



RECAPTURING EVANGELISM

A Biblical-Theological Approach

MATT QUEEN

Foreword by David S. Dockery

“Matt Queen has provided us with a comprehensive and clear guide on how to be a winsome witness to Jesus Christ. He engages with the best of classical and contemporary thinkers on the subject. The result is a trustworthy biblical, theological, and practical tour de force. He writes from a rich Southern Baptist context, but this book deserves a wide audience across the spectrum of denominations. As a mainline pastor teaching in an evangelical college, I recommend this book to all who want to learn how and why to share their faith. *Recapturing Evangelism* helped me, it is helping my students, and it will help you.”

—**Gregory M. Anderson**, evangelism commission chair,
Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

“Matt Queen exemplifies ‘scholarship on fire.’ *Recapturing Evangelism* demonstrates Queen’s meticulous research of existing evangelism materials, from which he provides practical application for believers today. I read everything Queen writes on evangelism. You should too!”

—**Timothy Beougher**, associate dean and Billy Graham professor
of evangelism, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“*Recapturing Evangelism* is a magnificent work of biblical and theological scholarship, vividly presented by one of Southern Baptist’s most passionate, grace-gifted evangelists. After reading this theology of evangelism, which masterfully integrates spiritual, philosophical, and methodological dimensions of the spiritual discipline, scholars, pastors, and those in the pew will exclaim, ‘I have recaptured my passion for evangelism!’”

—**Carl J. Bradford**, assistant professor of evangelism,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“What are the contemporary issues in evangelism? What are the theological minefields to be aware of? Matt Queen’s *Recapturing Evangelism* equips us to answer these questions. By reading this book, you will have a comprehensive foundation of Bible passages and a systematic

understanding of relevant categories for evangelism—both in theory and practice. Any serious student of evangelism must read this book.”

—**Sam Chan**, author of *Evangelism in a Skeptical World*;
How to Talk about Jesus (Without Being That Guy)
and *Topical Preaching in a Complex World*

“Matt Queen’s contribution to evangelism scholarship in *Recapturing Evangelism* provides a needed reminder of the gravity of an increasingly unpopular activity. The book moves from the biblical roots of evangelism, through various theologies surrounding the practice, and finally to the application of why and how every Christian ought to evangelize. This work is at once scholarly—researched deeply enough to satisfy any expert in the field—yet accessible—providing instructive anecdotes and strategies understandable by a novice Christian. It would serve equally well as a textbook for seminary courses or a topical study for church small groups.”

—**Adam W. Greenway**, president, Southwestern
Baptist Theological Seminary

“While there are many books on the subject of evangelism, *Recapturing Evangelism* is a biblically-grounded and theologically-informed resource that stands out from the others. He combines the study of the Scriptures with the wisdom of evangelists from history and insights of seasoned practitioners today. More than excellent content, however, Matt Queen’s passion to reach spiritually lost souls and form them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus, jumps from the pages.”

—**David M. Gustafson**, associate professor of evangelism and
missional ministry, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“I fear that pastors leading their churches to be evangelistic are often trying to train church members who do not see a need for evangelism in the first place. Ask the members, and they sometimes cannot summarize their own story well. Quiz them, and they cannot clearly explain the gospel. Press them, and they’re not all convinced hell is real—or even

that good people apart from Jesus are headed there. Matt Queen, one of the most passionate evangelists I know, recognizes that believers need a strong biblical and theological base if we expect them to tell the good news. Dr. Queen has provided this excellent resource to address that need. Read it, and then teach it to your church.”

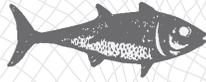
—**Chuck Lawless**, dean of doctoral studies and senior professor of evangelism and missions, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Sadly, evangelism has become multiple things to multiple people. As the Church goes into the world, She travels through a fog of confusion regarding this kingdom matter. Much is at stake. Billions are in need of the good news. Matt Queen has provided a means to remove the fog by challenging us to return to the apostolic imagination. *Recapturing Evangelism* is a great book! Queen’s scholarly, yet highly practical, work takes us on a journey into present realities while finding guidance from Scripture, history, and contemporary practice as we make disciples of all nations. This work equips us to go with intentionality and urgency and share with gentleness and respect as we proclaim the good news of the Kingdom!”

—**J. D. Payne**, author, missiologist, and professor of Christian ministry, Samford University

“In the book, *Recapturing Evangelism: A Biblical-Theological Approach*, Dr. Matt Queen addresses the essence of evangelism as a theological practice. This is a much needed and timely study for both the local church and academia. I have found that if we do not see evangelism as part of our overall theology, it will most likely be avoided altogether. I very much appreciate Dr. Queen’s willingness to deal with the man-made limitations to evangelism that are falsely embraced by many Christian leaders, etc. If you will read this book with an open mind, I am convinced that you will be both challenged and encouraged to join Christ on mission as a multiplying evangelist!”

—**David A. Wheeler**, professor of evangelism and senior executive director of Liberty University Shepherd, Liberty University



RECAPTURING EVANGELISM

A Biblical-Theological Approach

MATT QUEEN

Foreword by David S. Dockery

BH
ACADEMIC
BRENTWOOD, TENNESSEE

Recapturing Evangelism: A Biblical-Theological Approach

Copyright © 2023 by Matt Queen

Published by B&H Academic
Brentwood, Tennessee

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-0877-2335-8

Dewey Decimal Classification: 269.2

Subject Heading: EVANGELISTIC WORK / WITNESSING / CHURCH WORK

Some of the content of this book contains modifications of Matt Queen, *Everyday Evangelism*, 3rd ed. (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill Press, 2019); Matt Queen, *Mobilize to Evangelize: The Pastor and Effective Congregational Evangelism* (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill Press, 2018); and Matt Queen and Alex Sibley, eds., *And You Will Be My Witnesses: 31 Devotionals to Encourage a Spirit of Everyday Evangelism* (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill Press, 2019), with permission from Seminary Hill Press.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville Tennessee. All rights reserved. Lexham English Bible (LEB), 2012 by Logos Bible Software. Lexham is a registered trademark of Logos Bible Software. New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations taken from the New English Bible, copyright © Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press 1961, 1970. All rights reserved. Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The web addresses referenced in this book were live and correct at the time of the book's publication but may be subject to change.

Cover design by Darren Welch Design. Cover images by Bigmouse108/iStock and Ant_art/Shutterstock.

Printed in the United States of America

28 27 26 25 24 23 BHP 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CONTENTS

Foreword	xiii
Preface	xix
Acknowledgmentsxxiii

Part 1: Foundations for Evangelism

Chapter 1: Contemporary Misconceptions of Evangelism	3
Chapter 2: Toward an Understanding of Evangelism	35
Chapter 3: Biblical Foundations of Evangelism	51
Chapter 4: Biblical Foundations of the Gospel	93

Part 2: Issues in Evangelism

Chapter 5: Spiritual Issues in Evangelism	143
Chapter 6: Philosophical and Practical Issues in Evangelism	175
Chapter 7: Personal Evangelism Methods and Strategies	221

Part 3: Implications for Evangelism

Chapter 8: Evangelism as Communication and Proclamation	243
Chapter 9: Evangelism in the Local Church	275
Chapter 10: Evangelism That Makes Disciples	303

Subject Index	325
Scripture Index	333

FOREWORD

If anything has disappeared from modern thought in the twenty-first century, it is the belief in an eternal heaven and an everlasting hell. Even those who retain some vague idea of heavenly bliss beyond this life are slow to acknowledge the reality of final judgment and condemnation. Modern men and women live with the mindset that there is no heaven, no hell, and therefore no guilt. Much confusion exists concerning the gospel and the need for evangelism in our contemporary context. The church has added to this confusion by primarily focusing on evangelistic methodologies and strategies, as important as these may be, rather than prioritizing an understanding of the meaning, transformational power, and veracity of the message of evangelism, which is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The book you hold in your hands, by Matt Queen, the L. R. Scarborough Professor of Evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, thoughtfully addresses these important issues and more.

