

THE EVANGELICAL HEART

David VanAcker, Pastor of Discipleship
Grace Church, Evangelism Seminar – Session 2
June 12th, 2009

What is the relationship between evangelism and satisfaction in Jesus? What is the relationship between satisfaction in Jesus and love for others? How do our feelings effect our fruitfulness in evangelism? How should a mature Christian feel about evangelism?

Those who truly understand and believe the Gospel will be satisfied in Jesus and love others. Communicating the Gospel to non-Christians is usually most efficacious, and always most pleasing to God, when it springs from deep, personal satisfaction in God.

MAIN POINTS

1. Our feelings relating to evangelism should be based on the Word of God.
2. The bible teaches that we should feel a balance of sadness, urgency, obligation, joy, love, and hope.
3. When our feelings aren't in line with Scripture we should "ask God to change them".
4. Our evangelism is usually most efficacious, and always most pleasing to God, when it springs from deep, personal satisfaction in God.

INTRODUCTION

Evangelism...what feelings surface when you hear the word "evangelism"?

Evangelism tends to be a rather emotional experience or exercise or practice for most people—and rightly so. When we engage in evangelism there are a lot of very important things on the line. To name just a few (in ascending order), in evangelism our comfort, our time, our honor, our obedience to Jesus, the souls of the lost, the reputation of Christ, and the glory of God are all on the table.

I've felt all kinds of things. I've felt fear (Turkey), embarrassment (MSU), confusion (C and J), frustration (Erik; students), relief (Randy), joy (students), thankfulness (kids), and a whole host of other emotions as well. Some of my feelings have been godly and some sinful.

So how should we feel regarding evangelism and what do we do if we don't feel that way? These are a couple of the questions that I want to address in this session.

OUR FEELINGS RELATING TO EVANGELISM SHOULD BE BASED ON THE WORD OF GOD.

In our last session we looked at what the Word of God says about evangelism. We said that evangelism is sharing the good news (the gospel) of Jesus Christ, that there are six crucial elements to the gospel (the glory of God, the purpose of mankind, the sinfulness of mankind, the wages of sin, the atoning work of Christ, and the faith through which salvation comes), that all Christians are called to engage in evangelism, that we must consider the cost of evangelism, and that God is sovereign and central in all things—including our evangelism. ***It is from these truths that our feelings must arise.*** That is, it is from right thinking about evangelism that right feelings about evangelism flow.

So, what feelings should these truths produce?

THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT WE SHOULD FEEL A BALANCE OF SADNESS, URGENCY, OBLIGATION, JOY, LOVE, AND HOPE.

Remember, we're talking here about how a mature Christian should feel about (the nature and practice of) evangelism. And we've said that whatever feelings arise must (if they are going to be pleasing to

God) flow from (or be based on) the Word of God. I believe that the Bible teaches six predominant emotions that should arise from a right understanding of Scripture.

1. Love. Regarding evangelism, our feelings must begin with love for God which will produce love for our fellow man.

John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Mark 10:17-22 *And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"²⁰ And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."²¹ **And Jesus, looking at him, loved him,** and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."²² *Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.**

(2 Thessalonians 2:7)

We see the relationship between love and evangelism first in God sending His only Son, Jesus, to earth so that there would be good news. We see Jesus' love for the Father spill out onto the lost as he shares the gospel with the rich man. And we see that, as Packer reminds us from Scripture, "Love made Paul warm-hearted and affectionate in his evangelism".

If we are to feel rightly about evangelism, we must begin by crying out to God to give us a deep love for Him and for all mankind.

2. Sadness. When we truly love someone and we find that they are in a disastrous predicament, the natural (and necessary) emotion is sadness. This is where we find ourselves regarding the lost. Because of our God-given love for sinners, the knowledge that the wrath of God remains on them must produce in us deep sorrow. We see this vividly in Jesus and Paul.

