

## The “ism” of Evangelism

by, Rev. Eric Greene

I have grown to dislike suffixes such as “-ism”. Usually when this is attached to a word, the word is castrated, losing the substance it once had. When a person’s name, theology, philosophy, or worldview becomes an “-ism” it usually marks the ending of which the root word had upon the real world of everyday life. Most often the addition of “-ism” merely points out a past event.

Like a birthday party that has come and gone, there will be different reactions to such an historic event. The past birthday party may be remembered, celebrated, or despised if it was a bad occasion. Either way the party is over, the feasting has stopped. Then forever after it stays in the mind and memories of those who attended. Sure, other parties will happen, but not *that* party on *that* date for *that* person. In the same way, when a word becomes an “-ism” it usually means the real event is dead, come and gone.

For this reason most of the real world events that happen on a daily basis are never referred to as an “-ism”. Eating, drinking, cleaning, breathing, working, and resting are all performed everyday by us. Those events or parties, so to speak, never stop. Drinking water will never become a “waterism” because it will never be just an idea, or a theory, having been removed from daily life. Drinking water is fundamental to life itself, therefore it can never simply be an “-ism”. The day we refer to “foodism” or “waterism” we will soon die of starvation and thirst.

### I. The “-ism” Problem

This leads us to the problem of studying evangelism. The root word is “evangel”, which means “gospel”. Thus, the study of evangelism is the study of “gospeling” those around us, which is a word I am making up because the word “evangelizing” falls on our deaf ears. In other words it concerns the work of bringing the gospel to others, or them to the gospel. Sadly, this work of bringing others to the gospel of Jesus Christ is often described by us with all the harmful connotations of an “-ism”: *evangelism*.

We do not consider the act of *gospeling* others to be as routine as eating, drinking, sleeping, or breathing. Since it has become something extraordinary to the routines of the real world, we consider it something foreign to the real world. It has become a good idea. A good theory, based on “back when” the church was growing especially during the time of the Apostles. Thus it is often considered an “-ism”, idolized and protected in the minds of believers who live in the real world, yet are looking and preparing for that extraordinary moment when they may be able to *gospel* someone else.

The purpose of this study is to stop the act of gospeling from being a study, and to make the work of discipling the nations as part of our daily routine. Once we remove the “-ism” from “evangelism” we are left with “evangel”: *the gospel* of the Lord Jesus Christ for the every day Christian.

## II. The “evangel” Solution

We have learned from our Genesis study that nouns and verbs are often the same in the Bible. The herbs on Day 3 were seeding seed, and the earth sprout sprouts. The lights on Day 4 gave light. The image of God on Day 6 was to live out God’s image. Over and over the identifying noun determined the vocational verb.

Likewise, as baptized believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are the evangelical people of the world, and *who* we are is *what* we do. This means we are the gospel-people; the people who bear witness of, demonstrate, and call others to the good news of Jesus Christ. In this first study I want to point out that the work of gospeling others is applicable to the real world everyday life of the Christian.

## III. Gospeling Through Worship, Work, and Words

The first way we gospel the world is by worshipping the Lord on the Lord’s Day with his people. As our Larger Catechism teaches, by *remembering* the fourth commandment of honoring the Lord’s Day, we are enabled “better to keep all the rest of the commandments” (#121). Worshipping with God’s people on Sunday strengthens us in our duties of bringing the gospel to others throughout the week.

Worship is the fountain and source of *how* we witness to others. Simply going to church bears witness of Christ to our friends and family. Telling others about Jesus, while forsaking the assembly of His people, is hypocrisy. Such an inconsistency will compromise one’s witness no matter how eloquent he or she can describe the work of Christ.

Worship is critical throughout the week in order to gospel one’s children and grandchildren. Children of believers come to, and grow in, the Lord ordinarily through the habits of their parents. Thus singing a song, reading the Bible, and prayer should all be daily routine within one’s family. This is the *how* fathers and mothers gospel their gospel-children (the repetition is intentional). Seek to make this weekly and daily worship times a goal for your family. Make it part of the eating, drinking, breathing routine of everyday life. In this way, we’ll begin to shave off the “ism” from evangelism, and begin to live out the name and calling as gospel people.

Work is a good four letter word. And in this study I’m referring to the good work of all Christians (yes, Christians do *good* work), whether individually or corporately. In Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are the salt and light of the world (Matt. 5:13-14). This so broad and exhaustive that is hard to consolidate. Doing good ethical work at home or business is critical to the role of gospeling others for Jesus. The work of joy in the home, paying taxes, table manners, and saying “hello” to strangers, are all good works. My point is that the gospel, which conquers the nations, is for the real world – the world where people work, pay bills, and feed kids. For this reason there is no “ism” in the gospel, just as much as there is no “ism” the food we eat; both are essential to life.

