

CHAPTER 31

Evangelism and Systematic Theology

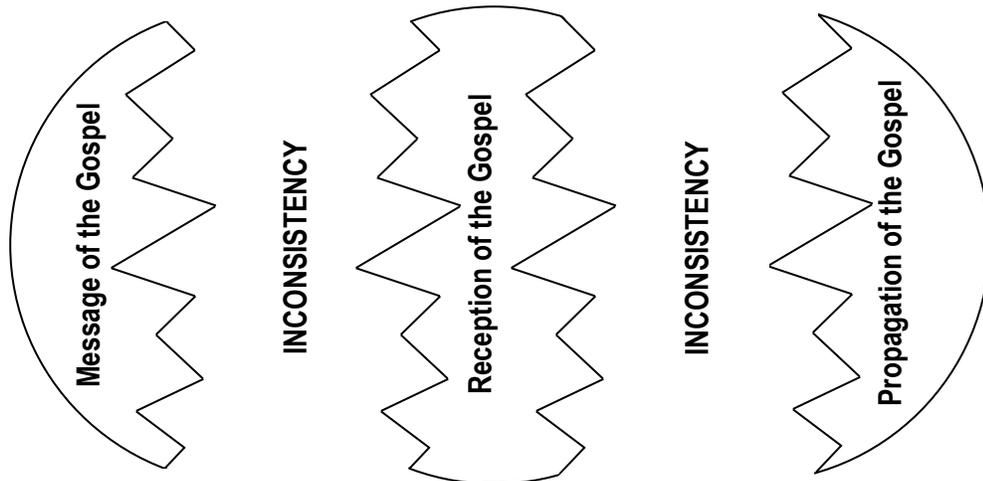
Introduction:

- Introductory Thoughts
 - ✓ Theology and practice are inseparably linked

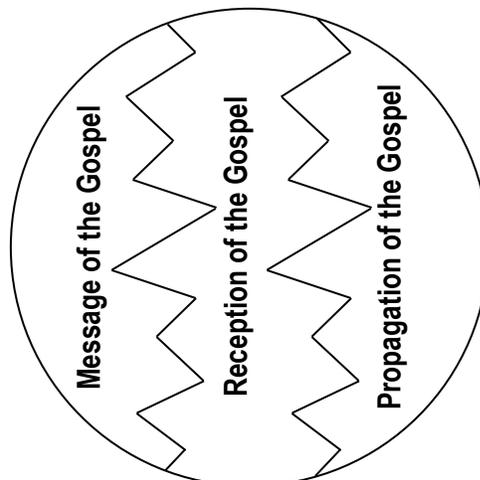
The main point of this chapter is to show that message of the Gospel, the reception of that message, and the method of proclamation are inseparably linked and interrelated.

The Interrelationship of Message, Reception, and Propagation

Fragmented Approach Assuming no interrelationship



Non-fragmented Approach Acknowledging interrelationship



- ✓ Good theology leads to good practice
 - Bad theology leads to bad practice, or...
 - Bad practice may in fact point to bad theology!
- ✓ E.g. Note the theological foundation of Christian Schwarz' evangelism as communicated in his *Natural Church Development* material:

- ✓ *The ABC's of Natural Church Development*

“There are some people who feel evangelism works best when you push people to commit their life to Christ. They do not even shy away from manipulative methods to reach this goal. No wonder many of us feel a strange sensation in our stomach when we hear the word ‘evangelism.’

“But it can be shown that ‘pushy’ manipulative methods represent the exact opposite of the practice we learn from growing churches.”¹⁵⁰⁶

- ✓ *Natural Church Development*

On the last two pages of his *Natural Church Development*, Schwarz titles his topic “Church growth in the power of the Holy Spirit.” In this very interesting portion, he reveals the relationship of his sociological work and the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God:

“Natural church development is made up of principles God has created and revealed to us. This theme is woven through this whole book. It does not mean, however, that this book claims ‘divine authorship.’ That claim would be absurd. No, the *terminology* we have chosen to describe these principles is less than perfect. The *research techniques* we used to empirically identify the principles are flawed—like any scientific method. And the *materials* we have developed can be improved. But all of this does not change one basic fact: the *principles* that we have gropingly tried to search out and blunderingly tried to communicate find their source in God.”¹⁵⁰⁷

What does Schwarz mean by “find their source in God”? His theological book may provide an answer ...

