



Sharing Our Faith

WHAT we do,
WHO should do it,
HOW we should do it, and
WHY we must do it.

Over the next couple of sessions we are going to be looking at the important topic of “Sharing our Faith”. There are all sorts of images and experiences that come up in our minds when we think about this topic. There are very special memories and there are some things that make us cringe!

For most people, there is a lot of fear, because sharing our faith is risky business. It puts our relationships and reputation on the line. We feel guilty because we know we should be passionate about doing it, but somehow the desire to stay safe seems always to prove more powerful.

My prayer is that as we look at this subject again, it will cause you to rejoice in what you see that God has already been doing; that you will be freed from fear and guilt but instead empowered to step out in faith, hope and love to share the greatest message ever told.

Why We Must Do It



We're going to start with the end in mind – why should we bother to share our faith with others?

Let me say this simply – we must share our faith with others because faith in Jesus determines whether people are going to heaven or hell. If we claim to be God's children then we must share his love for those who are lost. That love must run so deep that it extends even to giving our lives up for the sake of their salvation.

Are there other reasons to share our faith? Yes, there are. Sharing your faith is the best way to grow in your faith. Sharing your faith is the best way to challenge yourself to live by faith. Sharing your faith is the best way to make a real difference in the lives of people here and now in ways that no-one else can. These are all benefits that come from sharing our faith, but the central reality and reason is this: there will be a day of judgement, and we will stand before God either on the basis of what we have done or on the basis of what Christ has done for us which we received by faith.

The following Scriptures explain this clearly for us:

Romans 3:21-26

*²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*¹

John 3:16-18

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son"

Revelation 20:11-15

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Sharing our faith is the last thing we want to do at a selfish level. We want to be popular, respected, accepted, secure and so on, and sharing the confrontational message of the gospel puts all of that at risk. Living by God's standards instead of conforming to the pattern of this world puts all of that at risk. We must die to our selfish desires before we can be free to share the gospel with passion and freedom. If we are truly God's people, do we really have the option to do otherwise?

What is “Sharing our Faith?”



The Bible talks about 2 different ways in which we share our faith. We can summarise these by using 2 words: *witnessing* and *evangelism*. There’s an important difference that I want us to be clear on today.

Witnessing is our testimony about what we have seen, heard and experienced. The Greek word which we translate as witness is also the origin of the word “martyr”. Literally, those we call “martyrs” were witnesses for Jesus who would not change their story even under the greatest of pressure. All Christians are called to be witnesses to Jesus. Our whole lives are to demonstrate His reality and the effect that He has had on us.

Philippians 1:27-28

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

² We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. ³ We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹ for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

³ We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. ⁴ Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

⁵ All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. ⁶ God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷ and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

¹¹ With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. ¹² We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So our witness consists of our every act prompted by faith. As God works in us by His power Jesus is glorified. These texts, along with many others, demonstrate that when a person truly believes in Jesus their whole lives are inevitably changed. We live for a different purpose. We live by different values. We have different priorities. We live by the Holy Spirit, not by our own strength and wisdom. Our behaviour demonstrates these differences, and that is our witness.

Evangelism is a very specific part of our witness which involves communicating the good news about Jesus – the gospel. At its core, the gospel message is that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day, just as the Scriptures foretold (1 Cor. 15:1-11). Every Christian teaching has its foundation in those central truths. From those truths we can go back to Creation and explain the origins of the problem of sin. From these truths we can look forward to Christ's second coming. From these truths we can talk about the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the nature of the Christian life. But in order for any message to be called the gospel, it must communicate each of those central elements: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation.

Ephesians 6:19-20

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Romans 1:16-17

¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

How do witnessing and evangelism work together?

In 1 Peter 3 we read that the behaviour of Christian wives can win over their unbelieving husbands. In Titus 2 we read that the integrity of Christian slaves could make the teaching about Jesus attractive to unbelievers.

St Francis of Assisi is quoted as saying: "Preach the gospel at all times, and where necessary use words". It's a great saying, but is very often misused. Yes, our conduct matters. Yes, we communicate the values of our faith by how we live. But if we want people to be saved, we must give them the truth that they must believe in order to be saved. It is the gospel which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Our conduct – our witness – can make people curious about Jesus or it can produce hostility toward us and our faith. But neither curiosity nor hostility produce salvation, only faith does. Most of the time people who come to faith in Jesus do so because of a curiosity or openness which has been produced by the solid witness of Christians. This occurs in homes, workplaces, clubs or wherever else people have a chance to observe the lives of Christian people. Occasionally however, people who are very turned off by the lives of Christians still come to faith...

"There's a story in the biography of George Whitefield about a man named Thorpe, who was a bitter opponent of everything that is holy. He and a group of his friends—all of them young, rebellious thugs—conspired together to mock and oppose George Whitefield's evangelistic ministry while Whitefield was preaching in Bristol, England.