What has been lost, or at least misplaced in our current context, is the recognition that at the heart of genuine evangelism and outreach must be a firm biblical and theological foundation. Queen rightly begins his thorough treatment of the subject of evangelism at this point. Stressing that biblical and theological foundations undergird the message of the

gospel and the work of evangelism, this contemporary evangelism textbook builds upon and greatly expands the concepts taught by longtime Southwestern Seminary president L. R. Scarborough in the classic volume *With Christ after the Lost* (Baptist Sunday School Board, 1919).

Queen emphasizes that the message of and commission for the work of evangelism, which involves the communication of the good news of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ in word and in deed, is found in the Bible, God's truthful, inspired, and authoritative written Word (2 Tim 3:16). Furthermore, it is understood that the work of evangelism cannot be done in our human frailty; it requires the empowering of God's Spirit (Acts 1:8). While the work of evangelism is broad in its scope, including discipling and teaching others to do all that Jesus commanded (Matt 28:19), Queen wisely introduces his readers to the work of evangelism with a focus on a theological foundation of the gospel message by seeking to define evangelism, by articulating the meaning of the gospel, and by surveying the teachings on this subject in both the Old and New Testaments.

Queen maintains with conviction that even though men and women are created in God's image, the entrance of sin into the world has had great and negative influences upon God's creation, especially for humans created in God's image. As a result of sin, the image of God, though not lost, was affected by sin. The role of exercising dominion (Gen 1:28) has been drastically disturbed by the effects of sin on humans and the curse on nature (Gen 3). The ability to live in right relationship with God, as well as with others, with nature, and even with ourselves, has been corrupted. All attempts at righteousness have fallen short (Isa 64:6; Rom 3:23). Humans are ultimately spiritually dead and alienated from God (Eph 2:1–3). Evangelism is necessary because men and women in every country and every context, throughout every period of history, are separated and alienated from God.

The message of evangelism is found in the gracious redemption that God provided in the person of Jesus Christ. It was necessary that Christ should be both God and man. Only as man could Jesus be a redeemer

for humanity, and only as a sinless man could he fittingly die for others. Yet it was only as God that his life, ministry, and redeeming death could have infinite value and satisfy the wrath of God to deliver others from it. Unless the work of evangelism, the telling of the good news of the gospel, is focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ, it is misguided.

At the heart of the evangelistic message is the amazing news that Christ's death provided for sinners a sinless substitutionary sacrifice that revealed God's love for the world (John 3:16) while satisfying divine justice (Rom 3:21–26). This incomprehensibly valuable redemption delivered sinners from enslavement and reconciled and restored believers from estrangement to full fellowship and inheritance in the household of God. The basis of our salvation is totally in God himself and in Christ's atoning, redeeming, and reconciling work on the cross. Because of Christ's accomplishment on the cross, God has chosen to treat sinful men and women who believe the good news of the gospel as children rather than transgressors (2 Cor 5:18–20; Eph 2:12–16; Col 1:20–22). Paul, in 2 Cor 5:14, points us to the motivation for sharing the good news of the gospel in a local context or in a cross-cultural one; it is the love of God made known in Jesus Christ and his death and victorious resurrection.

The Bible maintains that faith is the means by which we receive and appropriate the good news of the gospel. Salvation is a gift of God that cannot be merited by good works (Rom 3:22–24; Eph 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–6). Grace comes to us while we are still in our sins and brings spiritual transformation based on the accomplished work of Jesus Christ. For the recipients of grace, the promise holds that Jesus Christ delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9). Those who believe the message of the gospel need not fear future condemnation because believers have been justified by grace through faith (Rom 5:1; 8:1).

The work of evangelism calls for a human response to this good news. When God extends his grace to us, he is the active agent, but he always extends grace through means, such as the preached word, the written Word of God, the sharing of personal testimony, the prayers of

other believers, the invitation to respond to grace, and the faith of the respondent. Though faith is more than doctrinal assent, it must include an adherence to the truths made known in Scripture regarding the person and work of Christ, who is the truth, the life, the only way to have relationship with God (John 14:6). In our commitment to Jesus Christ, we acknowledge him as Savior from sin and Lord of our lives (Rom 10:9).

The work of evangelism must be understood within God's overall redemptive work, for God is not just saving individuals, he is saving a people for himself. The plan of salvation includes not only the redemption of individuals, but also the redemption of all creation (Rom 8:18–27; Rev 20:11–15), and the redemption of people from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev 5:9; 7:9). Queen provides illumination on the reality that the evangelistic message must also reflect awareness of our context, a lesson to be learned from the apostles in the book of Acts (see Acts 2:14–36; 3:11–26; 13:16–41; 17:22–31; 22:6–21; 24:10–21; 26:12–23).

The volume you hold in your hand by Matt Queen is much more than a work on the theology of evangelism, but I am grateful that it is no less than that. Queen recognizes that a firm theological foundation is important for faithful evangelistic proclamation. This volume also carefully explores the spiritual, philosophical, and methodological dimensions of evangelism. Addressing practical matters like the fear and anxiety that many believers experience in attempting to share their faith, Queen, who is a faithful evangelist himself (as I have witnessed on more than one occasion), guides readers toward developing a personal philosophy and approach to evangelism, as enabled by the Holy Spirit.

Recapturing Evangelism also addresses the entailments of evangelism such as communication theory, the place of discipleship and disciple-making, and the significance of the church in this work. Queen exhorts followers of Christ to work harder at closing the gap between our talk about evangelism and the faithful work of evangelism, encouraging our evangelistic efforts to be done for the building up of the church, while emphasizing that proclamation and service must be grounded in a scripturally formed theology. Our evangelistic message must be firmly

grounded in the love of God, made known in holy Scripture, while understanding the need for the Holy Spirit's enablement, especially when encountering spiritual opposition (Eph 6:10–17).

This contemporary evangelism textbook is faithful in its message, sensitive in its presentation, and timely in its approach. It will be our prayer that church leaders and students for generations to come will learn from and profit both from Queen's heart and his message. With the author of this fine book, we affirm that our evangelistic proclamation and commitments must be shaped by the truths regarding creation, the fall, and redemption. We join with him in gladly confessing Jesus Christ as Lord, our prophet, priest, and king, who has completely revealed God, reconciled men and women to God, and who now sits enthroned as ruler of God's kingdom and head of his church. In him we place our trust and hope, offering our thanksgiving, praise, and worship for the gift of salvation he has provided for us by grace through faith (Eph 2:8–9). Like the apostle Paul, let us pray for opportunities to proclaim the gospel message with all boldness and without hindrance to a lost and dying world in need of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31).

Soli Deo Gloria

David S. Dockery

President, International Alliance for Christian Education
and Distinguished Professor of Theology,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Part 1

Foundations for Evangelism

Contemporary Misconceptions of Evangelism

Most, if not all, Christians view evangelism favorably, but they do not all share the same commitment to it. Some believers like evangelism as long as they own no responsibility to practice it. Other Christians express full-throated support for it—if other people are doing it. Still, a small contingent of believers cherish evangelism and share their faith.

How can one particular word—*evangelism*—be almost universally and favorably affirmed by Christians, yet possess so many different meanings and elicit numerous kinds of responses? For the most part, believers' conception and understanding of what is meant by "evangelism" stimulate these and other types of responsive actions. Some constrict evangelism into a particular method, either that they cannot envision themselves doing—like preaching in a pulpit—or against which they have a prejudice—such as evangelizing door-to-door or preaching with a bullhorn on a street corner. Others believe their participation in events

and efforts that meet others' physical needs qualifies as evangelism. And growing numbers of believers have adopted the idea that evangelization is optional and not a required Christian duty. This chapter surveys the most common misnomers attributed to evangelism and provides a biblical corrective to each of them.

Misnomers about Evangelism

Generally speaking, believers do not evangelize for one of at least three reasons. First, fears associated with evangelism, notably the fears of failure and rejection, prevent some believers from evangelizing.¹ Second, believers sometimes do not share the gospel because of their apathy, and thus their own personal rebellion against the Lord, toward obeying the Great Commission.² Last, some believers involve themselves either in misguided alternatives to biblical evangelism that prove harmful to the evangelistic enterprise, or in admirable spiritual activities that confuse evangelism with other Christian functions. These issues require a differentiation between evangelism's meaning and the common misconceptions attributed to it. The following sections refute some of the most common misperceptions people have confused with evangelism.³

¹ Correctives to the evangelistic inhibitor of fear will be discussed in the section "Fear and Evangelism" in chapter 5.

