

# **THE EVANGELICAL MIND**

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*What do we mean by evangelism? What do we not mean by evangelism? What exactly is the Gospel? What is the Gospel not? Who is called to evangelize? How should a mature Christian think about evangelism?*

## **MAIN POINTS**

1. Evangelism is sharing the good news (the gospel) of Jesus Christ.
2. There are six crucial elements to the gospel.
3. All Christians are called to engage in evangelism.
4. We must consider the cost of evangelism.
5. God is sovereign and central in all things—including our evangelism.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Evangelism...what comes to mind when you hear the word “evangelism”?

Several images come to my mind as I consider evangelism. I think of the Four Spiritual Laws (or gospel tracts). I think of knocking on dorm doors. I think of going up to strangers at the beach. I think of the seemingly contradictory simultaneous experience of awkwardness and anticipation in telling a sinner about the forgiveness that they are offered in Jesus. I think of the feeling of rightness that follows an evangelistic encounter. I think of my neighbors. I think of McDonalds. I think of the glory of God. I think of the cross. I think of discipleship. I think of all kinds of things.

The main question that I want to answer in this session is, “How should a mature Christian think about evangelism?” Let’s start with a story, a warning, and a definition.

## **EVANGELISM IS SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (THE GOSPEL) OF JESUS CHRIST.**

Donald Whitney recounts the following story:

*“I heard the story of a man who became a Christian during an evangelistic emphasis in a city in the Pacific Northwest. When he 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?’ he asked. ‘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 that it was Christ who made the difference, I convinced myself that if you could live such a good and happy life without Christ, then I could too.’”*

The point of this story (in this context, anyway) is to usher in a warning; namely, a warning about misunderstanding evangelism. As you will see in a few minutes, there is an urgency about thinking (and acting) rightly about evangelism. To help drive this point home, I want to offer 6 things that evangelism is not (2-6 come from Mark Dever’s, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*):

1. Evangelism is not “living a good Christian life”. As Donald Whitney’s story illustrates, although engaging in evangelism is certainly part of living the life of a Christian, simply being a good person in front of non-Christians is not evangelism.
2. Evangelism is not imposition. Dever reminds us that the gospel is a fact and you cannot impose facts on others (only opinions).
3. Evangelism is not personal testimony. Dever’s point here is that telling a story about your life is not the same thing as evangelism.
4. Evangelism is not social action or public involvement. Fighting against abortion, for instance, is good, but it is not evangelism.
5. Evangelism is not apologetics. Arguing or offering a defense for the reasonableness of Christianity is not evangelism.
6. To make Dever’s last point I want to turn your attention to J.I. Packer’s book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. In it he, asks us to consider what’s wrong with the following definition (taken from the 1918 Archbishops’ Committee): “To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Savior, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of the Church.”

Packer suggests that there is one fundamental matter of error in this otherwise good definition: “It puts a consecutive clause where a final clause should be. Had it begun: ‘to evangelize is to present Christ Jesus to sinful men *in order that*, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they *may come...*’, there would be no fault in it. This is to define evangelism in terms of an effect achieved in the lives of others; which amounts to saying that the essence of evangelizing is producing converts.”

Or, as Mark Dever puts it, “evangelism is not the results”.

What then is evangelism? Simply put, (Packer) “according to the New Testament, evangelism is just preaching to Gospel”. ***Thinking rightly about evangelism, then, includes understanding evangelism is sharing the good news (the gospel) of Jesus Christ.***

But what is the good news or gospel of Jesus Christ?

### ***THERE ARE SIX CRUCIAL ELEMENTS TO THE GOSPEL***

The Bible is very clear that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe it. That is, it is through faith or trust in the gospel that God has chosen to save sinners.

***Romans 1:14-17*** *I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup> So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Therefore, evangelism is sharing the gospel and sharing the gospel is the means by which men are saved. But what is the gospel? Or, what exactly are we called to share in our evangelism? And what are men called to believe or trust in, in order to be saved?

Before we get into what the gospel is, I want to acknowledge the fact that if men are saved by believing in the gospel, then, by implication: 1) (As I said above) getting the gospel wrong in our evangelism has eternally serious consequences; and 2) By believing (even very sincerely) in a false gospel will do no one good. Please let this knowledge shape your listening for the following few moments. We need to get the gospel right!

Consider with me six things that the gospel is not (1-5 are from Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*):

1. The gospel is not merely the good news that there is a benevolent, loving, personal higher power.
2. The gospel is not merely the good news that everything will be OK.
3. The gospel is not merely the good news that Jesus was a forgiving, insightful man.
4. The gospel is not the good news that God wants us to be fiscally prosperous or physically blessed or emotionally protected in this life.
5. The gospel is not the good news that we can make ourselves acceptable to God through religion.
6. The gospel is not the good news that Jesus died for all mankind.