- ✓ *Paradigm Shift in the Church*

In a chapter titled “Functionality as a Theological Criterion?” Schwarz again reveals his theological emphases:

“The problem is that the term ‘theological’ is often identified with a static, ideological concept of truth.... But in fact (as this chapter will argue), to ask about the (practically demonstrable) functionality of church structures is an eminently theological concern. I would even say that a *functional* understanding of the church as an organization is the only legitimate way to justify the institutional side of the church theologically. ...

“In this chapter I propose to demonstrate that the concepts of *truth* and *functionality* (understood as usefulness for church development) are theologically closer together than appears in conventional discussion.... What is a false church? My thesis is that it is a church whose structures have not been justified in terms of how useful they are for effective church development.”¹⁵⁰⁸

- If God predestines the Christian to salvation:
 - ✓ Does that mean no evangelism is needed?
 - ☞ To believe so would be disregarding the Great Commission
 - ✓ Does that mean we need to share the truth but no persuasion or invitation is needed?
 - ☞ To believe this would be disregarding the examples and teaching of the Bible
 - ✓ We are to share the Gospel and call for commitment, even though we believe in predestination
- If God predestines the Christian to salvation, does He also predestine their spiritual growth?
 - ✓ Does this not imply the sinless perfection of all who believe (e.g. Matt 5:48)?

¹⁵⁰⁶Christian A. Schwarz, *ABC's of Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart, n.d.), 16.

¹⁵⁰⁷Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: ChurchSmart, 1998), 126-27.

¹⁵⁰⁸Christian Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church: How Natural Church Development Can Transform Theological Thinking* (Wheaton, IL: ChurchSmart, 1999), 65-66.

- ✓ Otherwise there must be the possibility of the “carnal Christian” (e.g. 1 Cor 3:10-15)?
 - ✓ And how about those who drift into theological error (e.g. Gal 1:6; 5:10)?
 - ✓ Yet all our good works are “wrought in God” (John 3:21; Eph 2:10)?
 - ✓ There are two warring natures in the believer (e.g. Gal 5:16-18).
- There are actually a number of issues addressed in evangelism and systematic theology:
- ✓ The message of salvation
 - ✓ The role of the preacher in salvation (his lifestyle or deeds, as well as his preaching)
 - ✓ The role of the Word of God
 - ✓ The role of the Holy Spirit
 - ✓ The lostness of man
 - ✓ Man’s ability to understand the message and respond
 - ✓ The order of conversion/salvation
 - ✓ The role of Baptism in salvation
 - ✓ The role of the church in salvation, etc.

Evangelism and Systematic Theology:

- Two Approaches to evangelism:
- ✓ Man-centered
 - ✓ Christ-centered

EMPHASES IN EVANGELISM

Christ-Centered	Man-Centered
Supernaturally-oriented	Naturally-oriented
Instantaneous Conversion (e.g. “you must be born again”)	Gradual Conversion (e.g. Schleiermacher’s “quiescent self-consciousness”)
Instantaneous Witnessing	Gradual Witnessing

- Christ-centered...
- ✓ Follows the teaching of the Bible
 - ✓ Follows the examples of the Bible
- Man-centered...
- ✓ Seeks to please man, John 12:42-43; Gal 1:10?
 - ✓ Focuses on man’s ability, contra Phil 3:7-8?
 - ✓ Focuses on man’s righteousness, Phil 3:9?