² Correctives concerning disobedience in evangelizing will be offered in chapter 3, in the section "Biblical Motivations for Evangelism."

³ Authors of prominent textbooks and books on evangelism have identified general misconceptions about evangelism, in order to define evangelism biblically. For examples, see George E. Sweazey, *Effective Evangelism: The Greatest Work in the World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 21–22; C. E. Autrey, *Basic Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 26–30; Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 69–82; and Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is . . . : How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), vi–ix.

Evangelism Is a Spiritual Gift

The belief that the Holy Spirit bestows a “gift of evangelism” upon a select, exclusive group of believers to carry out the work of evangelism has gained increasing acceptance today. This misconception of evangelism advances a narrative that only certain people can, or should, evangelize. Advocates of this position have convinced themselves that those with “the gift of evangelism” have the sole responsibility to evangelize, or that spiritually gifted evangelists possess some enhanced ability to do so. Some may accept they have a responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission through evangelism but believe that because they do not have “the gift of evangelism” they can practice it more passively and less frequently than those who possess it.

These positions fail to align with the New Testament’s teaching about evangelism. First, the Bible never mentions “a gift of evangelism.” Paul does identify grace-gifted *evangelists* (Eph 4:11), whom he explains equip the saints in local churches for ministry along with the grace-gifted apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers (Eph 4:12–13).⁴ In Paul’s Ephesian paradigm of grace-gifted functionality, all believers are responsible to be

⁴ Generally Christians refer to grace-gifts as *spiritual gifts*, although the phrase, *charisma pneumatikon* [spiritual gift], is present only once in the New Testament (i.e., Rom 1:11). In 1 Corinthians Paul used the Greek word translated as *spiritual* [sans *charisma*] twice within the context of his explanation about these kinds of gifts. He used cognates of *pneumatikos*, specifically *pneumatikōn* in 1 Cor 12:1 and *pneumatika* in 1 Cor 14:1, to discuss the gifts. Nevertheless, Bible translations (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB, and ESV) that use the wording *spiritual gifts* or *gifts of the Spirit*, add the word *gifts*, although it is not present in the Greek. Mark Taylor has explained reasons why these forms of *pneumatikos* are better translated as *spiritual things* or *spiritual people*, see *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 279.

Both Paul and Peter generally and consistently use cognates of *charisma* to refer to the gifts (i.e., *charismatōn* in 1 Cor 12:4; *charismata* in 1 Cor 12:28, 30 and Rom 12:6; *charis* and *dōreas* in Eph 4:7, while Peter uses *charisma* in 1 Pet 4:10). For these reasons the terminology of *grace-gifts* is preferred and will be

equipped for ministry by those who are endowed with these functional grace-gifts, which includes being equipped by grace-gifted evangelists to evangelize. In other words, Christ has not gifted churches with evangelists so that they evangelize for the churches. Instead, he has given churches evangelists so that they might model evangelism and encourage, equip, train, and mobilize their members to practice it. In the contemporary era, Christ continues to equip believers for ministry through grace-gifted evangelists and pastor-teachers.

Additionally, the misconception of “a spiritual gift of evangelism” occurs because believers confuse the New Testament’s use of evangelists as a synonym for evangelism. In fact, the noun *evangelism* appears nowhere in the Scriptures, whereas the noun *euangelistēs*, or *evangelist(s)*, appears three times (e.g., Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11; and 2 Tim 4:5). This does not mean that evangelism is not extant in the Bible; rather evangelism permeates the New Testament in its verbal form—*euangelizō*, or *proclaim (preach) the gospel* (i.e., Luke 4:43; 9:6; 20:1; Acts 8:35; 13:32; 14:7; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:16, 18; Gal 1:8b; and Eph 2:17; 3:8).

Second, the evangelistic enterprise of the church cannot advance through the evangelism practiced by “specially gifted evangelists” alone because God has ordained that all believers evangelize the entire world. If, in fact, only a few believers were endowed with “the spiritual gift of evangelism,” they would never have the breadth of access to evangelize as many unbelievers in their sphere of influence as do all believers around the world. Nowhere in the Gospels does Christ appoint only “spiritually gifted evangelists” to fulfill the Great Commission on their own. If he had, not all of those first disciples who received the Great Commission would have evangelized others or encouraged the disciples they made to evangelize—but they did (e.g., Acts 4:29–31; 8:4)! Furthermore, if the task of world evangelization falls only upon those with “a spiritual gift

used when discussing them, due to its precision with the wording used by the New Testament’s authors when describing and explaining these gifts.

of evangelism,” then it follows that Jesus’s promise to be with his people always (Matt 28:20) also applies only to evangelists.⁵

Third, if evangelism were a spiritual gift, believers could claim that other additional spiritual gifts exist outside of those identified in the New Testament. The inventory of the gifts in the New Testament is found in Rom 12:4–8; 1 Cor 12:1–31; Eph 4:7, 11–13; and 1 Pet 4:10–11. These are the spiritual grace-gifts in the New Testament: a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, faith, healing, effecting of miracles, prophecy, distinguishing of spirits, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, administration, service, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. This list verifies, as mentioned earlier, that the Bible never references “a gift of evangelism.” Evangelists are listed, but as explained earlier (1) evangelists exercise their grace-giftedness by equipping believers not evangelizing unbelievers and (2) evangelism and evangelists are two different concepts. If the Holy Spirit does endow some believers with “a gift of evangelism,” then it follows that additional grace-gifts of the Spirit exist outside those provided in Scripture. How can the existence of additional gifts not mentioned in Scripture be verified? What prevents people from asserting “a gift of reading the Bible” or “a gift of prayer” as a reason why they do not have the responsibility to read the Bible or pray either consistently or at all? Assigning or identifying grace-gifts not identified in the New Testament would be subjective and fail to obtain a common consensus.

Last, evangelism is not a spiritual gift because the primary beneficiary of spiritual gifts is the church, not the unchurched. The New Testament’s

⁵ This reasoning echoes William Carey’s response to critiques John Ryland Sr. raised concerning Carey’s interpretation of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Carey argued, “If the command of Christ to teach all nations extend only to the apostles, then, doubtless, the promise of the divine presence in this work must be so limited; but this is worded in such a manner as expressly precludes such an idea, ‘Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world.’” Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (Leicester, UK: n.p., 1792), 9.

inventory and explanation of spiritual grace-gifts demonstrate that the purpose of every spiritual gift is to unite diversely gifted believers in the body of Christ (Rom 12:5), to benefit the common good of the body (1 Cor 12:7), to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:12), and to serve one another (1 Pet 4:10). All grace-gifts are given primarily to benefit the body of Christ, not unbelievers. Ephesians 4 states that Christ gave evangelists to equip the saints, not to be the only saints to evangelize sinners. Rather than do all the work of evangelism for the saints, grace-gifted evangelists equip, encourage, train, and teach the saints for their perfecting in evangelistic ministry.

Instead of describing “a spiritual gift of evangelism” bestowed upon a select few, the book of Acts presents evangelism as a spiritual discipline all believers in the early churches practiced intentionally and consistently. In his seminal history of evangelism in the early church, Michael Green observed this phenomenon among first-century believers: “It was axiomatic that every Christian was called to be a witness to Christ, not only by life but by lip.”⁶ He explains:

The very disciples themselves were, significantly, laymen, devoid of formal theological or rhetorical training. Christianity was from its inception a lay movement, and so it continued for a remarkably long time. . . . They were evangelists, just as much as any apostle was. . . . [Their spreading of the good news] must often have been not formal preaching, but the informal chattering to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes . . . on walks, and around market stalls. They went everywhere gossiping the gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing. Consequently, they were taken seriously, and the movement spread, notably among the lower classes.⁷

⁶ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 246.

⁷ Green, 243.

Elton Trueblood translated this first-century reality into a principle for the contemporary era. He declares, “A person cannot be a Christian and avoid being a [personal] evangelist. Evangelism is not a professionalized job of a few gifted or trained men but is, instead, the unrelenting responsibility of every person who belongs, even in the most modest way, to the Company of Jesus.”⁸

For these reasons, evangelism fails to meet the biblical qualifications and descriptions of a spiritual gift. If evangelism is not a “spiritual gift,” can it be considered a “spiritual fruit”? In Gal 5:22–23 Paul identified the virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as spiritual fruit. As in the inventories of spiritual gifts, Paul also excluded evangelism from his list of spiritual fruit. Therefore, it also cannot be categorized as a spiritual fruit. What, then, is evangelism?