Now consider with me six elements of the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation:

1. The gospel is the good news that there is a God who is infinitely glorious. Any truly biblical gospel presentation will begin with the glory of God.

*"Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting." "Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you." (Nehemiah 9:5-6)*

The God of the Bible is infinitely more beautiful and wonderful and holy and majestic and powerful and awesome than the greatest human mind can comprehend. His power knows no end, His justice is perfect, His mercy is like a never ending tide, His holiness is whiter than the whitest snow, His knowledge is exhaustive, and His love cannot be contained by all creation. He has existed and will continue existing in all His beauty forever. He has no beginning and no end. He placed every star in the sky. He knows every atom in the universe by name. He stands alone in honor and value and worth. His name is above all names. He has no equal (Exodus 15:11).

2. The gospel is the good news that we were created by God for His glory.

*"Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." (Isaiah 43:7)*

The God of the universe designed the universe to display His glory (Psalm 19:1). We exist to reflect the greatness of God. Our whole purpose in life is to see and be satisfied by the glory of God. Everything that we do – whether we eat or drink or drive a car – must be done to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). How remarkable. God, in His infinite wisdom and love, created us such that we are to spend our entire lives pursuing the most magnificent, satisfying, beautiful, and worthy being in all of existence – Himself!

3. The gospel includes the news that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

*"There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)*

None of us have done that which we were created to do. That is, every one of us has sinned by failing to glorify God as we should. We have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). In other words, we choose constantly to glorify God's creation (toys and money and sex and relationships) rather than God Himself. When God sees us, He does not measure our goodness in comparison with other people. Instead, God measures our goodness against Himself—a standard which we all fail to meet.

4. The gospel includes the news that the cost of our sin—of failing to live for the glory of God—is death.  
*“For the wages of sin is death.”* (Romans 6:23)

Our sin, inherited and chosen, prevents us from doing the very thing that we were created to do: glorify God. Our sin has separated us from fellowship with God and the ability to live for his glory. Our rebellion brings with it extremely serious consequences. By failing to glorify God as we should, we have brought the wrath of God upon ourselves. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness (Romans 1:18). Those who remain in their sin will ultimately be judged guilty by God and sentenced to spiritual death – hell.

5. The gospel is the good news that in order to show His love, uphold His justice, forgive sinners, and display His glory, God sent His Son, Jesus, to pay for sins with His death.

*“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”* (1 John 4:9-10)

Because of God’s great love for us and His glory, He did not leave us without hope in our state of enmity. He provided a way for sinners to again delight in His glory and be reconciled to Himself. God cannot ignore injustice. Because He is just, God must punish all sin. Therefore, God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is, in order to show His love, uphold His justice, forgive sinners, and display His glory, God sent His Son, Jesus, to pay for sins with His death.

6. And the gospel is the good news that the forgiveness of sins and the everlasting life bought by Jesus death belongs to all who repent, believe, and love Jesus.

*“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.”* (Acts 3:19)

*“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”* (Acts 16:31)

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; ...‘Do this and you will live.’”* (Luke 10:25-27)

God decides whether or not we go to heaven based solely on our response to Jesus. In order to gain access to the forgiveness, love, and glory of God in Jesus — in order to get to heaven — we must repent, believe, and love Jesus (the mingling of which the Bible calls “faith”). Repenting means turning from sin and towards God. Believing means trusting and placing our faith in the promises of God rather than the promises of sin. And loving means realigning our affections to delight in the God of the universe.

This is the gospel! This is the good news that, if we’re given eyes to see, we will believe in and be saved. ***So, again, thinking rightly about evangelism means understanding that evangelism is sharing the gospel and that the gospel is the good news that, for the glory of God and the good of man, man is saved from his sins by grace through faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.***

It’s important to note, I believe, that Scripture gives the example of being saved by grace through faith in a true understanding of the Gospel, rather than a deep one. Scripture also gives us the example (which we’ll get to in a moment) of a true understanding of the Gospel, rather than a deep one (which all true believers have), as a requirement for engaging in evangelism.

Let me also remind you that a true gospel presentation always includes a call to respond. That is, we must instruct people that part of the gospel is responding in faith (repentance, belief, and love).

So who is called to engage in evangelism?

## **ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO ENGAGE IN EVANGELISM**

Who among us is called to engage in the practice of evangelism? Who is responsible to share the gospel with the lost? Who is charged to tell others that Jesus Christ died to save them?