“The Bible, in short, is not an ideological tract and does not teach an ideology. Scripture does present a certain view of the world that has true propositional content. But it is an error, and a fatal one to suggest that, once we have systematized the propositional content of Scripture, the result is a “worldview” call Christianity to which we can give our assent, and there an end. French usage notwithstanding (*christianisme*), it is a radical distortion to think of Scripture’s teaching as an “ism”.”

- *Against Christianity*, Peter Leithart, pg. 15

The point of the previous quote is that our calling as Christians is for the real world where it affects the ritual and practices of every day life. When gospel becomes an irrelevant “ism”, or theory of Christianity, then the world around us does not change and we fail to gospel others through out works. Lastly, we use our words in gospeling others.

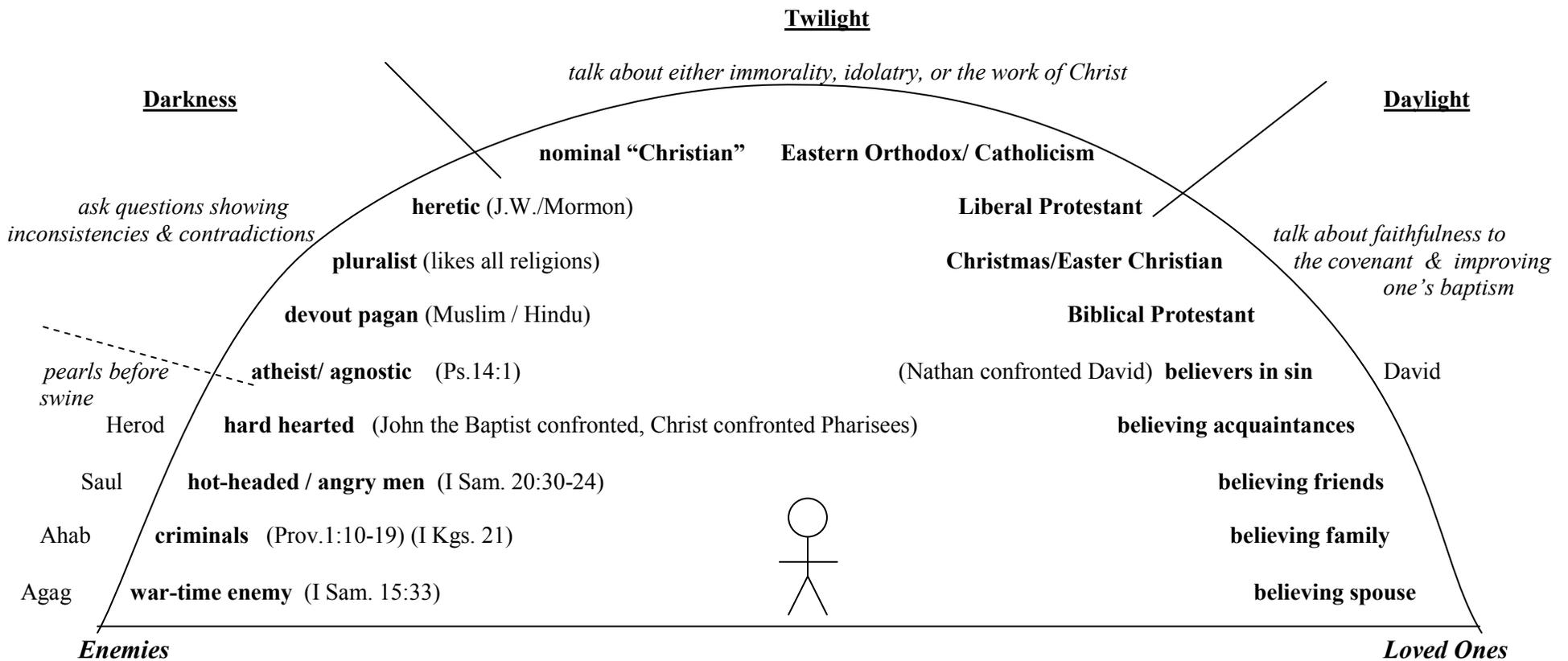
Scripture says that we are to “*give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you*” (I Pet. 3:15). This means we are to used words, and it also assumes that we will be asked. If our lifestyle, yes our rituals, of worship and work are bearing fruit then unbelievers will ask. They will ask why? They may jump the gun and persecution but not before they notice a difference in the fact that we have hope and they do not. So in our next study we will focus on the words we should use, and how we should communicate to unbelievers the Faith that is for daily life.