Evangelism meets the qualifications of a spiritual discipline. A *spiritual discipline* is a deed commanded by God in the Scriptures that requires a Christian’s obedience for the purpose of spiritual growth and intimacy with God. Due to the imperatival commands and obedient expectations associated with them in the Scriptures, activities such as reading and studying the Bible, praying, worshiping, serving, giving, and fasting qualify as spiritual disciplines. As with each of these disciplines, the New Testament authors also instructed and expected believers to practice evangelism. Many of them recounted Jesus’s command that his disciples evangelize (cf. Matt 10:7; 28:18–20; *Mark 16:15*; Luke 24:47–48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).⁹ Because it meets the necessary criteria, Christians should consider evangelism as a spiritual discipline.¹⁰

⁸ Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed: A Bold and Imaginative Re-thinking of the Strategy of the Church in Contemporary Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 55.

⁹ *Mark 16:15* is denoted in italics because many scholars suggest that due to its omission in the majority of the oldest Marcan manuscripts, it likely was not included in the original manuscript of Mark’s Gospel.

¹⁰ To distinguish those individuals who are grace-gifted to equip and mobilize churches for evangelism from every Christian who is obligated to evangelize,

Even though evangelism fails to meet the criteria of a spiritual gift, God has given every believer a gift to aid them in their evangelistic endeavors. The 1939 film adaptation of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* illustrates this spiritual benefit he affords his children. The film portrays the fantasy tale of Dorothy Gale's journey to the Emerald City to inquire of its Wizard the way home from Oz to Kansas. While on the yellow brick road to the city, she encounters and subsequently enlists a brainless Scarecrow, a hollow-chested Tin Man, and a cowardly Lion. In addition to Dorothy's wish to go home, the Scarecrow desires a thinking brain; the Tin Man, a beating heart; and the Lion, ferocious courage. Arriving at the Emerald City, Dorothy and her band of misfits present themselves before the great and powerful Oz, who knows what they want before they even ask. He agrees to grant their requests, providing they can defeat the Wicked Witch of the West and bring him her broomstick. Motivated by his rewarding offer, Dorothy leads her mindless, heartless, and fearful army to undertake a mission impossible to win without brains, heart, and bravery.

Nevertheless, Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion returned triumphantly to the Wizard with the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West. The Wizard rewarded the Scarecrow with a "doctor of thinkology" diploma, the Tin Man with a ticking heart clock, and the Cowardly Lion with the Triple Cross Medal of Courage. He explained to them, however, that by virtue of the way they defeated the Wicked Witch, the brainless Scarecrow had been able to think all along, the heartless Tin Man had been able to love all along, and the Cowardly Lion had been courageous all along!

Similarly, many believers have convinced themselves that because they have not been endowed with a "gift of evangelism," they do not possess enough knowledge, love, or courage to share the gospel. But God's people do not require "a gift of evangelism" to make disciples—they

I will refer to the former as *grace-gifted evangelist(s)* and the latter as *personal evangelist(s)*.

already have what, more specifically, they need to do so intentionally and consistently. God does endow believers with a gift to evangelize, but it's not "a gift of evangelism"—it's his Holy Spirit!

Evangelism Is “Using Words When Necessary”

Some believers think they practice evangelism on the basis of their moral and upright lifestyles, apart from actually verbalizing the gospel. In describing advocates of this way of thinking, Trueblood says:

[Some] people [have] decided that while they might continue as believers in Christ, they would never be caught dead talking about it. They determined to be discreet and quiet about their faith, to let their lives speak, if any speaking was required, and to avoid, at all costs, forcing their opinions upon anyone else. They did not want to emulate the people who invaded the privacy of others, because, they said, they did not want to have their own privacy invaded.¹¹

Those who espouse evangelism in this way can caricature believers who emphasize gospel proclamation as outdated legalists who care only about a message and disregard the need for accompanying action. Yet while a few Christian evangelists throughout history have elevated proclamation to the detriment of Christian ethic, most evangelistic Christians recognize the importance of both. Furthermore, merely living out the gospel without actually sharing it makes it no less moralistic than legalistic Christianity.

Others believe that the differences Christ has made in believers' lives, without a verbal declaration of the gospel, will raise unbelievers' curiosities, leading them to initiate conversations with believers concerning the gospel. Practitioners of this approach fondly invoke a common misnomer attributed to Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel; use words

¹¹ Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed*, 46.

when necessary.” Nevertheless, after conducting biographical research on Francis, Mark Galli states:

Francis of Assisi is said to have said, “Preach the gospel at all times; when necessary, use words.” This saying is carted out whenever someone wants to suggest that Christians talk about the gospel too much, and live the gospel too little. Fair enough—that can be a problem. Much of the rhetorical power of the quotation comes from the assumption that Francis not only said it but lived it. The problem is that he did not say it. Nor did he live it.¹²

Duane Litfin also critiques the quote and its attribution to Francis. He asserts, “According to those who know the relevant history well—the Franciscans—Francis never uttered these words. But more important, on its face this dictum represents a significant error. It’s simply impossible to preach the gospel without words. The gospel is inherently verbal.”¹³ The sentiment, “Go, preach the gospel; use words when necessary,” is like saying, “Go, feed the hungry; use food when necessary.” Food is necessary to feed the hungry; and likewise, words are necessary to preach the gospel.

Those who hold this view correctly promote moral and upright lifestyles, but they have been called to live according to the highest standard of righteousness, that is, holiness (cf. Eph 1:4; 5:27; 1 Pet 1:15–16). They leave out an essential aspect of evangelism: the proclamation of a verbal message. While believers’ lifestyles must match the demands of the gospel, they must also perform their duty to the gospel. Personal evangelists proclaim the gospel verbally through vocal means

¹² Mark Galli, “Speak the Gospel, Use Deeds When Necessary,” May 21, 2009, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/mayweb-only/120-42.0.html>. Galli also discredited this quote being attributed to Francis in *Francis of Assisi and His World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).

¹³ Duane Litfin, “Works and Words: Why You Can’t Preach the Gospel with Deeds,” May 30, 2012, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/may/litfin-gospel-deeds.html>.

as well as through written and signed gospel presentations to those who are physically unable to speak and/or hear. Today's Christians, like first-century believers, are called to proclaim the gospel (cf. Acts 10:42; Rom 10:15; 1 Cor 1:17; Gal 1:15–16; Eph 3:8; and 2 Tim 4:1–2), not merely to live holy lives. In fact, holy living that accommodates being less than wholly obedient to all Christ's commands might meet ours or others' standards, but it fails to meet God's. As Trueblood explains, "[T]he living deed is never adequate without the support which the spoken word can provide. This is because no life is ever good enough. The person who says naively, 'I don't preach; I just let my life speak,' is insufferably self-righteous."¹⁴ The reverse is also true. Believers should not merely share the gospel. They must also live their lives in such a way that attests to the righteousness imputed to them through the gospel they have believed and now proclaim.

Christians believe that the gospel works in such a way as to result in conversions. Why, then, would they not also work the gospel into their conversations? Donald Whitney recounts the following precautionary tale for those who downplay the necessity of the gospel's verbal components:

I heard the story of a man who became a Christian during an evangelistic emphasis in a city in the Pacific Northwest. When the man told his boss about it, his employer responded with: "That's great! I am a Christian and have been praying for you for years!"

But the new believer was crestfallen. "Why didn't you ever tell me you were a Christian? You were the very reason I have not been interested in the gospel all these years."

"How can that be?" the boss wondered. "I have done my very best to live the Christian life around you."