Romans 9:1-3 *I am speaking the truth in Christ- I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*

Luke 19:37-42 *As he was drawing near- already on the way down the Mount of Olives- the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen,³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples."⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."⁴¹ **And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it,**⁴² saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.*

Feeling rightly about evangelism includes a sadness or sorrow for the spiritual depravity of the lost generally and those closest to us specifically.

3. Urgency. As we experience love for the lost and sadness for the spiritual condition of the lost, and as we consider the Biblical truth that life is a vapor (James 4:14), we should expect to find a sense of urgency welling up inside of ourselves. That is, as we come to realize that tomorrow is not guaranteed for anyone (including ourselves) and that there are millions of non-Christians in the world today we must develop a feeling of alarm.

James 4:14 *What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.*

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 *Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

Having a sense of urgency in evangelism is necessary if we are to feel rightly about evangelism.

4. Privileged obligation. As we talked about previously Christians should feel a sense of privileged obligation to share the gospel. That is, since we are commanded to share the gospel we should feel a sense of duty or obligation or responsibility to obey. And since in evangelism God graciously allows us to be conduits of the grace in the salvation of the lost we should feel a sense of privilege or honor or position.

Romans 1:14-15 *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

Feeling a sense of privileged obligation toward evangelism is part of biblical evangelism.

5. Joy. The obvious source of joy in evangelism comes from the knowledge that we possess the words of eternal life. That is, in engaging in evangelism we must do so in joy, knowing that the Word of God is powerful and active and that salvation belongs to our God! And the joy of seeing a sinner repent and believe is like few other joys in the Christian faith. What a wondrously joyful thing it is to be involved in the salvation of another.

Acts 15:3 *So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and **brought great joy to all the brothers.***

3 John 1:2-4 *Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. ³ For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ⁴ **I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.***

There is another, more important kind of joy in evangelism, however. Bill Walsh make the following observation about our first joy in evangelism.

Praise God for the times of effective ministry that he allows us to experience. If you're like me you get excited when you see the fruitfulness of any ministry that God calls you to do. It is a thrill to see him at work, putting to use the gifts and callings that he has granted to us for the cause of the Kingdom.

But in Luke 10 Christ challenges us to test our own hearts, by examining what we rejoice in most.

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' And he said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.... Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven' (Luke 10: 17-20).

We easily slip into over-emphasizing results rather than rejoicing most in our redemption. According to the Lord, the deepest rejoicing that we should seek [in evangelism] is the joy of the impact that the Gospel has made on our own hearts and lives.

Some questions to regularly ask ourselves:

- *Do I rejoice that God, by some mystery to me, chose me before the foundation of the world, due to nothing in me, and wrote my name in his Book of Life?*
- *Do I rejoice that God, from the beginning, had me in mind when he was carrying out his plan to redeem a people for the glory of his name?*
- *Do I rejoice that God sent his Son on a mission from heaven to become the Word made flesh on my behalf, in order to save me from my sins?*
- *Do I rejoice that Christ lived perfectly without sin, fulfilling the law in my place, in order that its righteous requirements might be fulfilled in me by grace through faith?*
- *Do I rejoice that the Lord Jesus bore my sins in his body on the tree, so that I could receive forgiveness for every sin that I have or will commit?*
- *Do I rejoice that day by day, these truths are sinking down into my soul and, as C.S. Lewis says, re-working my house; re-building, re-furnishing, preparing me for greater works ahead and ultimately for a greater Kingdom ahead.*
- *Do I rejoice in counting everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord who is bringing me to God?*

Why does Christ tell us to rejoice first that our names are written in heaven? Might it be because he knows that the mustard seed of faith that he plants in us is what opens our eyes and lives to the Gospel in the first place? It is only because he chose us for salvation that we even have the possibility of reaching out and being a part of his work in bringing others to salvation and spiritual growth.

True ministry effectiveness and impact springs from a heart radically changed by the Gospel. No God-granted mysterious seed of the Gospel in us—no tree of lifelong fruitfulness.

