

Intro

Paul's on evangelism today. I'm guessing an uncomfortable subject for most of us. Generally Christians don't want to speak about sin, judgment, and repentance with non-Christians. And generally non-Christians don't want to hear about these things. A natural recipe for silence.

Christians, if the surveys are anywhere near accurate, many of us are neglecting our duty. Resulting in guilt, excuses, or a combination of both.

Why don't we evangelize? Mike McKinley suggests five reasons:

<https://www.9marks.org/article/journalfive-reasons-we-dont-evangelize/>

- 1) Churches isolate Christians from non-Christians.

Calendars filled up with church activities means little time for non-Christians. Few relationships with non-Christians.

- 2) We believe that evangelism is extraordinary.

Only for pastors/elders and those with the evangelist gift.

- 3) Churches don't talk about the cost of following Jesus.

In consumer Christianity, being a Christian is all about my personal well-being. Rejection because I urge others to repent and believe isn't part of the program.

- 4) We look for immediate results.

We give up because we conclude no one's going to believe so why bother. Our role is faithfulness, not results. Our gospel witness may be one of many God uses to bring a lost person to faith.

- 5) We aren't clear on the message.

Many Christians who genuinely believe the gospel don't know how to explain what they believe in a clear manner.

In his book, Overcoming Walls to Witnessing, Timothy Beougher adds a few more:

- 1) Fear

Fear I'll mess up and prevent people from believing. Or fear that I'll be rejected.

- 2) Apathy

Sadly we're preoccupied with other pursuits and the salvation of lost people isn't a priority.

- 3) Introspection

My life isn't in good enough order to call others to repent.

Christian, what holds you back?

Non-Christians, we know proselytizing is a dirty word. Faith is a private matter. It's not polite to talk religion and politics. Who wants to be told their way of life is wrong? Who wants to be told what they believe is wrong? I get it.

There was a time I didn't want to hear it. Why? I wanted to keep getting drunk with my friends. The social life I cherished was frowned upon by Christians.

Christians afraid to speak the gospel. Non-Christians who don't want to hear it. It's a wonder that churches are spread throughout the globe! Christianity is a super-natural religion! Jesus is building his church through our words.

Let's hear Paul's guidance on evangelism.

READ PASSAGE (4:2-6)

Body

BIG IDEA: Jesus saves us to proclaim him to others.

Passage Focus

We pray for opportunities to speak. We're alert to opportunities that arise. And we speak wisely.

Some concluding statements from Paul on continuing and completeness (no area of life untouched by God's word).

The Christian life is all-encompassing. Jesus' lordship touches every single area of our lives. Evangelism is one of those areas.

Note: Paul's speaking to the whole church = something all Christians should be doing.

Point 1: Continue in watchful prayer (4:2)

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

We're on continuing again. Here it's continuing in prayer.

Continue steadfastly = persisting in prayer, continually engaged in prayer, busy in prayer. Prayer our regular practice.

"being watchful in it with thanksgiving" describes the manner of prayer. Watchful = continually ready and on the alert. Alert because we pray intermittently throughout the day. And prayer flavored with thankfulness to God.

Why the need for Paul to command Christians to continue in prayer?

Maybe we have a tendency to neglect prayer? Busy being preoccupied with other things we're not attuned to spiritual realities going on around us. So we don't pray.

Context?

In context watchful means being attune to evangelistic opportunities before us. And seizing opportunity when it arises. The buzzword at my last church was **gospel conversations**.

It was convicting. At Immanuel Baptist Church there was a greater focus on speaking the gospel to non-Christians. These people were more intentional about speaking the gospel than I was. Gospel conversations was a way of life. What normal Christians do. What Christians talk about in small groups. The patterns I experienced revealed lack in my life. I had never heard the phrase gospel conversations before. I gathered from observation that gospel conversations meant talking about the gospel with non-Christians in everyday conversations.

And it was normal. Not super-spiritual. Not awkward. Just normal conversation about the Lord we love.

The impact was I started looking for opportunities. I intentionally talked about Jesus in normal conversations.

What does watchful, thankful, persistent prayer look like in real life?