Donald Whitney writes, “Some Christians believe that evangelism is a gift and the responsibility of only those with that gift. They appeal to Ephesians 4:11 for support. While it is true that God gifts some for ministry as evangelists, He calls all believers to be His witnesses and provides them with both the power to witness and a powerful message. Every evangelist is called to be a witness, but only a few witnesses are called to the vocational ministry of an evangelist. Just as each Christian, regardless of spiritual gift or ministry, is to love others, so each believer is to evangelize whether or not his or her gift is that of evangelist” (Spiritual Disciplines, p.101).

He also writes, our evangelism “will necessarily be customized by [our] spiritual gift, talents, personality, schedule, family situation, location, etc. But having taken all that into consideration, every believer must realize that it is sinful not to seek ways to spread the message about our Lord Jesus” (p.112).

Dr. James Kennedy writes , “I am certain that for the vast majority of Christian church members the idea has firmly taken root in their minds that it is primarily the task of the minister to fight the battles of Christ—especially for the souls of men.”

John Stott (in “Our Guilty Silence”) says, “We are to go as He went, to penetrate human society, to mix with unbelievers and to fraternize with sinners. Doesn’t one of the Church’s greatest failures lie here? We have disengaged too much. We have become aloof instead of alongside.”

J.I. Packer suggests that “the commission to publish the gospel and make disciples was never confined to the apostles. Nor is it not confined to the Church’s ministers. It is a commission that rests upon the whole Church collectively and therefore upon each Christian individually. All God’s people are sent to do as the Philippians did, and ‘shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life’. Every Christians therefore, has a God –given obligation to make know the Gospel of Christ.”

Briefly, I want to give you eight reasons why I believe that Whitney and Kennedy and Stott and Packer are right in teaching that evangelism is the privilege and duty of all Christians; of all who claim Jesus as lord and savior.

1. There are several Biblical texts that seem to explicitly teach this (1 Peter 2:9; 1 Peter 2:20-21; Matthew 28:18-20; **Mark 16:15**; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:14; John 20:21; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; Acts 8:1-4; 11:19-21 [notice who is scattered, who stays in Jerusalem, and who preaches]; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 3:15 [notice who Peter is writing to]).
2. The NT narrative is full of passages describing the evangelist efforts of the early church (**Acts 8:1-4**). Some of these passages are to large groups of people who, inevitably, were not all given the gift of evangelism, yet they were expected to evangelize.

Also, examples and commands and admonitions and encouragements to share the gospel are so prevalent in the New Testament that it would be very difficult, I believe, to go on a case by case basis in order discount the universality of the examples, commands, admonitions, and encouragements.

3. The primary call that Jesus makes on our lives is, “follow me” (and I will make you fishers of men) (Matthew 10:38). This means that we are called to think like Jesus thought, feel like Jesus felt, and do what Jesus did. Jesus evangelized the lost and therefore, so must we.
4. We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Loving our neighbors, I believe, means desiring and pursuing what’s best for them. While there are a lot of good things that we might pursue for our neighbors, the best thing is their reconciliation with God. Indeed, what

weight does our claim to love them carry should we deny them the good news that they can be reconciled with God?

5. Paul says, follow me as I follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). In Philippians he calls us to put into practice the things that he does (4:9). Paul, more than most, engaged in evangelism. Therefore, following him or putting into practice his example means engaging in evangelism.
6. This is part of what it means to be a debtor of grace (Romans 1:14). That is, by accepting the saving grace of God through faith, Paul teaches, we become grace debtors—owing grace to everyone. One means (I believe the primary biblical means) of making the grace payments that we owe is by engaging in evangelism.
7. Evangelism is a means of grace. Wayne Grudem notes that (in Acts in particular) “there is often a significant connection between proclaiming the gospel and being filled with the Spirit” (Acts 2:4; 14-36; 4:8; 31; 9:17, 20; 13:9, 52). Evangelism is not only a means of grace then in that it ministers to the unsaved, but also because those who evangelize experience more of the Holy Spirit’s presence in their lives.
8. Why would we not intentionally pursue opportunities to share the Gospel with non-Christians? What good reason might there be? It seems to me that a true knowledge of the Gospel, in and of itself, is a kind of compulsion for all believers to share the gospel.