Lord, make us aware and vigilant for where our deepest rejoicing lies. Keep us focused on allowing the amazing truth of your redemption to shape our hearts while we labor in your field.

A feeling of great joy should mark the heart of believers as they engage in evangelism.

6. Hope. Finally, our evangelism should be characterized by a deep feeling of hopefulness. Our knowledge that God is sovereign and that His Word will not return void and that none that the Father has given to the Son will be lost should give us a deep, deep sense of hope (even in the face of apparently fruitlessness) every time we engage in evangelism.

Isaiah 55:10-11 *For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

If we are to feel rightly about evangelism, we must grow in hope that God will bring to Himself all that He wills.

It should also be said, as Mark Dever points out (in *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*), that there must be a balance in these feelings. Sadness without hope would make our evangelism depressing. And hope without sadness would make our evangelism naive. Urgency without love would make our evangelism overwhelming. And love without urgency makes our evangelism disingenuous. Obligation without joy makes our evangelism burdensome. And joy without obligation makes our evangelism recreational.

So, while the biblical nature of these feelings probably isn't a point of much difficulty, the fact that none of us feel them appropriately (in quality or quantity) is a point of difficulty. What, then, do we do when we find these feelings lacking in us?

WHEN OUR FEELINGS AREN'T IN LINE WITH SCRIPTURE WE SHOULD "ASK GOD TO CHANGE THEM".

As John Piper points out in a sermon (*You Are God's Midwife for the New Birth*), where these feelings (love, sadness, urgency, obligation, joy, and hope) are lacking, or are otherwise "out of sync with the truth," or when we find ourselves experiencing different, sinful emotions, "we should [I'd add, "must"] ask the Lord to change our feelings".

In a moment I want to address the matter of asking the Lord to develop in us these right feelings or to change our wrong feelings. Here, however, I want to address two prominent unbiblical feelings surrounding evangelism. The two primary unbiblical emotions that I have come across in my own heart and in the hearts of those to whom I have ministered over the years are fear and apathy.

The apathy (or indifference to the spiritual condition of the lost) seems to stem primarily from a spiritual blindness. That is, when I find hints of apathy in my own heart it's usually because I'm lacking the ability to see my lost neighbor as he truly is (dangling over the fires of hell on a thread as thin as a spider's web as Edwards describes it). I struggle, at times, to truly feel the gravity of the situation because I struggle to see with spiritual eyes.

This is one of the most serious of all spiritual maladies, I believe. A persistent indifference to the spiritual condition of the lost is one of the gravest warning signs of a lack of regeneration. We know that loving our neighbor is a mark of our own salvation. How might we claim to love our neighbor if we do not despise his spiritual death? And if we cannot claim to love our neighbor, how can we claim to love God?

The second most common example of a feeling that is not based on Scripture is fear that I have seen in the church is fear. Donald Whitney suggests that fear in evangelism takes five different primary forms among those in our culture (*Spiritual Disciplines*, p.101-102):

1. Some fear not having enough knowledge.
2. Some fear being perceived as strange and consequently rejected.
3. Some fear a particular method of evangelism.
4. Some fear taking upon themselves matters of such weightiness (heaven, hell, God, sin, salvation, etc.).
5. Some fear failure.

So, again, what do we do when we find ourselves absent biblical emotions based on biblical truth and in the presence of unbiblical feelings regarding evangelism? The answer is that we must fight! These wrong feelings, or lack of right feelings, must be fought against viciously and unrelentingly. John Piper comments on the fact that he must daily ask God to change his feelings, "This is the way I live my life every day. My feelings are not God. God is God. My feelings do not define truth. God's word defines truth. My feelings are echoes and responses to what my mind perceives. And sometimes—many times—

my feelings are out of sync with the truth. When that happens—and it happens every day in some measure—I try not to bend the truth to justify my imperfect feelings, but rather, I plead with God: Purify my perceptions of his truth and transform my feelings so that they are in sync with the truth.”