"That's the point," explained the employee. "You lived such a model life without telling me it was Christ who made the

¹⁴ Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed*, 53.

difference, I convinced myself that if you could live such a good and happy life without Christ, then I could, too.”¹⁵

As Whitney’s story illustrates, failing to provide any verbalization of the gospel while modeling a Christian lifestyle can hinder evangelism. In a similar way, believers who relegate the gospel into conversations only when they determine it essential to do so impede the gospel’s advance. Consider the model of the apostles and other first-century believers. They did not “use words when necessary” when they practiced evangelism the New Testament. Words were necessary for personal evangelists in the New Testament! Examples of New Testament evangelism occur in the context of proclamation, not mere demonstration or duty alone. In fact, the New Testament addresses this kind of approach only once, and it refers to a marriage in which a believing wife is married to an unbelieving husband (1 Pet 3:1–2). As such, this passage’s specific context and intent is not prescriptive for all believers, that is, for men and women to which this situation does not apply; nor should it be adopted by all believers as a normative evangelistic approach.

Evangelism Is an Opportunity for Which Believers Should Await

Some believers assume they should wait for God to provide them evangelism opportunities. Those who hold this concept of evangelism believe they should be obedient to evangelize; however, their obedience is more passive than proactive in nature. Advocates of this view determine they will wait expectantly for the Holy Spirit to generate the perfect circumstance or situation that will prompt them to evangelize. An example of such an “opportunity” entails believers waiting until unbelievers randomly,

¹⁵ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. and updated ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 133.

at the Spirit's prompting, ask them about Christianity, the gospel, Jesus, or some other spiritual matter before they share the gospel with them.

The New Testament provides a corrective to those who wait for opportunities to share the gospel. In his charge for Timothy to fulfill his ministry as a grace-gifted evangelist, Paul commanded, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2a). Most Christians interpret this verse incorrectly in two ways. First, they interpret *kēryxon ton logon* to mean "preach the Bible." But when Paul used the Greek word *logos* in his Epistles, he overwhelmingly meant "the gospel," not "the Scriptures," "the Word of God," or "the Bible." When he had the Scriptures or its derivatives in mind, he used *graphē*. Thomas D. Lea corroborates this understanding:

Many American Evangelicals use the term "the word of God" as a reference to the words of Scripture. In the Pastorals the term "word," "word of God," or "word of truth" is frequently a reference to the gospel. In the following passages from the Pastorals, this is the usual meaning of the term: 1 Tim 5:17; 2 Tim 1:13; 2:9; 2:15; Titus 1:3; 2:5. The term "gospel" has a wider reference than a mere explanation of the plan of salvation. It refers to the message of salvation along with the truths and moral demands that accompany it and support it.¹⁶

He also explained the context for "preach" in this passage: "To 'preach' does not imply that an ordained minister is to stand behind a stately pulpit and expound Scripture. [Paul's charge] called Timothy to a public heralding of the gospel message, whether done in a mass meeting or person-to-person. An example of the 'Word' Timothy was to declare is found in 1 Tim 1:15."¹⁷ In this context, the meaning of "preach" is synonymous with the activity of evangelism.

¹⁶ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr. *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 242–43.

¹⁷ Lea and Griffin, 243.

Second, Christians typically understand *epistēthi eukairōs akairōs*, translated by a majority of translations as “be ready in season and out of season,” to mean that preachers and pastors should “have a sermon ready to preach when you know you are expected to preach one, as well as when you might be unexpectedly invited to preach one.” The HCSB best captures the intended meaning of this passage: “Proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not” (2 Tim 4:2). Lea offered a helpful corrective to this common misinterpretation of the phrase:

Timothy was to stand “prepared in season and out of season” (“press it home on all occasions, convenient or inconvenient,” NEB). The command implies that each Christian leader must always be on duty and take advantage of every opportunity for service. Paul urged Timothy to stand by his message. . . . The phrase “in season and out of season” may point either to Timothy or to his listeners. If the former is true, then Paul was saying that Timothy should stay with the task whether or not he felt like it (see 2 Tim 1:6–7). If the latter is true, Paul urged Timothy to declare the truth whether or not his hearers found it a convenient time to listen. In light of Paul’s words in vv. 3–4, the latter reference is probably what Paul intended. We should not apply the command so as to violate Jesus’s warning in Matt 7:6, but we should realize that the occasion is always “seasonable” for proclaiming the gospel.¹⁸

Paul’s admonition that Timothy preach the gospel whether or not it is convenient should encourage all believers—not only pastors and ministers—opportunities abound for them to proclaim the gospel.

From time to time, God distinctly superintends circumstances at particular places to prompt Christians to evangelize. In such a case the Holy Spirit internally impresses upon a believer that he or she must share the gospel with a specific person. In so doing the Spirit is personally

¹⁸ Lea and Griffin, 243.

making an opportunity for the believer to evangelize. Most other times, however, believers should be taking an opportunity to share the gospel. If they find themselves in conversations with others whose standing with God and eternal destination is unknown to them, such an encounter should prompt them to take an opportunity to share the gospel with those people.

Evangelism does not happen incidentally. It occurs intentionally. Intentionality in evangelism is not simply knowing you should evangelize, rather it is constructing a plan to evangelize consistently and executing it. Believers who are not deliberate in evangelizing will ultimately relegate evangelism to nothing more than a good intention. To practice consistent evangelism, it must be planned—whether into daily, weekly, and/or monthly calendared events, or planned obedience in those moments of unscheduled prompting by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, evangelism will never occur by accident. It may take place during times and at places believers neither expect nor anticipate, but it will never occur until and unless they actually decide to evangelize. Those who fail to plan time to evangelize will fail to find time to evangelize. Believers will not evangelize consistently if they do not make evangelism a personal priority.

Evangelism planning can take two forms. The first can be referred to as a *corporate evangelism plan*. This type incorporates groups of believers, preferably those who belong to the same church, who schedule evangelism on a recurring basis. Nathan Lino has suggested, “Organized, public evangelism leads to organic, personal evangelism.”¹⁹ This corporate evangelism planning promotes accountability, encouragement, and structure. The group of believers should develop a strategy and employ a coordinator to maintain the plan.

¹⁹ Nathan Lino, “#70 – Igniting a Genuine Fire for Evangelism,” August 3, 2021, <https://www.namb.net/podcasts/evangelism-with-johnny-hunt/70-igniting-a-genuine-fire-for-evangelism>, 10:12–16.

The second form of evangelism planning is best described as a *personal evangelism plan*. This refers to an individual believer's own strategy to share the gospel persistently. Those who want to implement their own evangelism plan will find it helpful to incorporate a daily evangelistic petition during their quiet time, such as this one: "Dear God, give me opportunities to share the gospel today. When they occur, help me recognize them, and give me the courage and boldness to make the most of each opportunity to be able to share the gospel."

In addition to praying daily for opportunities to share the gospel, believers should adopt a rubric, or guidelines, by which they can easily identify the evangelistic opportunities God will provide them in answer to their prayers. Charles Stewart, a former pastor who has taught applied ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has suggested a helpful set of guidelines to assist believers in developing their own personal evangelism plan. He has proposed four evangelism guidelines intended to prompt and encourage the intentionally consistent practice of personal evangelism:

1. **The Holy Spirit Guideline:** In whatever circumstances I find myself, when the Holy Spirit prompts me to engage a specific individual in a gospel conversation, I want to do so obediently.
2. **The Five-Minute Guideline:** If the Lord gives me a captive audience with an individual for five or more minutes, I will try to engage that person in a gospel conversation.
3. **The Homestead Guideline:** When the Lord brings a person whom I have not previously met onto my property or into my home, I will try to engage that person in a gospel conversation.
4. **The Detour Guideline:** When the Lord interrupts my daily routine so as to direct me to a place that puts me in contact with someone I would not otherwise have met, I will try to engage that person in a gospel conversation.²⁰

²⁰ An earlier version of Stewart's guidelines was introduced in Matt Queen, *Mobilize to Evangelize* (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill, 2018), 67.

The Holy Spirit Guideline is a foundational principle that stimulates the practice of personal evangelism. Specifically, the latter three evangelism guidelines help personal evangelists become more aware and sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting. These guidelines are intended to be principles that encourage believers to practice intentional and consistent evangelism, not some form of legalism that imposes self-condemnatory forms of guilt upon them.

The Lord leaves the work of his evangelistic enterprise neither to mere coincidence nor to convenience. He demands obedience. Instead of waiting for just the right opportunity to evangelize, believers should look for and take every opportunity they have to evangelize.