***Indeed, a right understanding of evangelism, or a mature Christian’s thoughts about evangelism must include the fact that all Christians are called to engage in evangelism, in speaking the gospel to the lost.***

On a different, but related note, as Donald Whitney points out, even though all Christians are expected to evangelize “all Christians are not expected to use the same methods of evangelism...[Again,] I don’t want to leave the impression that the discipline of evangelism requires that we all share the gospel in exactly the same ways. [You may have] a picture of certain methods of evangelism that seem terrifying to you. But the preconceived style of evangelism you may fear is not necessarily the best way for you to help make disciples for Christ” (Spiritual Disciplines, p.100, 109).

I would only add to this my observation that most of the reasons that we fear or avoid a particular method of evangelism seem to have far less to do with gifting and far more to do with sinful hearts. I see this particularly in the fact that most of the people who most adamantly reject a particular (biblically consistent) method of evangelism are not consistently engaged in any other form of evangelism.

### ***WE MUST CONSIDER THE COST OF EVANGELISM.***

Briefly I want to make mention of the fact that there is a general cost to being a Christian—a Christ follower.

***Luke 14:25-33*** Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ <sup>31</sup> Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

***John 15:18-21*** “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out

of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

**2 Timothy 3:12** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...

However, there is also a specific cost to following Jesus in the way of evangelism. Therefore, thinking rightly about evangelism includes understanding that there is a high cost to it. I want to mention two specific costs of evangelism (if not altogether unique to evangelism, these costs are certainly uniquely amplified in evangelism):

1. Evangelism will cost you your honor. Jesus is clear about this. When you speak boldly about Jesus (particularly in an evangelistic encounter) others will take offense at you. You simply cannot expect to tell others about their sinful depravity and that they will stand guilty in judgment before God without people thinking bad things about you. And you simply cannot expect to speak to others about things that are foolishness to them and expect them to esteem you.

**Matthew 13:53-58** And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, <sup>54</sup> and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? <sup>55</sup> Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" <sup>57</sup> And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." <sup>58</sup> And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

2. Evangelism will cost you your comfort. You must understand (we will talk more about this tomorrow) that a life committed to speaking the gospel to the lost means giving up other good things (like rest, or family time or a bible study or golf or a time with the girls or reading certain books). When evangelism is a priority it will mean giving up many good comforts. It can be easy and comfortable to hang out with strong Christians. It can be very messy and uncomfortable to hang out with non-Christians.

Consider the John 4 account of the woman at the well. Jesus gave two days that it doesn't appear that he had planned in order to bring the good news to the Samaritans.

**John 4:39-43** <sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." <sup>43</sup> After the two days he departed for Galilee.

**Again, thinking rightly about evangelism includes understanding that there is a high cost to it.**

### **GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND CENTRAL IN ALL THINGS—INCLUDING OUR EVANGELISM**

Finally, I want to close by addressing the sovereignty of God in evangelism. Right thinking about evangelism includes a right understanding of the sovereignty of God in all things—including evangelism.

Scripture teaches plainly that God is sovereign (Genesis 18:14, Jeremiah 32:17, 27, Luke 1:37, Matt. 19:26; Isaiah 46:8-11). That is, scripture plainly teaches that God controls all things according to the counsel of His will. Nothing occurs apart from the ordination of God. We would do well in thinking about this in the context of evangelism in at least three particular areas: prayer, empowerment, and confidence.

Since God is sovereign in evangelism it is impossible to separate prayer from evangelism. Consider the words of J.I. Packer (from *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*),

“The prayer of a Christian is not an attempt to force God’s hand, but a humble acknowledgement of helplessness and dependence. When we are on our knees, we know that it is not we who control the world; it is not in our power, therefore, to supply our needs by our own independent efforts; every good thing that we desire for ourselves and for others must be sought from God, and will come, if it comes at all, as a gift from His hands.”

Similarly, in evangelizing the lost, we are not attempting to force God’s hand, but humbly acknowledging our helplessness and dependence on God to save sinners. Since God has made it known to us that He has chosen to save man only through his trusting in the gospel, evangelism is the acknowledgement that we cannot save souls on our own. It is this knowledge, above all else, that brings us to our knees in prayer regarding our evangelization of the lost.

1. Again, since we recognize God’s sovereignty in evangelism, we pray. Since we recognize that the gospel, apart from the work of God, will always be foolish to non-Christians (1 Corinthians 1:18) we pray that the lost would be given eyes to see. Since we recognize that no one will come to Jesus apart from the drawing of the Father (John 6:44) we pray that the Father would draw. And since we recognize that the road of the evangelist will be marked with frustration we pray that God would sustain our joy in preaching the gospel. As J.I. Packer says (in *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*), “Faith in the sovereignty of God’s government and grace is the only thing that can sustain [evangelism], for it is the only thing that can give us the resilience that we need if we are to evangelize boldly and persistently, and not be daunted by temporary setbacks.”