If you have ever seen a realistic likeness of him, you'll know that George Whitefield had severely crossed eyes. And these guys used to refer to him as "Dr. Squintum." They called their little gang "The Hell-Fire Club," and they disrupted meetings, mocked Whitefield on the streets and in public places, and generally tried to make his ministry a reproach in their community. Whitefield's preaching had already made a deep and lasting impact in Bristol, and these young ruffians hated him for it. So this guy Thorpe got one of Whitefield's published sermons and took it to the local pub, where the "Hell-Fire Club" was gathered to drink together while they make a burlesque of

Whitefield.

Thorpe was apparently pretty good at doing impressions, and he had all Whitefield's mannerisms and gestures down pat. So he stood in the center of this pub and crossed his eyes and began to deliver a derisive rendition of Whitefield's sermon. But in the middle of the sermon, the Word of God pierced his heart, and he suddenly stopped and sat down, trembling and broken-hearted. Right then and there, he confessed the truth of the gospel and gave his heart to Christ. His aim was to taunt and ridicule, but he accidentally converted himself! Or rather, the power of the Word of God penetrated his soul and cut him to the heart. He became a preacher himself and quite an effective evangelist, because he knew so well the power of the Word of God to penetrate hardened hearts."

Thorpe and his friends saw the changes produced by people coming to faith in Jesus and they didn't approve. They didn't want to be like all these other folks who were suddenly becoming religious, and they certainly didn't want their own fun ruined by the change in morality in Bristol.

Yet it was their hostile reaction to the witness of this great revival that actually led to Thorpe's conversion. If they were disinterested, they would have gone about their own business without bothering about this itinerant preacher. Their desire to mock and belittle Whitefield was what exposed them to his message, and God worked salvation through that gospel even in the midst of their hostility.

As we read in...

Romans 10:9-15

¹⁴ *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?*

¹⁵ *And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

It is possible to witness without evangelizing, but we must remember that witness without evangelism is not complete - people must hear the gospel in order to be saved.

Who Should Do It?



As mentioned earlier, we are all witnesses to Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded us to let our light shine before all men, that they might see our good deeds and praise our Father in Heaven (Matt. 5:16).

On the other hand, we are not all called to be evangelists. Ephesians 4:11 lists evangelists as one of the specific types of people that God has appointed to build up the church body, along with apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers.

However, does this mean that you are excused from evangelising if you do not consider yourself to be an evangelist? In no way!

First of all, 1 Peter 3:15 tells us that we should all *"be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have"*.

Secondly, not being called or gifted for a particular role does not mean that we should never perform it, or that we will never be used by God to do it.

Just because I am not gifted for regular teaching does not mean I should never teach – especially as we are all commanded to do so. Just because I am not a natural encourager does not mean I should not encourage – we are all told to do so. Just because I am not a pastor does not mean I should not look out for others and care for their spiritual needs. Just because I am not gifted for practical service does not mean I shouldn't stack the chairs when necessary.

On the contrary, it is our love for others that prompts us to serve in whatever way is appropriate, and to do so by the power of the Spirit. If we are serving outside our normal areas of gifting, then in our weakness we depend on God even more, and just as He said to the Apostle Paul: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* (2 Cor. 12:9)

So let's not handball responsibility to anyone else, but in love for others let's step out in faith to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

The other side of that is that there are some people who are especially gifted for and called to the role of evangelist. We need to pray that God will produce such people in our congregation, and we also need to train and support them in their ministry. I have noticed that people with a strong heart for evangelism often do not find it easy to be part of the body with other believers. They want to be out among unbelievers! Very often they are busy forming relationships and breaking down barriers to communication and doing things that sometimes people who do not share their passion find difficult to understand and approve of. These are the ones who always seem to be pushing the church to change in order to connect better with the surrounding culture, ruffling plenty of feathers in the process. They are the ones who end up disillusioned because others in the church seem to care more for their own comfort than reaching the lost. They can come across as critical of others who don't share their enthusiasm, which can make people feel defensive.

If you are a leader who tries to keep everyone happy, having an evangelist in your congregation is probably your greatest nightmare! Their favourite verse is 1 Corinthians 9:22 - *“I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.”*. At the same time most people in the congregation are saying “We don't want to be like this or that, we like being like THIS. We think this is the best way to be”.

These are the sort of people that many churches have driven away. They are the sort of people we need, working in harmony with the rest of the body in order to fulfil God's purpose for the church.

God has called us to bear His message of salvation to the World. People are dying with no hope for eternity, and we must do something about it.

God has appointed us to be His witnesses, who live lives which are transformed by power of the gospel. He has appointed us to be His messengers, bearers of the good news of this gospel which we hold out as we shine like stars in the universe (Phil. 2:15-16).

Are you ready to tell people the wonderful news of the gospel? Are we as a church utilising the evangelistic gifts that God has given us in our members? May the Holy Spirit challenge each one of us as to how we must respond.

Wrapping Up - Sharing Our Faith



Why?

We do it because we love people enough that we will risk everything in order to help them be ready for eternity

What?

Sharing our faith involves consistent witness and clear evangelism

Who?

Sharing our faith is for every Christian, but we each will do it differently according to God's call.

Next time....

How should we share our faith?