

## Loving God and Evangelism & Missions

Perhaps you have heard someone say something like, “I wish you Christians would stop trying to convert everyone. Why can't you just live and let live? Why can't you just let everyone choose his own way?”

Maybe you've heard it this way: “It is really arrogant for you to say that Jesus is the only way and that all other ways are wrong. It is really narrow-minded of you to say that my view is wrong and that I must believe what you believe to go to heaven.” If you've ever heard something like that, it's because you have tried to share the message of Christianity with people in a world where people don't believe in absolute truth.

But maybe when you have had a conflict like that, you have asked yourself, “Why do we have to share our faith, when people are so hostile to it? Why must we go around trying to make Christians out of people, when people don't want to be made into Christians?”

See, not every religion tries to aggressively get others to join. Judaism doesn't. Buddhism doesn't. Hinduism doesn't. New Age religions don't. In fact, not every religion claims that it is the only way and that you must know it and believe it to be right with God.

But Christianity does just that. Christianity is, has always been, and will always be, in its true expressions, and evangelistic religion. Ours is a faith we want to propagate. We want to share it. We want those who do not believe to come to believe it. We want those who are not Christians to become Christians.

And if you haven't noticed, that's not very popular these days. Evangelism is regarded by many as pretty much an anti-social behaviour, Missions is even worse – here are these Christians, crossing the globe, trying to colonise people with their religion, trying to change the happy and content state of others. We're accused of all kinds of motives for wanting to share the gospel. Some say it is because we are arrogant. Some say it is because we are intolerant of the opinions of others. Others say it is because we are insecure and are looking for legitimacy for our faith by converting others to it.

I'm sure, as a Christian, you would disagree with those accusations. But what is the real motive behind evangelism and missions?

Why is our religion evangelistic? Why is the faith of the Bible a faith which is supposed to be shared and declared?

To put it another way, what are the reasons for evangelism? Why is it in our faith? What is the mandate for evangelism based in?

I want to start this series in evangelism by giving you the three main reasons why we evangelise, three reasons that explain why we bother with this, when we would probably be a lot more popular if we didn't do it.

**2 Corinthians 5:14-20** <sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; <sup>15</sup> and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. <sup>18</sup> Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

Here Paul describes the actions of evangelism and missions as the ministry of reconciliation. He describes those who evangelise and do missions as ambassadors for Christ. Question: how many Christians are supposed to be ambassadors for Christ? All of us.

What is the motive for all Christians for missions and evangelism? Verse 14 gives it to us - love, the love of Christ. That can mean Christ's love of us, or it can mean our love for Christ. And we know both work hand in hand.

This is why evangelism and missions exist! Not to increase the size of our churches. Not to destroy other opinions. Not to make ourselves feel more right. Instead, it is love. When you think about it, love as a motive is one of the most unconquerable things. People who are motivated by guilt, or by fear, are never as motivated as those driven by love.

I believe Scripture teaches that three loves are at the heart of evangelism and missions. Love for God, love for your neighbour and love for your Christian brothers.

I want us to consider how each of these loves drives evangelism, and how it shapes our evangelism. I want us to begin by considering love for God and why love for God can be the reason you witness. There are three things we love about God which leads us to witness.

## **I. We Love God's Fame**

***Psalm 67:2-5*** *That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. <sup>3</sup> Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. <sup>4</sup> Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth. Selah <sup>5</sup> Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You.*

What is the attitude of the psalmist? Should God be hidden? Should God be concealed? Who among the nations should praise God?

Now when you read these things, what you ought to be gripped by is that God loves to be known. This is His book, and He fills it with statements like: let the whole world know me, let everything in the world praise me, let Me be famous, let me be known and adored. Let me be the most well-known person of all. Everybody must know Me! No one should be ignorant of Me!

Now stop for a moment and ask yourself, what would you think of another human being who acted like this? If you knew someone who was saying things like, "Let everyone know my name. Let every person know who I am. Spread my identity to every living person in the world."

What would you think of such a person? What would you say to such a person?

You would think, this person is incredibly vain. This person is enormously conceited. You might say to them, "I think you think a bit too much of yourself. Not everyone in the world needs to know you."

Question: why is it vanity and arrogance and sinful selfishness when a human does it, but acceptable if God does it?

Well, if God were just like us, it would indeed be vanity and conceitedness and arrogance for Him to want to be known so widely. If He were no more impressive or valuable or important than the next person, He would have an over-inflated ego, and would not be worthy of worship.

But what if God were the most important reality in the universe? What if God was the ultimate gladness of every human being? What if God was the main reason for living? What if every human was incomplete without knowing God? Then the most loving thing God could do would be to make Himself known. If God made you to find your ultimate satisfaction in Him, the most hurtful thing He could do to you would be to hide Himself from you. On the other hand, if He is the greatest blessing in the universe, the most loving thing He can do is to make Himself known.