Because God is sovereign, we pray.

2. Second, since God is sovereign we know that all true conversions are the product of God’s working through the gospel, through the evangelist.

Donald Whitney notes, in *Spiritual Disciplines* (p.103), “The power of evangelism is the Holy Spirit. From the instant that He indwells us He gives us the power to witness. Jesus stressed this in Acts 1:8.”

Again, we must recognize as Whitney says,

“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).

3. Because God is sovereign we have confidence in our evangelism. We have confidence that not one of Jesus’ sheep will be lost, we have confidence that our shortcomings in obedience will not prevent someone from coming to Christ, we have confidence that the gospel is able to pierce even the hardest heart, we have confidence that though we are weak, he is strong, and we have confidence that none can stay the hand of God in drawing a sinner to himself.

***Indeed, thinking rightly about evangelism means recognizing God’s sovereignty in all things—including evangelism.***

Mark Dever, in *The Deliberate Church*, makes this observation,

“We shouldn’t want our Gospel presentations or invitations to be finally molded by what we think will ‘close the deal.’ If they are, then they reveal that we think conversion is something we can orchestrate, which is the furthest thing from the truth. Instead of using all our powers to convict and change the sinner, while God stands back as a gentleman quietly waiting for the spiritual corpse, His declared spiritual enemy, to invite Him into his heart, let’s preach the Gospel like gentlemen, trying to persuade but knowing that we can’t convert. Then let’s stand back while God uses all of His powers to convict and convert and change the sinner.”

Again, Mark Dever in the Deliberate Church,

“Some evangelism strategies seek to make the Gospel attractive to unbelievers by confronting all the benefits of Christianity and saving the costs for later. They promise that you’ll experience more satisfaction, less stress, a better sense of community, and an increased sense of meaning in life—and you’ll be prepared for eternity to boot!—if you’ll just make a decision for Christ right now. [Yet this kind of evangelism] makes the Gospel appear to be all about me and improving my lifestyle and making me happier. Now, granted, we are the beneficiaries and God is the benefactor. We’re not the ones “doing God a favor” by becoming Christians. Yet the Gospel is not ultimately about me. It is about God making His holiness and sovereign mercy known. It is about God’s glory, and gathering worshipers for Himself who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. It is about God vindicating His holiness by punishing Christ for the sins of all those who repent and believe. It is about making a name for Himself in the world by gathering a people and separating them to Himself for the spread of His fame among the nations.”

J.I. Packer in Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God,

“It is not true that some Christians believe in divine sovereignty while others hold an opposite view. What is true is that all Christians believe in divine sovereignty, but some are not aware that they do, and mistakenly imagine and insist that they reject it. What causes this odd state of affairs? The root cause is the same as in most cases of error in the Church—the intruding of rationalistic speculations, the passion for systematic consistency, a reluctance to recognize the existence of mystery and to let God be wiser than men, and a consequent subjecting of Scripture to the supposed demands of human logic.”

“How, then, do you pray? Do you ask God for your daily bread? Do you thank God for your conversion? Do you pray for the conversion for others? If the answer is ‘no’, I can only say that I do not think you are yet born again. But if the answer is ‘yes’—well, that proves that, whatever side you may have taken in debates on this question in the past, in your heart you believe in the sovereignty of God no less firmly than anyone else. On our feet we may have arguments about it, but on our knees we are all agreed.”

“Scripture teaches that [God] orders and controls all things, human actions among them, in accordance with His own eternal purpose. Scripture also teaches that [God] holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the courses of action he pursued. Thus, hearers of the gospel are responsible for their reaction; if they reject the good news, they are guilty of unbelief.” Packer goes on to add that, even though God is sovereign, Christians are also responsible to, indeed penalized for unfaithfulness in, preaching the gospel. This is true and Paul rebukes those who question it (Romans 9:19).

There is great danger in forgetting the practical implications of God’s sovereignty. “It is right to recognize our responsibility to engage in aggressive evangelism. It is right to desire the conversion of unbeliever. It is right to want one’s presentation of the gospel to be as clear and forcible as possible. If we preferred that converts should be few and far between, and did not care whether our proclaiming of Christ went home or not, there would be something wrong with

us. But 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.”

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, a mature Christian will learn to think well about evangelism. Specifically a mature Christian will come to understand that evangelism is sharing the good news (the gospel) of Jesus Christ (and consequently will come to know the gospel well), that all Christians are called to engage in evangelism, that evangelism is very costly, and that God is sovereign and central in all things—including our evangelism.