

TRUE CHRISTIANS EVANGELIZE

Can a person be a Christian and not participate personally in proclaiming the gospel to the lost?

This paper is written to clarify our understanding of the biblical command to evangelize the lost. The state of the church in America (and probably the world) is so deplorable that it has become necessary for us to explain the biblical teaching that the Great Commission is the duty, responsibility and privilege of every Christian. The Great Commission is the parting command of Christ and therefore, to refuse to obey it is an act of rebellion. Those who persist in their rebellion are unconverted. ***To word this in another way, if a person persistently refuses to evangelize, they are not evidencing one critical mark of true conversion.*** While God alone is their final Judge, if it is their manner of living to refuse to proclaim the gospel to the lost then they have no grounds for being assured of their salvation. Faith without works is dead (James) and evangelism is one crucial work for a Christian to perform which validates their claim to have saving faith.

The statistical fact is that most professing Christians do not share their faith. Are these non-evangelizing people actually true Christians or are they deceived? Can a person actually be a Christian and habitually refuse to obey the Great Commission? I think not.

Not a Condition, an Identifying Mark

It is critical to make it clear that evangelism is not a condition for becoming a Christian, like repentance and faith. One is not saved by "evangelism". Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The Reformers died for the truth of "sola fide". A common saying is that a man is saved by faith alone, but the faith which saved is never alone. A man is not saved *by* works, but he is neither saved *without* works. James explains that what we are talking about is not salvation *by* works but salvation *that* works. But what are the works we are to do to demonstrate that our faith is genuine? There are many. Matthew lists the Beatitudes as marks of a genuine Christian:

A Grave Heresy

There has arisen in our land a grave heresy. This new heresy teaches that a person can actually be a Christian and not obey the command of Christ to go and make disciples, and personally participate in the Great Commission by personally preaching the gospel to the lost. This paper is intended to address this false teaching.

Not My Gift?

One of the first excuses Satan has convinced the biblically illiterate to use is that they are personally exempt from obeying the Great Commission because the command of Christ is only to those who have the gift of evangelism.

Gifted to Train – Eph 4:11-12

It is true that the Bible teaches that there is a **gift of evangelism**, but the gift does not mean that those with the gift are the only ones required to *do* evangelism. The gift was given **in order to train** the rest of the body to do the work of evangelism! Scripture says, "And He Himself gave . . . some evangelists . . .

- **for the equipping of** (*i.e. in order to equip*) the saints,
- **for the work of** (*i.e. in order to do the work of*) the ministry
- **for the edifying of the body of Christ** (Eph. 4:11-12). In other words, the gift of evangelism was given to key people in the church in order to train the rest of the people in the church to do the work of evangelism!

In simple terms then, those with the gift of evangelism are a gift to the local church in order to "equip" or train the rest of the body to do the work of evangelism.

Followers are Fishers – Matt. 4:19

Jesus said to those whom he called, "follow Me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:19). This is one of the many passages which teach that if a person is truly a follower of Christ, they will evangelize. Part and parcel with following Christ is fishing for men. *Those who follow Christ fish for men*. Thus, the logical opposite requires that those who do not fish for men are not followers of Christ.

Pray for Laborers – Matt. 9:37-39

Jesus said that his disciples should pray for more laborers in the harvest. This means that all disciples should pray for more converts because those converts will evangelize. To labor in the harvest means to sow the seed of the gospel of the kingdom in the field of the Lord in an attempt to reap a harvest of souls (Mt. 13).

It is important to point out that immediately after commanding His disciples to pray for laborers Jesus commands *them* to go as laborers! Someone might argue that the disciples He sent out were the twelve, and therefore the only ones required to actually do the work of evangelism were the twelve disciples, and thus they all must have had the gift of evangelism.

The flaw in that reasoning is that in the very next chapter Jesus sends out 70 more disciples to do the work of evangelism (compare Luke 9:1 with 10:1). Jesus did not select 70 of his disciples who happened to have the gift of evangelism. Rather, He sent out 70 more disciples, regular disciples, whom He commanded to evangelize. It is reading into the text what you want it to say, to say that 70 were only disciples with the gift of evangelism. The text does not say that. Furthermore, the "gift" of evangelism was not even given until the church was formed in Acts 2. None of the 70 had the gift of evangelism since it was only after the resurrection that Christ gave gifts to men (Eph. 4:8).

Bloody Hands – Ezek. 3:18

Another powerful text showing that the work of evangelism is the work of all disciples is Ezek. 3:18. God says that the wicked are about to face certain destruction from the judgment of God because of their sin. The only escape from that judgment is for the wicked man to repent and turn from his wicked ways. If God's servants do not warn the wicked to turn from their wicked ways that wicked man will die in his sin, **but his blood will be required at the hands of those who profess to be followers of God.**

Those who profess to be followers of Christ and who stand idly by while millions of souls are streaming over the falls into an eternal lake burning with fire and brimstone are spiritual murderers.

You Shall be My Witnesses – Acts 1:8

When the Holy Spirit comes upon a person at conversion the Spirit will *make* them witness as the pattern and course of their life. A person clearly reveals the fact that the Holy Spirit is not in their heart when they have no burden for souls and they refuse to obey the many commands and examples to witness, share their faith, proclaim the good news, preach the gospel, share their faith, and warn the wicked.

Self-Examination – 1 Cr. 13:5

Examine yourself. Are you in the faith? It is critical that we not be misunderstood, we are not saying that evangelism is a condition for earning salvation. Salvation is a free gift and cannot be earned, no matter what the work. **What the Bible is saying is that evangelism is a fruit of true conversion.** Paul spoke of winning souls as bearing fruit to God (Rom. 1:13). Fruit-bearing is a mark of a true Christian. True Christians evangelize, bear fruit and are persecuted for proclaiming the clear gospel. If you are in a church where the leadership is not personally involved in evangelism, having face-to-face conversations with lost people pleading with them to repent, then you are under the leadership of unregenerate men. Get out! If you are not habitually evangelizing then you are lost – repent before it is too late.

Clarifications:

1. A baby disciple is not going to evangelize perfectly.
2. There are numerous methods by which to evangelize.
3. A true Christian may be disobedient regarding evangelism for a limited period of time. King David committed adultery and did not repent for about a year. However, if David had repeatedly committed adultery year after year without repentance he would clearly have given evidence of being lost. This is also the case with one who, year after year, refuses to faithfully proclaim the gospel to lost people.
4. A genuine Christian may share the gospel with many people with no visible results for extended periods to time. Noah preached for 120 years with only 8 souls saved. Jeremiah preached for 40 years with not a single convert recorded to his credit. Evangelism must not be determined by how a sinner responds to the message or to the Christian sharing the message.

5. A true Christian is evangelizing even when the person he is witnessing to does not give him the time or freedom to communicate the full gospel message in its entirety. In other words, a baby disciple may just be able to tell a person that Jesus died for them and arose. Perhaps all they can do at one point with one person is to give them a gospel tract. For example, the woman at the well was evangelizing when she simply invited the men of the city to "Come, see a man who told me all things that I ever done" (John 4).

Those who seek to bring the lost to Jesus are involved in evangelism even when they are not given the time to fully explain the gospel or when they may not personally have a full understanding of the whole theology of the gospel message.