

Evangelism and Its Hurdles

Class 2: Conversion

TPC CE, Spring 2024

April 14, 2024

I. Recap from Week 1

- Foundations for the Class

Why a class on Evangelism?

- Because we have misconceptions about it
- Because it's not something we have always done well
- Because God commands it
- Because we love people who are not Christians

Basic Convictions

- Ever since the fall, people are born dead in sin
- If they stay dead in sin, they will spend eternity in Hell
- Jesus Christ came to save sinners by dying on the cross and rising from the dead
- We are saved by faith in Jesus
- Faith comes by hearing the message of the gospel

- Evangelism is gospel conversations aimed at conversion
- Every Christian is called to evangelism
- The content of evangelism is the gospel

Creation -> Fall -> Redemption -> Consummation

We must know the whole story of the gospel well to be able to engage those we love with the good news

II. What Is Conversion?

Conversion is a person changing from being dead in sin to alive in Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-10, ¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

III. How Does Conversion Happen?

Conversion is a work of God by the means of proclaiming his word where the result is faith and repentance in the hearer

A. A Work of God

WLC Q. 67. *What is effectual calling?*

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he does, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

John 6:35-40, 44-45, ³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day... ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me."

Acts 16:13-15, And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

B. By the Means of Proclaiming His Word

WCF 3.1, God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

WCF 3.6, As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

Romans 10:13-17, ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

“It is crucial to recognize that, according to this view, the internal (effectual) calling of the elect occurs through the same gospel that is announced externally to everyone... So the gospel is proclaimed to everyone without exception. It is proclaimed as good news not merely for the elect, but for each and every human being. Everyone who believes will be saved, and Christ’s redeeming work is sufficient for the whole world. At the same time, the Spirit supervenes upon this external call by drawing sinners inwardly to Christ.” – Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 256, 257

1. The danger of an exclusive concern with human responsibility

“If we regarded it as our job, not simply to present Christ, but actually to produce converts—to evangelize, not only faithfully, but also successfully—our approach to evangelism would become pragmatic and calculating... It is right to recognize our responsibility to engage in aggressive evangelism. It is right to desire the conversion of unbelievers. It is right to want one’s presentation of the gospel to be as clear and forcible as possible. If we preferred that converts should be few and far between, and did not care whether our proclaiming of Christ went home or not, there would be something wrong with us. But it is not right when we take it on us to do more than God has given us to do. It is not right when we regard ourselves as responsible for securing converts, and look to our own enterprise and techniques to accomplish what only God can accomplish. To do that is to intrude ourselves into the office of the Holy Spirit, and to exalt ourselves as the agents of the new birth. And the point that we must see is this: *only by letting our knowledge of God’s sovereignty control the way in which we plan, and pray, and work in his service, can we avoid becoming guilty of this fault.* For where we are not consciously relying on God, there we shall inevitably be found relying on ourselves. And the spirit of self-reliance is a blight on evangelism. Such, however, is the inevitable consequence of forgetting God’s sovereignty in the conversion of souls.” – J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 35, 36-37

2. The danger of an exclusive concern with divine sovereignty

“In their zeal to glorify God by acknowledging his sovereignty in grace, and by refusing to imagine that their own services are indispensable to him, they are tempted to lose sight of the church’s responsibility to evangelize... They are tempted, therefore, to suspect all enterprise in evangelism, whether organized or on the personal level, as if there were something essentially and inescapably man-exalting about it... But this is something that we must not forget. Christ’s command means that we all should be devoting all our resources of ingenuity and enterprise to the task of making the gospel known in every possible way to every possible person. Unconcern and inaction with regard to evangelism

are always, therefore, inexcusable. And the doctrine of divine sovereignty would be grossly misapplied if we should invoke it in such a way as to lessen the urgency, and immediacy, and priority, and binding constraint, of the evangelistic imperative... God did not teach us the reality of his rule in order to give us an excuse for neglecting his orders.”
– Packer, 40-41

“So far from inhibiting evangelism, faith in the sovereignty of God’s government and grace is the only thing that can sustain it, for it is the only thing that can give us the resilience that we need if we are to evangelize boldly and persistently, and not to be daunted by temporary setbacks. So far from being weakened by this faith, therefore, evangelism will inevitably be weak and lack staying power without it.” – Packer, 10

Prayer is not a sufficient means but it is a means that God uses

“The prayer of a Christian is not an attempt to force God’s hand, but a humble acknowledgement of helpless dependence... What we do every time we pray is to confess our own impotence and God’s sovereignty... When you pray for unconverted people, you do so on the assumption that it is in God’s power to bring them to faith.” – Packer, 17, 18, 21

C. Conversion Includes Faith and Repentance in the Hearer

WLC Q. 72. *What is justifying faith?*

A. Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assents to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receives and rests upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

WLC Q. 76. *What is repentance unto life?*

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, and upon the apprehension of God’s mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience.

Small Groups (4-6 people, not your spouse)

- Discuss how remembering those two truths—divine sovereignty and human responsibility—encourages you in evangelism
- Pray for those you are wanting to come to know Jesus
- Talk about goals for talking to them

Books

Evangelism:

- *Honest Evangelism: How To Talk about Jesus Even When It's Tough* by Rico Tice (Good Book, 2015)
 - *Christianity Explored, 7 week journey through the gospel of Mark* (www.christianityexplored.org)
- *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* by J. Mack Stiles (Crossway, 2014)
- *Ten Modern Evangelism Myths: A Biblical Corrective* by Ryan Denton (Reformation Heritage, 2021)
- *Before You Share Your Faith: Five Ways to Be Evangelism Ready* by Matt Smethurst (10Publishing, 2022)
- *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J.I. Packer (IVP, 1961)
- *The Heart of Evangelism* by Jerram Barrs (Crossway, 2021)
- *Evangelism in the Early Church* by Michael Green (Eerdmans, 1970)

Apologetics:

- *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* by Timothy Keller (Penguin, 2009)
- *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion* by Rebecca McLaughlin (Crossway, 2019)
- *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* by Timothy Keller (Viking, 2016)
- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis (HarperCollins, 2001)
- *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* by Michael J. Kruger (Crossway, 2021)
- *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity* by Rebecca McLaughlin (Crossway, 2021)

Cultural Commentary:

- *Making Faith Magnetic: Five Hidden Themes Our Culture Can't Stop Talking About... And How to Connect Them to Christ* by Daniel Strange (Good Book, 2021)
- *The Air We Breathe: How We All Came to Believe in Freedom, Kindness, Progress, and Equality* by Glen Scrivener (Good Book, 2022)
- *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims* by Rebecca McLaughlin (TGC, 2021)
- *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* by Carl R. Trueman (Crossway, 2022)