You see, there are only two ways to explain the radically self-loving statements of God. Either He is just like us, in which case His self-focus is arrogant and contemptible and needy, or else He is infinitely beautiful and worthy and lovely, in which case His self-loving statements are actually statements of **generosity**. When a fountain calls on everyone to drink, it is not because the fountain is thirsty; it is because the fountain is satisfying and overflowing and the more people drink, the more valuable that fountain is seen to be.

That's the heart of evangelism. God loves to be known because He is the best One of all to know.

Sometimes I hear Jewish people objecting to Christian evangelism, by saying things like, "You Christians are always trying to force your faith on us! Judaism doesn't try to convert anyone. Our faith is secure enough that we don't need to gather converts!" But that just shows that modern Judaism has departed very far from the Old Testament. The Old Testament reveals a God who desires greatly to be published, to be declared, to be known, for His fame to spread. Christianity did not invent evangelism. This is the nature of the God of the Bible. He wants to be known!

The deepest and strongest and toughest root of evangelism is God's desires. You see, there are many reasons to evangelise people from a human point of view. We can think of how lost people are without Christ; we can think of the terrible suffering of hell; we can think of the difference Christ makes; and those are all true. But stronger and deeper than any horizontal reason for evangelism is the vertical reason: because God wants this. This is what keeps us evangelising, even when the people we are evangelising have no interest. "I don't tell you this because you deserve to hear it, I tell you this because the God I know deserves to be known."

There was a missionary to Africa names Paris Reidhead. He told his story in a very powerful sermon called Ten Shekels and a Shirt. In it, he talks about his motives for going to Africa. He'd seen pictures of lepers, He'd seen pictures of ulcers, He'd seen pictures of native funerals, and he didn't want his fellow human beings to suffer in Hell eternally after such a miserable existence on earth. In his words, he went primarily to improve on the justice of God. He didn't think it was right for anybody to go to Hell without a chance to be saved. So he went to give poor sinners a chance to go to heaven. He was simply using the provisions of Jesus Christ as a means to improve upon human conditions of suffering and misery.

Then he got to Africa and was shocked. Because he found that the people he met weren't ignorant people running around the woods looking for someone to tell them how to go to heaven. In Reidhead's words, "They were monsters of iniquity! They were living in utter and total defiance of far more knowledge of God than I ever dreamed they had! They deserved Hell! Because they utterly refused to walk in the light of their conscience, and the light of the law written upon their heart, and the testimony of nature, and the truth they knew!"

Reidhead said that when he found that out he was so angry with God he told God what a wrong thing God had done in sending him out there to reach people that he thought were waiting to be told

how to go to heaven, only to find out that they knew about heaven, didn't want to go there, that they loved their sin and wanted to stay in it.

Reidhead said he felt the whole thing was a sham and a mockery, and he had been sold a bill of goods and he wanted to go home. So one day, Reidhead, got alone in his bedroom, locked the door and wrestled with God and faced Him honestly with what his heart felt. As he did so, it seemed to him he heard God say, "Yes, will not the Judge of all the earth do right? The heathen are lost. And they're going to go to Hell, not because they haven't heard the gospel. They're going to go to Hell because they are sinners, who love their sin and because they deserve Hell! But I didn't send you out there for them. I didn't send you out there for their sakes."

Reidhead said, "And I heard as clearly as I've ever heard, though it wasn't with physical voice but it was the echo of truth of the ages finding its way into an open heart. I heard God say to my heart that day something like this, 'I didn't send you to Africa for the sake of the heathen, and I sent you to Africa for My sake. They deserved Hell! But I love them! And I endured the agonies of hell for them! I didn't send you out there for them! I sent you out there for Me! Don't I deserve those for whom I died?'"

And that changed it all for him. Because he realised at the heart of missions is God Himself.

When all your compassion for other humans dries up, when all your sense of mission and obligation to make disciples dries up, what must still be there is love for God – a love for His fame. And if you know from personal experience why God wants to be known, then you will overflow to others. And that overflow is called love.

You could say that God is the most evangelistic Being in the universe. To come to know Him is to begin to share in His enthusiasm for His glory, and to desire it to flow out to others. As you think about your family, your relatives, your friends, your acquaintances, who are you eager for them to know? Are you eager that God's fame spread and that they come to hear of it?

There is a way we love God which becomes part of our motive for evangelism

## **II. We Love God's Will**

*Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

As you look at those words, what kind of sentence is verse 18? Is it a question? Is it a statement? Is it a plea? Is it a suggestion? It is a command. This is a command that comes from the one who says in verse 18 that all authority has been given to Him. To the believer, He commands, take my message to others and make disciples.

To be saved is to come under the Lordship of Jesus; it is to become a witness of Jesus.

**Luke 6:46** <sup>46</sup> " But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say

Now if we are Christians we obey Christ. We obey Him because we love Him. **John 14:15** <sup>15</sup> " If you love me, keep My commandments.

