stress and offer hope.

Repeated, intermittent relationships – these are people we see regularly for brief periods, such as coworkers, school friends, and neighbors (some of these may even move into the longer-term category); we get to know them gradually, but over time we gather a rather large amount of information about them, even personal (and vice versa); they are a field ripe for harvest, as they likely see your behavior and reactions in many different situations – sometimes more than your family. They struggle with the same problems in life as you. They probably watch you as closely as your family because they want a friend and are looking for life’s answers. The fields are very “white unto harvest” for evangelizing opportunities in these real-time life settings

Longer-term relationships – these would be your marriage, your family, your close friends, and your church family; these people see you very often and they deserve your greatest attention (especially family); they rely on you physically and emotionally, and you rely on them as well. These are people who already know your commitment to Christ, and our example must never fail. Neglect of these people causes severe spiritual damage, sometimes irreparable. We can’t afford to let these important souls go. These aren’t just people for whom we pray and encourage – these are the ones for whom we will lay down our lives to help get them there.

Share Ourselves

Our story – *everyone has a story to tell (remember?)*: the young, the old, the wise, the foolish/ dull, the happy, the sad, the successful, the unsuccessful...*everybody*, and they all are eager to tell it. As Christians, we should share *our* encounter with and acceptance of the gospel – explain the reason “for the hope that is within us”. But others must also see the happiness, joy, and determination in our hearts to both spread the gospel and live a happy and blessed life, unburdened by the weight of worrying about the inevitable daily troubles.

Our time – our time is our most precious possession, and we are very stingy about sharing it (even if we just want to sit around and *waste* it). The greatest gift we can give others is our time, and not just “junk time” but our “prime time”. Others deserve our full attention, which lets them know where our treasure

lies (them). Seeing our faith and strength and joy in God, these people will learn the truth of the gospel, long for it, accept it, and continue to share it themselves.

Our possessions – we all like our *things*, but unfortunately too many things lead to a love and sometimes worship of these things. We must remember: things don't honor us, but people do. That's God's plan. A great way to honor others is to be generous with giving to their needs – see Luke 12:33

Our effort – people notice when you give of yourself and your talents, and it's almost always appreciated. God reminds us that we are really serving **Him** when we give our best to others:

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters." –

Colossians 3:23

And again:

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." – **2 Timothy 2:15**

Serve Others

Quick needs - these are daily courtesies we show each other: a quick "thank you" / "your welcome", holding the door open for others, helping someone with their coat or their seat, sharing food or drink with someone, a kind word – these may not ever generate a conversation, but others definitely notice your kind and thoughtful actions and can be impressed with your kind demeanor. Secretly, they want to be like that, too.

Physical needs – we all have them at times, whether from illness or the loss of our possessions. It's a great blessing when other Christians are willing to give of what they have to help us and provide for our well-being; it's even better when we do it for others, and people are *always* watching our example. This doesn't mean you have to donate a kidney! Helping others in any way means loving others. Non-Christians watch for this, and they also want to feel that love that comes from serving others

Spiritual needs – whether they realize it or not, everyone we meet has deep spiritual needs that often go unfulfilled...unless we are willing to help. Needs such as comfort during times of grief, Godly advice when life seems to be closing in, encouragement for the depressed and lonely, and wisdom when life is forcing someone to face difficult choices. Many people turn to harmful or foolish things for temporary relief, or try to run away when stressed or hurting – somebody needs to lead them back to God's proven solutions.

Avoiding or ignoring work in these three categories will obviously hinder our personal efforts. To fail, we don't have to overtly sin - we just have to neglect the work set before us. Things we see every day and could easily do. We aren't perfect, but we need to better focus our attention on what's important. Our tools are limitless. Nearly everything we know and see in life can provide a strong case for believing in God.

Other Ways People are Drawn to the Gospel

Some people find God by watching you. It's important that you let others see you acknowledge God's power working in your life. We need to make the gospel very personal, both to ourselves and to everyone we meet. Consider the following thoughts about letting others see the gospel working in us (by Jeff Willetts, a teacher at Pepperrell Christian Fellowship):

1. Share your excitement in the Lord with others.
2. Thank others who encourage you with their excitement in the Lord.
3. Tell stories of what God has recently done for *you*. This is *not* trivial.
4. Share with others what God has been showing *you* in his Word.
5. Point out ways you see *others* growing in the Lord.
6. *Thank others* for specific ways their actions have pointed you to Christ.
7. Acknowledge the God-given *talents* you see in others.
8. If someone is hurting, take the time to pray with them *right then and there*.
9. Share your *own* struggles and how they have grown your dependence on God.
10. Help others see how God's Word speaks into their *current situation*.

Some people arrive at belief through exposure to truth and logic. Some contemplate and meditate on the Bible's irrefutable truth. Some see God by observing the people and the universe, which are created in perfect balance. Some who dedicate their lives to logic and science easily meet their match with God's word and the universe and are swayed when directly confronted with the Author and Creator of science and logic. Many atheists have renounced their unbelief due to the undeniable (and provable) truth of God. A quick read of the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans sums this up fairly well. We can encourage people to test the truth of Scripture, and help them see the beautiful logic of our Creator. For one of many examples of thought exercises, see the **Addendum**.

Some people find God by seeing His handiwork. The wonder and beauty of our world and the astounding majesty of the universe have also compelled many men to accept God (as it should). We could share scriptures such as **Psalms 19:1** ("The heavens declare the glory of God: the skies proclaim the work of His hands."), **Romans 1:20** ("For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."), **Isaiah 40:26** ("Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of His might and because He is strong in power, not one is missing."), **Psalms 8:3-4** ("When I consider Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them...?"), and **Psalms 139:14** ("I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well"). We can encourage people to pay attention to what's around them.

Some people are convinced by the undeniable results of the gospel. There are so many examples of changed lives, faithful works performed, evils defeated, wrongs made right, history changed for the better, prayers answered, relationships restored, attitudes changed - even enduring social benefits and

progress. The results of the spread of the gospel continue to provide many convincing proofs. We can encourage unbelievers to see the results of a life lived for Christ. The apostle John summed things up well:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” – John 20:30-31

“This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” - John 21:24-25

Conclusion

The gospel is not just good news... it's the greatest message ever given to us from God. When you personally heard it, you believed and obeyed its call, knowing that it would transform you into the person you were always meant to be. You are now a child of God, no longer left alone in this world, but now fit for the Kingdom and prepared to be with our God for eternity. When you ponder the memory verse below from Isaiah, you realize that God's word ***will accomplish its purpose***. Always. With or without you. The gospel is truly the only unstoppable force on earth and in heaven. Its power to draw people toward God *cannot be prevented*. You are either *for* God...or *against* Him. Why not devote your life to work that will forever succeed? It's better to be on the winning team in eternity.

Memory Verse –

*“So shall my word be that goes out from mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”*

– Isaiah 55:11

For Discussion

1. If we struggle to share the gospel, is it more a lack of faith, fear of rejection and persecution, or too great a focus on self?
2. If we are created to work the works of God, can we possibly truly be happy if we are remiss in our duties?

3. Sometimes we bemoan the lack of congregational resources we have, or regret we don't have more Christian friends – what should we do about that??
4. Jesus stated we all will wear a yoke in life – how is the Christian's yoke easy and light?
5. All of us like to share things we know and love. How can we project that enthusiasm into our evangelistic outreach?