Evangelism Is the Promotion of Inclusionism and/or Universalism²¹

Believers who either tell others they are already God's children or simply believe it to be true constitute an "everyone is okay with God" mentality, or universalism. But as Paul explained in Rom 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." For this reason, he described all humans as "children under wrath" in Eph 2:3. Identifying unbelievers as God's children not only hinders the work of evangelism; it renders evangelism obsolete. One likely inadvertent example of this approach appears in Steve Smith and Ying Kai's book, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution*. Smith noted that Kai began evangelistic conversations with unbelievers by telling them, "Congratulations, you are God's child! The problem is that you are lost, but I will show you how to be saved."²² Kai erred in this introduction to his gospel presentation in two ways—biblically and logically.

First, instead of referring to every human being as God's child, the Bible teaches that all people are God's creation (cf. Gen 1:27). Only

²¹ C. E. Autrey referred to this approach as "syncretism" in *Basic Evangelism*, 29–30.

²² Steve Smith with Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 217.

through repentance of sin and faith alone in Jesus Christ can men and women be appropriated as the children of God (cf. John 1:12; Rom 8:16; 9:7–9; and 1 John 3:1). If personal evangelists tell their hearers they are already God’s children, then what need would they have to repent and believe?

Second, by affirming his hearers are already God’s children before they give him evidence of the fact, Kai’s pronouncement, taken to its logical conclusion, promotes a type of “Christian” inclusivism that assumes the salvation of all human beings. John Sanders, an inclusivist himself, described and defined Christian *inclusivism*:

The unevangelized are saved or lost on the basis of their commitment, or lack thereof, to the God who saves through the work of Jesus. [Inclusivists] believe that appropriation of salvific grace is mediated through general revelation and God’s providential workings in human history. Briefly, inclusivists affirm the particularity and finality of salvation only in Christ but deny that knowledge of his work is necessary for salvation. That is to say, they hold that the work of Jesus is ontologically necessary for salvation (no one would be saved without it) but not epistemologically necessary (one need not be aware of the work in order to benefit from it). Or in other words, people can receive the gift of salvation without knowing the giver or the precise nature of the gift.²³

Failing to evangelize with a firm conviction concerning the exclusivity of Jesus for salvation encourages biblical compromise and will ultimately thwart believers’ participation in the evangelistic enterprise. Personal evangelists are not spiritual gurus. Instead, they are God’s ambassadors that sound forth his love for the world through Jesus Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, calling upon everyone, everywhere to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

²³ John Sanders, *No Other Name* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 131.

A compacted problem relating to the evangelization of adherents to the world's religions lies not only in the way some evangelicals have evangelized them, but also in the fact that they are not evangelizing them at all. For the most part, evangelicals soteriologically identify as exclusivists. In terms of soteriology, Christian *exclusivism* maintains that Jesus Christ, through his death, burial, and resurrection, is the only and exclusive means for the salvation of human beings. Unlike inclusivists, exclusivists affirm both the ontological and epistemological necessity of Jesus and his death, burial, and resurrection to save humans. On the theological and philosophical bases of their exclusivism, as well as their understanding of the imperative nature of the Great Commission, evangelicals avow both the necessity and their responsibility to evangelize any and every person generally, and particularly to do so with those who have never heard the gospel.

In his study of religious diversity in America, Robert Wuthnow made a surprising, yet disturbing, discovery concerning Christian exclusivists:

Exclusive Christians' assumptions about God, Jesus, and church restrict the amount of contact they have with non-Christians even as they reinforce the view that only Christianity is true. Yet Christianity also encourages evangelism; indeed, any belief system that is not only true but uniquely true is bound to encourage its followers to let other people know about the truth, especially when their immortal souls depend on it. Telling others the "good news" amounts to much more than merely being sociable, like sharing recipes or gardening tips. Thus, it is less surprising that exclusive Christians believe it is right to try to convert others . . . than that they do not engage more wholeheartedly in such efforts. . . . Since most exclusive Christians know few people of other religions, this strategy effectively minimizes their likelihood of evangelizing many such people.²⁴

²⁴ Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2005), 145–46.

This reality has unintentionally yielded a scenario in which some evangelicals are simultaneously exclusivists yet not evangelistic. Such a paradox between orthodoxy and heteropraxy yields believing exclusivists who are practicing universalists—they sincerely believe that no one can be saved apart from hearing about Jesus and believing in him, while they neglect to evangelize, acting as though God will eventually save everyone in the end. To the extent that some evangelicals continue not to evangelize those in other faith traditions, and others include inclusivist language in gospel presentations, the practice of evangelism will be threatened in its duty and doctrine.

Evangelism Is Shaming Others into “Repentance”

People often cower and recoil when Jesus Christ’s gospel and the Spirit’s holiness confront their sin. As a result, those who hear the gospel and are convicted by the Holy Spirit about their sins will experience some combination of guilt, humiliation, remorse, embarrassment, regret, and even shame. Personal evangelists should anticipate this reaction from unbelievers when they evangelize in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, those who for their own pleasure seek to condemn and shame others when they “evangelize” exemplify a “shaming others” mentality. Practitioners of this approach seek to make listeners feel bad about themselves apart from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Extreme cases of this attitude include self-proclaimed “evangelists” who berate others without even sharing the gospel with them. Such people weaponize evangelism, violating its intent and victimizing those they castigate.

When evangelism is primarily used as a tool to shame others, those who practice it err in at least two ways. First, they egregiously attempt to deify themselves. Only God can convict sinners of the depravity and futility of their sin. Personal evangelists can, and should, explain how unbelievers’ sin offends, and thus alienates them from, God. But only the Holy Spirit can convince them of their transgression against the holy God, as well as their complete inability to remedy it. For personal

evangelists to attempt to convict unbelievers of their sin in their own strength and ability is at best an exercise in futility and at worst an attempt at self-deification.

Second, practitioners of this “evangelism” misnomer distort a personal evangelist’s role. Instead of preaching against sin, they preach against sinners. Rather than humbly explaining how unbelievers have sinned against God, they seek to humiliate them by weaponizing their sins against them. In lieu of convincing those far from God how their sin offends him, they intend to push sinners even farther away from God by offending them.

Personal evangelists must convey to their listeners that they are unrighteous because they have not believed in Jesus Christ (John 3:18–19, 36). Yet believers must also tell them that Jesus Christ died on the cross for their sins, and if they repent of their sins and believe in him, they can be forgiven and declared righteous. Although sinners must be told that hell awaits them if they do not repent and believe, personal evangelists must tell them in such a way that their listeners realize that they care for their souls and want them to avoid hell by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

An incident that occurred in the summer of 2011 illustrates this point. I was conducting a street survey in another country with faculty and students from Southwestern Seminary. Tabitha, a lady in her twenties, indicated her willingness to answer questions asked by my evangelism partner, a seasoned missionary, and me.²⁵ She told us she was visiting from another country, so after our interview I asked her, “What brings you to this country?” She replied, “I am on a search to find God.” Then she asked me, “Why are you here?” I told her, “I have come from Texas to this country to help people find peace with God.”

My answer naturally led my partner and me to share the gospel with Tabitha. We urged her to repent and believe in Jesus as her Lord and

²⁵ In order to protect this woman’s identity, I have used “Tabitha” as a pseudonym for her name.

Savior; however, she declined. Normally I would have given her a tract and encouraged her to contact us if she changed her mind, but the Holy Spirit prompted me to continue our conversation. I said, “Tabitha, as you search elsewhere for God, I am compelled to tell you something more.” I knew what I had to say next, but verbalizing those words I believed at the time would put this new friendship at risk because my partner and I had really connected with her. My eyes began to water as I told her, “If you go through the rest of your life rejecting the God we have shared with you, basically telling him that you want to live the rest of your existence without him, he will give you exactly what you desire. You will spend an eternity in a place called ‘hell,’ consciously, hopelessly, and eternally apart from God.”