The command to make disciples is as binding as the command to not lie, to be forgiving, to love one another, to not commit adultery, to be generous. It is not as if we can keep some commands,

ignore the others, and feel that we did fairly well. Make disciples is as much a command as do not murder.

When it comes to this command, we sometimes tend to see it differently from others.

Imagine my wife says to me, "Please take one of the children with you, go to the shops, and get some milk and bread." And so I go out, take one of the children, go to the shops and return empty-handed. When she says, "Where's the milk and bread?" I say, "Look, I did 2 out of the 3 things you asked me to do. Isn't that enough?" That's not how it works in a relationship. This is not a maths test. It is a relationship of pleasing someone else.

One of the marks of someone who loves God is that he or she wants to please God. Pleasing God means doing everything you know pleases Him.

**John 8:29** <sup>29</sup> *"And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him"*

To love God is to love what He loves. And God has made it clear that He loves having His gospel declared. He loves saving sinners. He loves changing lives. And if it pleases Him to have His grace announced, then love for God means I will make that known.

If God was a private sort of God, then His worshippers would be very private about their faith and worship. If God did not really want to be known, then those who had accidentally stumbled across God would do their best to keep Him a secret, like a celebrity phone number which you agree not to share with the public. But if God Himself is overflowing with desire for people to know Him, then that must characterise our worship. You could say that God is the most evangelistic Being in the universe. To come to know Him is to begin to share in His enthusiasm for His glory, and to desire it to flow out to others.

Step back and see it. Here is the one who loved you enough to leave heaven's glories; died an agonising death in your place; has saved you and transformed you and given you a sure inheritance in heaven, and He says, "Mention Me to others. Let them know what I have done for you." Think again of family, relatives, friends, acquaintances. See their faces and think that it would please God if you told them what God has done for you. You would be loving God by sharing the gospel with them.

### **III. We Love God's Sacrifice**

**Revelation 5:9-10** <sup>9</sup> *And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."*

In heaven, the saints are praising Christ for His sacrifice. They honour Him for His sacrifice. They love Him for it. They do not regard it lightly. We do not only love God's fame, and love His will; we love what He has done. We can be people who are continually returning to the cross of Christ, and being amazed by it.

**Galatians 6:14** <sup>14</sup> *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

**1 Corinthians 2:2** <sup>2</sup> *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him*

*crucified.*

That price was what kept Paul vocal. Evangelism soars on the wings of a cross-centred life. You are probably at your most evangelistic, when you are most dazzled by the gospel. When you are amazed, awed, sunned by the sacrifice of Calvary.

Two young Moravians heard of an island in the West Indies where an atheist British owner had 2000 to 3000 slaves. And the owner had said, "No preacher, no clergyman, will ever stay on this island. If he's ship wrecked we'll keep him in a separate house until he has to leave, but he's never going to talk to any of us about God, I'm through with all that nonsense." Three thousand slaves from the jungles of Africa brought to an island in the Atlantic and there to live and die without hearing of Christ.

In the late 1700's a British planter owned an entire island in the West Indies off the coast of South America. Several thousand black slaves toiled in the sugar cane fields under the burning sun. The atheist planter vowed that no missionary would ever set foot on the island to talk about God. 3000 slaves were doomed to live and die without hearing of Christ.

Two young Germans in their 20's from the Moravians sect heard about their plight. They sold themselves to the British planter for the standard price for a male slave, used the money they received for their sale to purchase passage to the West Indies. The miserly atheist planter would not even transport them.

The Moravian community from Herrnhut came to see the two lads off, who would never return again, having freely sold themselves into a lifetime of slavery. As a member of the slave community they would witness as Christians to the love of God. Family members were emotional, weeping. Was their extreme sacrifice wise? Was it necessary? The ship slipped away with the tide and the gap widened. The housings had been cast off and were curled up on the pier. The young men saw the widening gap. They linked arms, raised their hands and shouted across the spreading gap "May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering."

This became the call of Moravian missions. And this is our only reason for being...that the Lamb that was slain may receive the reward of His suffering! The reward of His suffering - that became the battle cry of the Moravian missionary movement, a movement which began modern missions, and sent hundreds of missionaries across the globe.

Does the glorious cross of Christ draw you to share it with others? The Lamb deserves the reward of His suffering with this person, with this colleague, with this relative, with this schoolmate.

Evangelism is not a recruitment drive to fill seats in church. Evangelism is not some kind of self-affirmation, to get others to agree with us, so we don't feel insecure. Evangelism is not a way of shouting down other opinions, so ours looks like the right way.

No, we are ambassadors for Christ, ministers of reconciliation because the love of Christ constrains us. We love God's fame. He wants to be known, and since we know Him, we desire that others know Him. We love His will. He desires to spread the good news, and we wish to please Him, so we do. We love what He has done.