

Phil Sanders
God's Answers to Life's Questions

Occasionally people ask why churches are so insistent on taking the gospel to the whole world. They feel that it is a shame to impose your faith on others. Well, we're not trying to impose on anyone, but we do want people to know the truth. Today we're asking the question, "Why do churches evangelize?" In our postmodern world, many people think of all religions as the same and all churches are alike. Because of this, they wonder why anyone would take the time to evangelize the lost. In fact, they question if anyone is really lost. One famous preacher said he believed that people who had never read a Bible or heard the name of Jesus were members of the body of Christ and saved nonetheless. If this is the case, then there would be no reason to reach out with the gospel. This is popular thinking, but is it God's thinking? Is anyone really lost today? Does it matter whether people ever know the Scriptures? Does it take the gospel to save?

For many people words like gospel and evangelism are negative words associated with being judgmental. You many not know it, but for many people the worst sin anyone commits today is to be "judgmental." So the idea of evangelizing, telling people the gospel of grace and salvation, implies they are lost and in need of saving. This offends them, and so they think it wrong to evangelize. I can't think of anything further from the truth. The gospel is by definition "good news" not bad news. Yes, people in sin are lost and need saving; but that's all of us. Paul said in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That's you, that's me, that's everybody! You see, we are all in the same boat, needing grace and salvation. It is no disgrace to say we need salvation. What is a disgrace is to act like we are above sin and the need for salvation.

John said in 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." Again, he says in verse 10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." I am amazed at how people think everyone is saved, and no one is lost. When I have taught people in one-on-one studies through the years, I use the 'Upon the Rock' Bible study. It often shocks people when they read Matthew 7:13-14, which says, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." You see, they don't realize that most people take that easy road to destruction in hell rather than the narrow road to heaven. The reason for this program is help people go to heaven and avoid the road to destruction. We're in the saving business.

But for people to be saved, they must first understand and deal with the fact they are lost. People need Jesus. They don't always know that. They believe that if they live a good, moral life, help their neighbor, and pray now and then, they don't have anything to worry about. They believe they will go straight to heaven when they die. But the Bible tells us differently. You see, no matter who we are, we need the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from sin. The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 9:22, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." Jesus shed his blood to save you and me from our sins. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:24-25, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

Acts 10:1-2 tells of a good man. "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God." This

good man was devout, generous, and prayerful; but none of that saved him. He still needed the same thing everyone needs, the grace of God in the blood of Jesus. All his good works, all his praying, and all his devotion did not take away his sins. Only the blood of Jesus could do that. The fact is, you cannot find the salvation of your soul apart from Jesus. It takes his blood. The good news is that He loved you enough to die for your sins and to give you the hope of eternal life. You can't earn salvation, you can't win it, you don't deserve it, so God graciously gave you an opportunity to find salvation through grace in the sacrificial death of Jesus.

Paul said in Romans 5:6-9, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." This passage tells us four things about ourselves. First we were weak or helpless, like an infant. We could not save ourselves. Second, we were ungodly, that is, we didn't have God in our lives. Third, we were sinners. We had sinned against God. And fourth, we were enemies of God, hostile to God's will.

God loved us anyway. He loved us in our weakness, as ungodly people, sinners and enemies. Who would think of dying for the sins of your enemy? God would. That's how God is. He loves us even when we don't deserve it. Paul knew this better than anybody. He said in 1 Timothy 1:12-16, "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." If God and Jesus could love the chief of sinners and save him, God can also love you and save you. He used Paul as an example for us, so that He could show His perfect patience and love for us. No wonder Paul was so thankful. I'm thankful too!

What is the gospel, the good news? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." The gospel is the story of the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful, powerful story that can impact our souls.

Paul said in Romans 1:14-16, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 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.” The gospel is powerful, because it is God’s good news. It has the power to save, because it tells the story of Jesus and tells us what we must do in response to Jesus’ death on the cross. Paul knew that without preaching people would not know God. He said in 1 Corinthians 1:21, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” It is the message that saves, the message of love and grace and hope. It is the most important news you will ever hear.

The gospel gives a person the opportunity to be forgiven, to change his life, to have the past no longer held against him, and to be born again. That’s good news, my friends. Haven’t you ever wanted a chance to start all over again, clean and fresh? I want to stop here for just a minute and ask you to think with me. What sins have you committed in your lifetime? Have you lied, gossiped, cheated, broken a law, lusted, used foul language, coveted, envied, or hated someone? If you made a list of all the sins you’ve ever committed, you might be surprised at how long that list is. If you really took your sins seriously, you would probably be ashamed of yourself and wonder how you could possibly have done anything so bad. Sin is a terrible thing. It offends God, hurts others, and makes a person small in his own eyes. When people sin, they separate themselves from God.

Isaiah said in chapter 59, verses 1 and 2, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” Sin builds a barrier that keeps us from pleasing God. When sin is in our lives, God does not hear our prayers but turns his face and favor away from us. That sin has eternal consequences. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

You can’t hang on to sin and expect to go to heaven, my friend. The good news is that the passage does not stop there. 1 Corinthians 6:11 says, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” There is a way that you can be washed, sanctified (that is, made holy), and justified (that is, declared righteous) by the Lord Jesus. No matter who you are or what you have done, you can go to heaven, my friend, if you are washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. You don’t have to be lost eternally. You don’t have to miss heaven. Because of the grace of Christ, you can find salvation!

Now, what kind of person would you think me to be, if I knew how people could go to heaven and live with God eternally but kept my mouth shut about it? I would rather tell people the truth about sin and salvation, even if it is not politically correct, than to remain silent

while people are lost. I would rather point to Jesus as the way, the truth, and life than the leave people on an easy road to destruction. I would rather offend some and say Jesus is the only way to heaven (and he is according to John 14:6 and Acts 4:12) than I would to leave them ignorantly thinking they can save themselves by some other way. Some people think it is unkind to tell people about sin. But to remain silent about the sin that will condemn you eternally is really more than unkind—it’s criminal. The gospel message has God’s power to save. There is no more important work in all the world than to tell the story of Jesus, whereby sinful men respond in faith and repentance to the gospel and are baptized into Christ. My friend, I can’t think of anything more important for you to do today than to hear the gospel and obey it, before it is everlastingly too late. Today is the day of salvation. Don’t say no to God. Say yes and obey Him.

The gospel tells us of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ died for our sins. He was buried in the tomb, and on the third day Jesus arose again. All of this was done according to the prophecies in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Christ. The good news is that because he died for our sins, we can find forgiveness. The good news is that because He arose from the dead, we can have life beyond this life. We can live in heaven with Christ forever. That’s great news! When a person dies with Christ and is raised with Christ, he becomes a new creature; he is born again. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” The question, then, becomes how do I unite myself with Christ and be “in” Christ? Paul answers that question in Galatians 3:26-27, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Faith and baptism are here described as the means to become a child of God and putting on Christ. Paul makes it even more clear in Romans 6:3-7, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.” The good news of the gospel needs to be preached to every soul. But our preaching is in vain, when people are unwilling to listen or respond to the gospel. Some people love their sins or their pleasures too much to give them up. They would rather travel the easy road than the narrow one. You may get angry when you hear that sin will cost you your soul, but would you really rather that I lied to you? Would you rather hear the truth that sets you free or hear a lie that will please you today but cost you your soul in eternity? Don’t risk your soul. Come to the Lord and obey the gospel today.

Copyright 2007, Phil Sanders
Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org