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### Using Words To Share Your Faith

Witnessing the gospel to others with our words takes wisdom because every situation and person is different. Yet the common ground that everyone has is that we are all *sinful* and we all need the *savior*. For this reason there are many useful presentations that are rather universal in their approach. On the following pages I give you some outlines of gospel presentations that have been used over the past several decades: Evangelism Explosion, The Four Spiritual Laws, and the Romans Road to Salvation. The basic point of these presentations (and others) is explaining man’s need for Christ, the work of Christ, the reception of Christ, and scripture verses to prove those points. My advice on these presentations is simply: whatever is helpful and whatever works. They are guidelines. They are not exhaustive explanations of the work of Jesus, and they are intended to be a bare summary of the basics. And they contain just a few memory passages with which every mature Christian should be familiar.

Becoming familiar with a basic gospel presentation, helps you become familiar with the gospel itself; and the more you understand the good news of Jesus, the easier you will be able to communicate it. Sharing the gospel with someone is nothing more that talking about a person and His work. Like with anyone else, the more you about who they are and what they do, the better you can talk about them. When we witness we are not talking about a doctrine, a philosophy, or even a belief – *we are talking about a person and what He has accomplished for us*. Having this perspective on the good news of Jesus helps us to be ready for any conversation where we may have an opportunity to share what Christ has done for us.



The preceding diagram demonstrates the variety of people with whom the Christian contact, and it is good to consider what should be said, or done, in each circumstance. Notice that the outline moves from darkness, to twilight, to daylight – reflecting the spirituality or relationship Christians have with others.

First, there is the “pearls before swine” category. Enemies of war, villains of society, hot-heads, and ruthless rulers are the type of people where your words will do nothing for them. (Yes! we should preach to prisoners, but I’m talking about those seeking to shed blood and steal.) The ministries of John and Jesus exemplify what it means, and result from, throwing pearls before swine. The pearls of calling Herod and the evil Jews to repentance resulted in the death of Jesus and John. And such will happen to God’s people, or something like, on such occasions.

The second category points out those who are already identified with a false religion, or non-Trinitarian heresy. In these conversations the goal is to first expose the fallacies of their worldview. Hopefully they will see that their answer and arguments are the rope with which they are hanging themselves.

Atheists: You claim that there *is* no God. Would it be better to say you actually *hate* that existence of God? Why do you hate God so much?

Agnostics: (These claim to have no knowledge, or that no truth can be known.) Is it *true* that there is *no truth*? (Point out this contradiction.)

Hindu: If re-incarnation is true, how can you consume any food in the world; for you could be eating a former relative.

Buddhism: If the ultimate goal is to desire nothing, isn't that itself a desire? Why do you desire non-existence, while you feed yourself.

Muslim: How can God have a perfect justice and mercy at the same time? Does he compromise one to have the other?

Pluralist: So you think every religion is valid and alike? How is this true when most religions exclude all others? Are you sure you understand?

Heretics: (non-Trinitarian) How can Jesus' blood satisfy God, if Jesus Himself is not God? How do you explain Jesus baptism without Trinity?

Nominal Christian: What does it mean to be a Christian? You say you believe in God – did you know that Satan believes in God too?

If you are a Christian, why don't you change your lifestyle?

You call yourself a Christian, would it be better to consider yourself an apostate?

Since you're living with your girlfriend, do you realize your bringing shame on the name of Christ?

Catholicism / E. Orthodoxy: Did you realize that the second commandment forbids the making of idols, and using them to pray with?

Why did Jesus die? Did he satisfy all the wrath of God, or just some of it?

If I have to go to purgatory for some of my sins, then did Jesus not die for all of my sins?

Liberal Protestants: Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, do you believe that the Bible is equally the Word of God? If not, then why does the Bible claim to be the word of God?

Does God's love cancel out his wrath and judgment? If so, why does the Bible teach about eternal hell.

If homosexuality is legitimate, then why can't they naturally reproduce? Since they can't reproduce through a homosexual act, then wouldn't it be true that someone who "is made that way" is an inferior human being?

Instead of degrading a person's humanity to the inferiority of a non-reproductive lifestyle wouldn't it be more respectful to say that lifestyle was chosen – and being contrary to nature and God's word it is sinful?