In the case of apathy, this means, I believe reminding ourselves of the biblical truths describing the spiritual condition of the lost. Specifically we should remind ourselves that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and of the reality and horror of the hell that awaits all those who die in their sin (Mark 9:47-48).

When it comes to fear we must remind ourselves of the biblical truths describing our role as evangelists and God’s promise to protect us in it. Specifically...

1. Some fear not having enough knowledge. Certainly there is a bare minimum of information necessary for evangelism, but all Christians already have it (1 Corinthians 15:1)!

“Surely if we have understood the gospel well enough ourselves to be converted, we should know it well enough (even if as yet we know nothing else about the faith) to tell someone else how to be converted” (Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, p.106-107).

We fight this fear by remembering that In order to believe the gospel and be saved we must know the gospel. The scriptures model a true knowledge of the gospel, not a deep one, as a prerequisite for evangelism.

2. Some fear being perceived as strange and consequently rejected. Jesus promises this (John 15:18-21). But we must fight this by claiming the Biblical promises that we need not fear this because of the goodness and protection of God (Matthew 10:28-31).
3. Some fear a particular method of evangelism. It is true that we are all gifted in certain ways and that we are all given certain personalities and that these gifts and personalities will shape our evangelism, most of the reasons that we fear a particular method have, in my experience, have far less to do with giftings and personalities and far more to do with sinful pride. To combat this, we need to remind ourselves that it is God’s glory that we are after not our own (1 Peter 4:10-11).
4. Some fear taking upon themselves matters of such weightiness (heaven, hell, God, sin, salvation, etc.). Again, there is a form of godliness in this fear. We should feel a particular weight upon us when we handle the Word of God. However, we must fight this fear by reminding ourselves that God, Himself has called us to this noble task and promised to empower us for it (Matthew 28:18-20).
5. Some fear failure. We must ask God to help us recognize the fact that sharing the gospel with a non-Christian is successful evangelism. Again, Donald Whitney hits the nail on the head, “Some fear witnessing because they don’t feel confident enough in their persuasive powers or their ability to answer all imaginable objections to the gospel. But the power for evangelism is not in our ability; it is in the gospel. You may have never imagined that an unbeliever could actually be born again by hearing of Christ from your lips. But that’s not humility. It’s doubt, a denial of God’s blessing upon His gospel just because it is spoken by you. Don’t doubt the power of God to add His blessing upon your words when you speak of Christ” (*Spiritual Disciplines*, p.112).

Ultimately, we must remember that, when it comes to evangelism (or anything else for that matter), we are to fear no one and nothing except God alone.

Similarly we fight for the biblical feelings of love, sadness, urgency, obligation, joy, and hope by reminding ourselves of the biblical truths surrounding them and by crying out to God to work them out in us.

OUR EVANGELISM IS USUALLY MOST EFFICACIOUS, AND ALWAYS MOST PLEASING TO GOD, WHEN IT SPRINGS FROM DEEP, PERSONAL SATISFACTION IN GOD.

Romans 1:16 *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*

Ephesians 1:13-14 *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

Scripture makes clear that the *Gospel* is the power of God for the salvation of sinners. That is, Scripture teaches that we are promised an inheritance, as redeemed children of God, through belief in the “Gospel of [our] salvation.” It does not say, “My zealousness with the Gospel is the power of God for salvation”. It does not say, “My satisfaction in Jesus is the power of God for salvation.” And it does not say, “My bold, unashamed, risky presentation of the Gospel is the power of God for salvation.” It says the *Gospel* is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

What, then, is the relationship between satisfaction in Jesus, passion in presenting the Gospel of Jesus, and boldness and unashamedness in evangelism and the effectiveness of the Gospel?