Immediately her body language changed. She looked intently in my eyes and asked, “Matt, are you telling me I am going to hell?” I avoided shaming her and had tried my best not to offend her, but I was sure I had. I knew her forthright question deserved an answer, but I did not want to offend her any further than I convinced myself I already had. Trying to regain some sense of goodwill with her, while also telling her God’s truth, I shifted the responsibility for my assertion away from myself and toward God: “Well, Tabitha, that is what the Bible teaches.” She solemnly said, “Matt, tell me more about hell. You are the first person to ever tell me about it.” I was so shocked by her response that I found myself without words. My partner began to explain hell to her and upon regaining my composure, I joined her in retelling the gospel to Tabitha. Although she did not receive Christ that day, she left with a clear understanding of the seriousness of her sin without feeling as though we had tried to embarrass her. In the same way, personal evangelists must be motivated by genuine concern for unbelievers’ souls to compassionately inform them of their unrighteousness and offensiveness to God. Those who “evangelize” in such a way that they take pleasure and gratify themselves by demeaning and belittling sinners neither understand evangelism nor practice it.

Evangelism Is “Winning at All Costs”

Christians sometimes view evangelism in terms of winning or losing. This preconception manifests itself in one of two different ways. First, some Christians view evangelistic conversations as argumentative contests that end with a winner and loser. They assume God’s honor is on the line and therefore defend the gospel with their mental prowess.

Believers with this “winning” mindset can sometimes seem more interested in winning arguments than they are in winning souls. In their well-meaning attempts to explain and defend the gospel, they argue their point in hopes that their listeners will concede a loss so they can be declared winners. Mack Stiles has written of this mindset: “Sticking people with the right answers won’t guarantee they’ll turn to Christ. In fact, the smug answer, however correct, may ensure that a non-Christian will never listen to a Christian again. Christianity is not information transfer.”²⁶ In such a scenario, believers might walk away from an encounter having won an argument, but in the end losing souls due to a pretentious spirit.

The truth of the gospel does not hinge on the cleverness of its presentation. Whether personal evangelists win or lose an argument about the gospel and its claims, they should remain confident in the veracity of the gospel they share, as well as the superiority of the Christian gospel to any other “gospel.” Nineteenth-century English C. H. Spurgeon, a Particular Baptist pastor, addressed this “winning at all costs” mentality in one of his sermons:

I believe the best way of defending the gospel is to spread the gospel. I was addressing a number of students, the other day, upon the apologies for the gospel which are so numerous just now. A great many learned men are defending the gospel; no

²⁶ J. Mack Stiles, *Speaking of Jesus: How to Tell Your Friends the Best News They Will Ever Hear* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1995), 121.

doubt it is a very proper and right thing to do, yet I always notice that, when there are most books of that kind, it is because the gospel itself is not being preached. Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion, a full-grown king of beasts! There he is in the cage, and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I should suggest to them, if they would not object, and feel that it was humbling to them, that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself; and the best “apology” for the gospel is to let the gospel out.²⁷

In other words, the best “defense” when it comes to God and his gospel is for believers to stay on “offense” without being offensive.

Concerning the second way, other Christians have convinced themselves that they must be able to answer any question or respond to any objection an unbeliever can pose before they can or should share the gospel. Many believers fear evangelism, worrying that while they have complete confidence in what they believe about the gospel, they are not sufficiently prepared to respond to others’ critiques or questions. This kind of uncertainty arises from a legitimate concern; however, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will provide his disciples the words they need when they testify about Jesus (cf. Matt 10:19; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11–12). In addition, believers need to recognize that they will not always have the answers because, unlike God who is omniscient, their knowledge and understanding are limited. Trueblood encourages believers who struggle with these concerns:

We do not have to wait until we know the whole truth about anything to make our witness. If we were to wait for this, we should wait forever. There is a paradox in the fact that we can

²⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “Christ and His Co-Workers,” *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 42, June 10, 1886.

bear witness to the truth without claiming to be possessors of it. The truth is bigger than our systems, yet we must give testimony to the little that we now see. I must risk my reputation on the point at which I am willing to stand, even though much beyond that point is hazy. Only as we are willing to declare where we *are* are [*sic*] we likely to go beyond this unsatisfactory point. It is in this spirit that testimony is able to reconcile the two moods which seem so deeply opposed: boldness and humility. We can never say, “This I know beyond a shadow of a doubt,” for that kind of certainty is not given to finite men. All we can say is that “we are persuaded.”²⁸

Know-it-alls endear no one. No one will ever be an expert on everything, but this lack of expertise should not hinder believers from sharing their faith. They have not failed if they cannot answer every question. Instead, in humility and honesty, they can admit they do not know, research the issue, seek the counsel of their pastor, and return with more information later. This type of honest answer encourages another meeting, furthering a relational trust that could provide a later opportunity for more gospel-centered conversations.

Although these previous evangelistic concepts of “winning” prove to be problematic, evangelism can be philosophically paired with the concept of “winning”—*soul-winning*.²⁹ Nevertheless, some believers have expressed concerns about associating evangelism with winning in this way. They cite sincere theological reasons to avoid talking about evangelism in terms of “winning people to Christ,” objecting to this language because they believe using it deprives God of full credit for his role in saving people from their sins. They contend that to say Christians “win souls” ascribes unmerited recognition to human agents because they do not win souls; God does. Of course he does; however, the Bible does not

²⁸ Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed*, 66.

²⁹ A biblical examination and defense of evangelism as *soul-winning* will be presented in the section “Winning a Soul” in chapter 3.

record an instance where God won a soul apart from his Spirit working through and in cooperation with the evangelism of human agents.

What, then, does it mean to “win souls,” and can this activity incorporate a human dimension without threatening the tenet that God alone saves souls? C. H. Spurgeon, cited earlier, embraced the word *soul-winning*. In *The Soul-Winner* he explained his understanding of the concept:

What is the real winning of a soul for God? So far as this is done by instrumentality, what are the processes by which a soul is led to God and to salvation? I take it that one of its main operations consists *in instructing a man that he may know the truth of God*. Instruction by the gospel is the commencement of all real work upon men’s minds. . . .

We are sent to evangelize, or to preach the gospel to every creature; and that is not done unless we teach them the great truths of revelation. The gospel is a reasonable system, and it appeals to men’s understanding; it is a matter for thought and consideration, and it appeals to the conscience and the reflecting powers. . . . The field of instruction is wide if men are to be made to know the truth which saves. “That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good,” and it is ours as the Lord’s instruments to make men so to know the truth that they may believe it, and feel its power. We are not to try and save men in the dark, but in the power of the Holy Ghost we are to seek to turn them from darkness to light.³⁰

Spurgeon’s understanding of soul-winning incorporated a cooperation between the divine and the human agencies involved in evangelism. This cooperative effort in evangelism can correctly and accurately be referred to as *soul-winning*.

³⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Soul-Winner; or, How to Lead Sinners to the Saviour* (New York: Revell, 1895), 14–16, emphasis added.

Personal evangelists should share the gospel with complete confidence in its veracity, regardless of the extent to which they can explain it or answer questions about it. If, in evangelism, convicting, convincing, or regeneration depended solely upon believers' cognitive expertise and their ability to answer questions or respond to objections, perhaps they could consider themselves winners or losers based on outcomes alone. But evangelism depends on God. Therefore, the goal is not winning at all costs, but witnessing no matter the cost.

Evangelism Is a Right to Be Earned

In *Invitation to Evangelism* Tim Beougher referenced the most accurate description of evangelism ever written. He wrote, "Someone once defined evangelism as a conversation between two people, both of whom are nervous."³¹ Evangelism can certainly make both the evangelizer and the evangelized nervous. These feelings of anxiety stem from the believers' desire not to offend their hearers, as well as unbelievers' desire to avoid being offended. The intent to avoid offending unbelievers has led to the emergence of a philosophy that maintains personal evangelists must earn permission from unbelievers before they share the gospel with them.

In his classic book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, J. I. Packer discussed the role of relationships and gaining permission to share the gospel:

You are not usually justified in choosing the subject of conversation with another till you have already begun to give yourself to him in friendship and established a relationship with him in which he feels that you respect him, are interested in him, and are treating him as a human being and not as some kind of "case." With some people, you may establish such a relationship in five

³¹ Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 198.

minutes, whereas with others it may take months. But the principle remains the same. *The right to talk intimately to another person about the Lord Jesus Christ has to be earned*, and you earn it by convincing him that you are his friend, and that you really care about him.³²

Packer correctly emphasizes the necessity for sincere care for unbelievers, calling personal evangelists to treat them as humans worthy of respect, not some spiritual project. But requiring believers to convince unbelievers of their concern through friendship before they should, or can, evangelize proves problematic for several reasons.