\* *The challenge with these types of conversations is allowing the message itself to cause the offensive, not your method or approach.*

## **Evangelism Explosion Outline:**

- I. The introduction
  - A. Their secular life
  - B. Their church background
  - C. Our church (their impression)
  - D. Testimony: church and/or personal
  - E. Two diagnostic questions:
    - 1. *Have you come to a place in your spiritual life where you know for certain that if you were to die today you would go to heaven, or is that something you would say you're still working on?*
    - 2. *Suppose that you were to die today and stand before God and He were to say to you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say?*
- II. The Gospel
  - A. Grace
    - 1. Heaven is a free gift
    - 2. It is not earned or deserved
  - B. Man
    - 1. Is a sinner
    - 2. Cannot save himself
  - C. God
    - 1. Is merciful – therefore doesn't want to punish us
    - 2. Is just – therefore must punish us
  - D. Christ
    - 1. Who He is – the infinite God-Man
    - 2. What He did – He died on the cross and rose from the dead to pay the penalty for our sins and to purchase a place in heaven for us, which He offers as a gift
  - E. Faith
    - 1. What it is not – mere intellectual assent or mere temporal faith
    - 2. What it is – trusting in Jesus Christ alone for eternal life
- III. The commitment
  - A. Transition: "Does this make sense to you?"
  - B. Commitment: "Would you like to receive the gift of eternal life?"
  - C. Clarification: "Let me clarify this..."
  - D. Prayer
  - E. Assurance
- IV. The immediate follow-up
  - A. The means of growth
    - 1. Bible
    - 2. Prayer
    - 3. Worship
    - 4. Fellowship
    - 5. Witness
  - B. Appointment for church

## **The Four Spiritual Laws Outline**

Law 1: *God LOVES you and offers a wonderful PLAN for your life.*

### **God's Love**

"God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NIV).

### **God's Plan**

[Christ speaking] "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

Why is it that most people are not experiencing the abundant life? Because...

Law 2: *Man is SINFUL and SEPARATED from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.*

### **Man Is Sinful**

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Man was created to have fellowship with God; but, because of his stubborn self-will, he chose to go his own independent way, and fellowship with God was broken.

This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is an evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

### **Man Is Separated**

"The wages of sin is death" [spiritual separation from God] (Romans 6:23).

This diagram illustrates that God is holy and man is sinful. A great gulf separates the two. The arrows illustrate that man is continually trying to reach God and the abundant life through his own efforts, such as a good life, philosophy, or religion – but he inevitably fails.

The third law explains the only way to bridge this gulf...

Law 3: *Jesus Christ is God's ONLY provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.*

### **He Died in Our Place**

"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

### **He Rose From the Dead**

"Christ died for our sins...He was buried...He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures...He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred..." (1 Corinthians 15:3-6).

### **He Is the Only Way to God**

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me'" (John 14:6).

Law 4: *We must individually RECEIVE Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.*

### **We Must Receive Christ**

"As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12)

### **We Receive Christ Through Faith**

"By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

### **We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation**

[Christ speaking] "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him" (Rev.3:20).

## The Romans Road to Salvation:

### 1. **Romans 3:23** "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

We all have sin in our hearts. We all were born with sin.

We were born under the power of sin's control.

- Admit that you are a sinner.

### 2. **Romans 6:23a** "...The wages of sin is death..."

Sin has an ending. It results in death. We all face physical death, which is a result of sin. But a worse death is spiritual death that alienates us from God, and will last for all eternity. The Bible teaches that there is a place called the Lake of Fire where lost people will be in torment forever. It is the place where people who are spiritually dead will remain.

- Understand that you deserve death for your sin.

### 3. **Romans 6:23b** "...But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Salvation is a free gift from God to you! You can't earn this gift, but you must reach out and receive it.

- Ask God to forgive you and save you.

### 4. **Romans 5:8**, "God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us!"

When Jesus died on the cross He paid sin's penalty. He paid the price for all sin, and when He took all the sins of the world on Himself on the cross, He bought us out of slavery to sin and death! The only condition is that we believe in Him and what He has done for us, understanding that we are now joined with Him, and that He is our life. He did all this because He loved us and gave Himself for us!

- Give your life to God... His love poured out in Jesus on the cross is your only hope to have forgiveness and change. His love bought you out of being a slave to sin. His love is what saves you.

### 5. **Romans 10:13** "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved!"

- Call out to God in the name of Jesus.

### 6. **Romans 10:9,10** "...If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."