It doesn't mean praying every minute of the day. It doesn't mean a morning prayer time then turning God off for the rest of the day. It doesn't mean I can't watch a Patriots game and relax from time to time. It means praying

intermittently throughout the day. Being alert to whatever's going on and praying accordingly throughout the day. It doesn't have to be limited to evangelism.

- 1) Having a conversation about complex and controversial stuff with non-Christians = pray for wisdom and boldness to bring the gospel in.
- 2) A child did something seriously wrong and sensing sinful anger = praying to discipline well with love and self-control.
- 3) Sensing I'm getting irritated with my wife = pray for love and self-control and grace-giving words.
- 4) Sensing another Christian differs with me strongly on a topic = praying for wisdom in how hard to push.
- 5) Sensing that the traffic is about to create a sinful response.
- 6) Watchful to minister to fellow Christians who are discouraged or becoming comfortable with sin.
- 7) Watchful to welcome visitors on Sunday morning.

It's living all of life in the presence of God. Evangelism is a life lived in the presence of God.

What about thankfulness?

Routinely meditating on the blessings we have in Christ makes us a thankful people. Our alertness is flavored with gratitude because we have joy in Jesus.

Point 2: Pray for opportunities to speak the gospel (4:3-4)

At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ,

Paul says when you are engaging in persistent, watchful, thankful prayer, please pray for our evangelism (Paul has co-workers). Pray that God would open a door for us. Meaning pray that God would give us opportunity to *"to declare the mystery of Christ."*

Mystery = truth once hidden but now revealed.

"the mystery of Christ" is:

- 1) Something Paul spoke for God.
- 2) Christ in you (1:27) = individually the new birth.
- 3) Christ in you = corporately Christ in the Gentiles = Jesus building churches throughout the globe.
- 4) *"the hope of glory"* = the assurance of final salvation = glorification when Jesus returns (Rom 8:18-25).
- 5) The mystery is the gospel.

The good news of salvation. Rescue from the wrath to come and rescue from the rule of sin in this life through the new birth. Rescue through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus died such that whoever believes will be forgiven of sin and given eternal life. In the gospel, God says repent and believe and find life in my Son Jesus. I've furnished proof of my promises by raising Jesus from the dead.

on account of which I am in prison-

Paul was in prison because he was faithful in his God-given duties. Likely in Rome where he stayed by himself in rented property chained to a soldier who guarded him (Acts 28:16, 30-31). Faithfulness can result in hardship!

that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

So Paul asks them to pray for God to create opportunity to speak. Then Paul asks them to pray for God to help him speak well.

Application

1) Paul believed God grants opportunity to speak the gospel through our prayers.

Who opens the door? God. We might be lacking opportunity because we aren't praying for it.

Application: make this a personal prayer request. Pray this for one another.

2) Paul believed God helps us to speak clearly through our prayers.

Clear = ability to speak the gospel in an understandable manner on the spot when opportunity arises. God is pleased to help us do this!

Why don't we evangelize? One reason is because we really don't know what to say. In membership interviews, it's common practice for elders to ask those desiring membership questions to verify conversion. One question is explain the gospel to me in 60 seconds. Pastors are shocked by the number of Christians who don't know how to answer this question. Legitimate Christians can't explain what they believe in a clear manner.

If we are going to evangelize, we need to be clear on the gospel. Knowing what to say beforehand.

Point 3: Take advantage of gospel opportunities that arise (4:5)

Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

Walk = our manner of life. How we do life.

Wisely = using truth well. Putting what we know into practice. Knowing how truth applies to real life.

Outsiders = non-Christians.

The early church was clear on who was in and out. They weren't fuzzy on who was and wasn't a Christian. Based on a person's beliefs and practices they could tell whether or not a person was a Christian. Yes, they could err in judgment. Yes, sometimes it may be fuzzy. But in most cases it's clear.

Does a person trust in Christ alone? Have they repented of their sins? Is there evidence the Holy Spirit has changed their heart?

Opportunity

Specifically, we need to use the time we have well. That's wisdom. What's meant by time? Time could refer to a point in time (past, present, or future) or an extended period of time (era) or a temporary period of time (summer). The last sense is likely: making the most of a temporary opportunity.