First, any time the gospel was presented in the New Testament, it occurred without believers first having to gain permission before they shared it. Had New Testament preachers earned the right to proclaim the gospel publicly to the crowds due to a preexisting friendship they shared with each and every one of them? Did personal evangelists in the New Testament wait to share the gospel conversationally with people until they established a friendship with them, or did they almost exclusively share the gospel immediately when they were engaged in conversation with them?

Second, earning the right to evangelize unbelievers sometimes leads Christians to dismiss the instantaneous practice of evangelism as a valid way to exhibit compassionate respect for unbelievers. Some believers have been convinced they must earn the right to evangelize unbelievers, because to evangelize without gaining trust disrespects them and places their own concerns before those of unbelievers. In his second correspondence with the Corinthian church, Paul explained to them that the love of Christ compelled him to evangelize (cf. 2 Cor 5:11–15). Building a friendship and trust certainly are helpful ways for believers to demonstrate their genuine love and respect for unbelievers; however, it is not

³² J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1961), 81, emphasis added.

the only way to do so. Biblically informed evangelism compels believers to love sinners, as Christ did, and to demonstrate it by sharing the good news with them.

While recounting an encounter with a Gideon Bible distributor who evangelized him, atheist Penn Jillette attributed this man's evangelism to a demonstration of his love for Jillette. He asserted, "How much do you have to hate somebody to not [evangelize] them? How much do you have to hate someone to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"³³ Believers should exhibit a genuine interest, respect, and compassion for unbelievers in every way they can as soon as they can—which includes sharing God's demonstration of his love through Christ with them.

Last, requiring that personal evangelists earn permission before being heard assumes an unrealistic expectation on the part of unbelievers. In addition to causing enmity with God, human sin and depravity prevents sinners from ever desiring reconciliation with God. This basic anthropological principle raises several questions about unbelievers' ability and willingness to grant believers permission to evangelize them. First, due to their habitual rejection of God and his gospel, is it reasonable for believers to assume unbelievers will come to a point where they will ever want to hear the gospel, no matter how much relational capital believers build with them? Second, if believers should wait to share the gospel until they receive permission from unbelievers to do so, would unbelievers even know they are expected to give it? Last, if believers should wait to earn the right to share the gospel, would that not mean that believers' compliance with the Great Commission was based on unbelievers' consent, rather than their willful obedience to the lordship of Jesus Christ?

The apparent answers to these questions should convince personal evangelists not to understand evangelism as a right they must earn from

³³ Penn Jillette, "A Gift of a Bible," 3:28–3:38, 2009, vlog, original post <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JHS8adO3hM>, deleted; available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6md638smQd8>.

unbelievers before they evangelize them. Instead, evangelism is the right thing for personal evangelists to do. In the same way that no one earns the right to become God's child—Jesus bestows it upon all who believe—no one earns the right to evangelize—Jesus gives it to all who have believed. Perhaps believers should consider such a “right” in terms of evangelism from a different perspective. In a personal conversation on June 11, 2014, missiologist Keith Eitel posited an astute question about believers earning a right to share the gospel. He asked, “While we are waiting on the ‘right to be heard,’ we must seriously consider, ‘Do the lost have a right to hear the gospel?’”

Evangelism Is a Means to Garner Personal Glory

Some personal evangelists seek attention for the positive results of their evangelism. They share their faith as an act out of pride, seeking recognition for those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Scripture, however, exhorts evangelists not to boast or seek credit for what God does in and through our evangelism (cf. 1 Cor 1:31; 9:16; 2 Cor 10:12–18; Gal 5:25–26; 6:13–15).

God alone saves humans who repent and believe in the gospel. The Father sent his Son to humankind as a demonstration of his love, desiring the salvation of the world. Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and was raised from the dead to provide the way for people to be saved from their sins. The Holy Spirit convicts, convinces, and draws sinners so that they will repent and believe in Christ, while simultaneously regenerating them. In addition, he emboldens, empowers, and fills believers as they evangelize unbelievers. So, from start to finish, God alone is responsible and receives any and all credit for saving human beings.

Believers must not succumb to the temptation of using evangelism to garner personal glory for themselves for a couple of reasons. First, God is a jealous God and will not share his glory with anyone (cf. Isa 42:8). If believers attempt to share in God's glory for the positive results of their evangelism, they can surely expect God's discipline.

Second, those who quantify their evangelistic success by numbers of unbelievers who positively respond to their gospel invitations also tend to measure their evangelistic failure according to how many reject them. In other words, if they take the credit when someone receives Christ, then they must also take the blame when someone rejects Christ. This type of mentality yields a few complications.

One problem with this mindset is that more people will reject the gospel than will ever accept it, regardless of any believer's personal ability to evangelize. Both the Bible (cf. Matt 13:1–9, 18–23; Mark 4:1–9, 14–20; Luke 8:4–8, 11–15) and personal experience attest to this reality. Over time, the disproportionate ratio of those who accept the gospel versus those who reject it has a greater likelihood to discourage personal evangelists than it does to encourage them.

Also, in order to achieve evangelistic “success,” personal evangelists will be tempted to pressure or manipulate their hearers in order to achieve their desired results. Such action on the part of personal evangelists often generates bad will, results in a loss of credibility, and yields false professions from unbelievers. Furthermore, J. I. Packer warned:

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 Ghost, and to exalt ourselves as the agents of the new birth. . . . For where we are not consciously relying on God, there we shall inevitably be found relying on ourselves.³⁴

Those who practice any kind of manipulative evangelism dismiss the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and, instead, attempt to force their hearers into a decision. They would do well to remember that if they can talk people into making a decision, then others can talk them into making

³⁴ Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 29.

the opposite one. Worse yet, manipulators can foster a false assurance of salvation within those who have not actually repented and believed in Christ, if not altogether harden sinners' hearts to the gospel because they believe they are saved, when in reality they are not. For these reasons, instead of taking credit for the results of their evangelism, personal evangelists should give glory to whom it alone is due—the triune God.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What misunderstandings about evangelism have hindered you from practicing it consistently? What are some of the ways this chapter has given you a new understanding of evangelism?
2. Have you ever considered when God prompts you to evangelize someone that it may be his/her only or last opportunity to hear the gospel? What guideline(s), including but not limited to the Holy Spirit, Five-Minute, Homestead, and/or Detour Guidelines, will you adopt to assist you in becoming an intentionally consistent personal evangelist?
3. Whenever an unbeliever either poses a question or raises an objection you are unable to answer, how will you respond?
4. In what ways can you communicate the unrighteousness of unbelievers' sin without shaming or embarrassing them?



Evangelism in Scripture is both winsome and worshipful.

In a world of colliding narratives, Matt Queen's *Recapturing Evangelism* explores the Bible's many teachings on evangelism and outlines biblical, philosophical, and spiritual methods to interact with unbelievers. Queen helps students, pastors, church leaders, and everyday Christians across all denominations take a deeper look at what evangelism is and how to go about it.

“What are the contemporary issues in evangelism? What are the theological minefields to be aware of? Matt Queen's *Recapturing Evangelism* equips us to answer these questions. By reading this book, you will have a comprehensive foundation of Bible passages and a systematic understanding of relevant categories for evangelism—in both theory and practice.”

—**SAM CHAN**, *author of Evangelism in a Skeptical World, How to Talk about Jesus (Without Being That Guy), and coauthor of Topical Preaching in a Complex World*

“While there are many books on evangelism, *Recapturing Evangelism* is a biblically grounded and theologically informed resource that stands out from the others. Queen combines the study of the Scriptures with the wisdom of evangelists from history and insights of seasoned practitioners today. Queen's passion to reach spiritually lost souls and form them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus jumps from the pages.”

—**DAVID M. GUSTAFSON**, *associate professor of evangelism and missional ministry, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

“Billions are in need of the good news. Matt Queen has provided a means to remove the fog by challenging us to return to the apostolic imagination. This work equips us to go with intentionality and urgency and share with gentleness and respect as we proclaim the good news of the kingdom!”

—**J. D. PAYNE**, *author, missiologist, and professor of Christian ministry, Samford University*

MATT QUEEN (PhD, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as associate dean of the Roy J. Fish School of Evangelism and Missions, professor of evangelism, and L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism (“Chair of Fire”) at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.