The simple answer to this question is that, while God is able to (and does) save sinners through weak, feeble, dispassionate (albeit accurate) presentations of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Philippians 1:15-18), and while there is no intrinsic relationship between the zealousness of the Gospel presenter and the effectiveness of the presentation, God has chosen to demonstrate the power and effectualness of the Gospel more fully through passionate, pleading, bold, risky, satisfied presentations (Acts 2; Acts 4 (particularly Acts 4: 1-4); Acts 7-8; Acts 16:16-34; Acts 17:16-34; John 4:1-42). Again, while Scripture places more emphasis on the truthfulness (or accurateness) of the presentation of the gospel than it does any particular emotional state or mental or spiritual or relational condition, it nevertheless makes plain that God is most glorified in our gospel presentations when our satisfaction in Him leads to our gospel presentations.

Our aim, therefore, is a truthful presentation of the gospel and our prayer (as John Piper reminds us from 1 Peter) is that we would drink deeply, until the point of drunkenness, from the heart of Jesus, as a result of our salvation, as a fuel for evangelism, and for the unique blessing and fruitfulness of God.

“And why would you want to do this? [1 Peter 2] Verse 3: You will have this desire . . . “if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” This is key to personal evangelism: Have you tasted in the word of God—especially the gospel—that the Lord is good? Have you tasted it? Not: Have you thought about it? Not: Have you decided to affirm it? But: Have you tasted it? Are there living, spiritual taste buds in your heart that taste Christ as more desirable than all else?

This is where we need to get serious. We will spread the seed of God’s mighty regenerating power if we have tasted that the Lord is good. The Lord is our delight. The Lord is our treasure. The Lord is our meat and milk and water and wine. May God loosen our tongues and make us bold gospel-tellers because we are drunk with the wine of the word of God and the goodness of the Lord” (John Piper, You Are God’s Midwife for the New Birth of Others)

Indeed, we must come to feel satisfied in Jesus because communicating the Gospel to non-Christians is usually most efficacious, and always most pleasing to God, when it springs from deep, personal satisfaction in God.

CONCLUSION

Many among us are creatures of emotion, but with all of this having been said, it must be noted that our obedience in evangelism must not be based on our feelings. It must instead be based on the unchanging Word of God.

I want to close with this quote from J.I. Packer (*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, p.77-78) as we consider how a mature Christian should feel regarding evangelism:

J.I. Packer, in makes this observation,

“It is a tragic and ugly thing when Christians lack desire, and are actually reluctant, to share the precious knowledge that they have with others whose need of it is just as great as their own. [Christians should not] need to be told to do this [evangelism]; they [should do] it naturally and spontaneously, just as one would naturally and spontaneously share with one’s family and friends any other piece of news that vitally affected them. There is something very wrong with us if we do not ourselves find it natural to act in this way...It is a great privilege to evangelize; it is a wonderful thing to be able to tell others of the love of Christ, knowing that there is nothing that they need more urgently to know, and no knowledge in the world that can do them so much good. We should be glad and happy to do it. We should not look for excuses for wriggling out of our obligation when occasion offers to talk to others about the Lord Jesus Christ. If we find ourselves shrinking from this responsibility, and trying to evade it, we need to face ourselves with the fact that in this we are yielding to sin and Satan. If (as is usual) it is the fear of being thought odd and ridiculous, or of losing popularity in certain circles, that holds us back, we need to ask ourselves in the presence of God: Ought these things to stop us loving our neighbor? If it is a false shame, which is not shame at all, but pride in disguise, that keeps our tongue from Christian witness when we are with other people, we need to press upon our conscience this question: Which matters more—our reputation, or their salvation? We cannot be complacent about this gangrene of conceit and cowardice when we weigh up our lives in the presence God. What we need to do is to ask for grace to be truly ashamed of ourselves and to pray that we may so overflow in love to God that we shall overflow in love to our fellow-men, and so find it an easy and natural and joyful thing to share with them the good news of Christ.”