Temporary opportunity could go in several ways. Opportunity that arises in a certain conversation. Or opportunity that we have to speak in this age before Christ returns. In either case, we have a temporary opportunity that won't last forever.

Prayer

What keeps us from wasting our opportunities? Persistent, watchful, thankful prayer.

We pray for God to create opportunity. We **pray** for God to help us speak clearly. We remain **watchful** for opportunity. And when God opens the door we **speak**. But how should we speak when opportunity arises?

Point 4: Respond to questions that arise in a winsome way (4:6)

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Gracious = speech that is winsome, attractive, and gains a favorable impression. Like kindness or humility or excitement.

Seasoned with salt = flavor. Flavor is attractive and desired. Like salt's flavor makes a food attractive (potato chips), gracious speech makes the gospel desirable.

Paul is saying how we speak matters.

Several things are assumed here

- 1) New Testament Christians spent time with non-Christians.

They didn't shelter themselves from the world. They weren't overloaded with church activities.

- 2) God answers the prayer for opportunity (open door).
- 3) As we spend time with non-Christians, their questions or comments will give opportunity for gospel conversations.

So again: **pray** → **watch** → **speak**.

Here Paul adds speak well.

Caution: not a sales pitch where we leave out details. Not trying to trick someone into something they don't want. Just carrying ourselves in a way that commends our message. Talking about **God** → **man** → **Christ** → **response**.

Progress

In the Christian life, we grow in wisdom and knowledge of the truth. So completeness (maturity) is a process. Growing in evangelism is a process too.

Personal regret

I have so much regret in this area.

- 1) Being overly aggressive with strangers (speaking like John the Baptist). Thinking I wasn't ashamed of the gospel, I was actually using truth poorly.
- 2) Seeking to win a debate instead of helping them to see Christ's beauty. Making people look silly doesn't bring them to faith.
- 3) Not following up with people who were willing to talk.
- 4) Sharing data, but never actually calling people to respond in faith and repentance.
- 5) Not being ready when asked questions like, "why did you become a Christian?"
- 6) Avoiding evangelism because I assumed nobody was going to ever believe.
- 7) Aiming to prove Christianity instead of speaking the gospel.
- 8) Speaking the gospel to some employees, but not to those I was closest to for fear of rejection or hostility.

Advice to Christians

Be confident in God. His word is powerful to convert sinners. He changes our hearts. He enables us to do what we couldn't do if left to ourselves. He gives us opportunity to speak. He helps us to speak. His ways are always good. His design for marriage is good. His instruction in Proverbs works.

Sinners really are ruined. The gospel really is good news. Hell really is horrific. Sin really brings ruin into people's lives. Christ really is worthy of worship.

Delight in Christ, confidence in Christ is the antidote to fear. Evangelism is a fight for faith!

Compassion for ruined sinners helps too. Paul experienced great sorrow and anguish because his fellow Jews were lost (Rom 9:1-2; 10:1).

Do you believe what you have in Christ is good? Do you want others to have what you have?

Non-Christians

Interesting sermon. A message on how Christians struggle to tell you about the God they claim to worship. People who love you struggle to tell you about rescue in Christ. You might wonder, why would I believe something Christians are afraid to talk about?

The reason Christians don't share is we're weak sinners. More concerned about ourselves than you. We need God's work in our hearts to overcome our fears. The deficiency lies in us. Not in God.

I attended church somewhat regularly for six months as a non-Christian. I hated the singing. Why would I want to sing about a God I'm not following? But I wanted the sermon. I wanted to learn. I knew I was ruined. Is that you?

If we repent and believe, Jesus rescues us from the wrath to come. And he changes us. Helping us to live according to our design rather than against it.

Conclusion

Jesus saves us to proclaim him to others.

Paul's evangelistic method isn't gimmicks. It's ordinary Christians proclaiming the gospel to those non-Christians they spend time with. What's better? A once a year event? Four people at PCC regularly sharing the gospel? Or the whole body regularly sharing the gospel?

Christian, pray → watch → speak.