FOCUS OF EVANGELISM I

"Look-at-Him Evangelism" [Substitutionary]	"Look-at-Me Evangelism" [Moral-influence theory; "people will be drawn to Christ by my life"]		
Christ's Righteousness, Christ's Life, Christ's Works, and Christ's Death	My Righteousness	My Life	My Works
2 Cor 4:5, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord" 1 Cor 2:2, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" Phil 3:3, "for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh"	Matt 6:1ff (2-18), "Beware of practicing your righteousness to be seen by men" Rom 10:2-4, "For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."	Matt 13:57, "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.' And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief." Mark 6:4-6, "Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household.' And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching." Luke 4:23-24, "And He said to them, 'No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, "Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" And He said, 'Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown.' Luke 4:28-30, "And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way."	John 10:32-33, "Jesus answered them, 'I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?' The Jews answered Him, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God'" [therefore, even the good works of Jesus were not infallible preparations for His words, the Jews still wanted to kill Him!] John 6, Jesus performs signs (John 6:2); He feeds 5,000 men (v. 10-13); they believe that He is a prophet (v. 14); they want to crown Him king (v. 15); Jesus tells them that their motives are wrong (v. 26-27); He teaches them of the need for faith in Him (v. 35-40); they begin to grumble (v. 41-43; 60-61); all but the twelve leave Him (v. 66-67); Peter gets it right (v. 68-69). The signs and feeding of Jesus did not suffice for preparing the hardened hearts of the 5,000 men! (cf. Luke 11:14-16; John 12:37-41; Acts 14:8-20)

➤ Some thoughts on Matthew 25 and Social Responsibility:

- ✓ Consider the comments of Delos Miles in this regard:

"Evangelist Billy Graham defined evangelism in 1983 as 'the offering of the whole Christ by the whole Church, to the whole man, to the whole world.' If the world-renowned evangelist was right, and I believe he was, then evangelism and social involvement are two wings of the same gospel bird.

"Evangelism and Christian social concern are two sides of the same coin. If one side of the coin is missing, that coin has lost its value. The lack of social conscience impugns the reputation of the holy God and leads to societal failure. Evangelism is surely a blood brother to social involvement."¹⁵⁰⁹

- ✓ The litany of good works performed as discussed in Matt 25:34-39 are often used to promote a "two wings of a bird" approach to evangelism, hence evangelism plus social responsibility, or more likely, social responsibility plus evangelism:
 - ☞ Hungry, you gave me something to eat
 - ☞ Thirsty, you gave me something to drink
 - ☞ A stranger, you invited me in
 - ☞ Naked, you clothed me
 - ☞ Sick, you visited me
 - ☞ In prison, you came to me.
- ✓ However, in Matt 25:40, it is very difficult to overlook to whom the ministry was performed, "one of these brothers of mine", and the parallel in 25:45, "one of the least of these"
- ✓ Is not the context of these terms found in Matt 10:42, "one of these little ones", in which case, it is referring to the traveling evangelists who have no money or food (Matt 10:9-10)?

¹⁵⁰⁹Delos Miles, *Evangelism and Social Involvement* (Nashville: Broadman, 1986), 7.

- ✓ Using “these little ones” (Matt 25:45) and “these brothers of mine” (Matt 24:40) for evangelism results in the liberal “Fatherhood of God” and “brotherhood of man” concept, outside of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ
- ✓ Furthermore, churches that focus on social responsibility:
 - ☉ Lose the radical distinction between the saved and the lost
 - ☉ Begin to treat the saved and lost with the same care (thus their love grows cold for the brethren, in the name of their loving all men)
 - ☉ Lack the funds to provide for the needy in their own churches, according to the command of the Scriptures, Gal 6:10, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (cf. Col 1:4), since the social needs of a lost world are overwhelming, and can easily and quickly sap the funds of any government, much less a local church or denominational entity
- ✓ Note how this whole discussion in Evangelicalism was preceded by and encouraged John R. W. Stott through his chairmanship of the 1974 Lausanne Conference on World Evangelism:

“Stott’s call to social responsibility used emotionally-charged language, including terms such as ‘we are appalled’ and ‘radical compassion.’¹⁵¹⁰ The commitment then reaffirmed the definition of the Lausanne Covenant. In a next section, the commission examined the issue of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility. Three relationships were proposed: ‘social activity is a *consequence* of evangelism,’ ‘social activity can be a bridge to evangelism,’ and ‘social activity not only follows evangelism as its consequence and aim, and precedes it as its bridge, but it also accompanies it as its partner.’¹⁵¹¹ Stott, however, was not satisfied to allow proposition one to stand on its own. He stated as part of proposition one, ‘Social responsibility is more than just a consequence of evangelism; it is also one of its principal aims.... Social responsibility, like evangelism, should therefore be included in the teaching ministry of the church.’¹⁵¹² Thus, Stott could not allow proposition one to stand on its own under its own definition without having to insert his rhetoric relating to position three, and then restating it in proposition three—begging the question.”¹⁵¹³

- ✓ This same discussion was telegraphed into the future by South African missiologist David J. Bosch as he sought to define “evangelism” in his 1991 *Transforming Mission*:

“10. *Because of this, evangelism cannot be divorced from the preaching and practicing of justice.* This is a flaw in the view according to which evangelism is given absolute priority over social involvement, or where evangelism is separated from justice, even if it is maintained that, together with social justice, it constitutes ‘mission.’ ...

“... At its heart, Jesus’ invitation to people to follow him and become his disciples, is asking people whom they want to serve. Evangelism is, therefore, a call to service. ...

“... God wills ... that within us—and through our ministry also in society around us—the ‘fullness of Christ’ be re-created, the image of God be restored in our lives and relationships.”¹⁵¹⁴

- The Atonement—Two main views of the atonement—discounting Socinianism:
 - ✓ Substitutionary atonement
 - ✓ Example Theory
 - ✓ With attempts at Mediation

¹⁵¹⁰John R. W. Stott, “Grand Rapids Report on Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment,” in *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*, ed. John R. W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 177.

¹⁵¹¹*Ibid.*, 181-82.

¹⁵¹²*Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁵¹³Johnston, *Examining Billy Graham’s Theology of Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003),

¹⁵¹⁴Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 418.

FOCUS OF EVANGELISM II

View of Atonement	Substitutionary Atonement	Attempts at Mediation	Moral-Influence Theory
Emphasis of Atonement	Christ did it all; "It is finished!"— our salvation is paid full and free!		Christ was an example
Effect of Atonement	Faith alone is necessary		Works are necessary
Effect on Response to Gospel	Belief in Gospel uniquely		Faith and works
Effect of Method of Sharing the Gospel	Proclamational or Expectant Evangelism		Lifestyle or Service Evangelism

- Atonement and focus of Evangelism
 - ✓ Is the focus Christ, or is the focus the Christian (Church, Christian society)?
 - ✓ Disclaimer one: the Christian is to live a lifestyle in accordance with the Gospel
 - ✓ Disclaimer two: the life of the Christian is important, as it should reflect the message of the Gospel
 - ✓ Impact of soteriology on evangelism in general
 - ✓ Impact of soteriology on particular aspects of evangelism.
- Note the two evangelism approaches listed by Delos Miles, and the "inductive" approaches to intentionality and their seeming negativity to expectant evangelism (compare with "Postmodern Evangelism Methodologies" above)... [next page]

Two Kinds of Contemporary Evangelism (1983)

Personal Evangelism¹⁵¹⁵

(Intentionality)

<i>Deductive</i>	Vs	<i>Inductive</i>
Receptivity (high)	Vs.	Receptivity (low)
Monological (telling)	Vs.	Dialogical (listening)
Short-term Gains	Vs.	Long Term Gains
Canned	Vs.	Spontaneous
Instant	Vs.	Incarnational
Religious Persons	Vs.	Secular Persons
Proclamational	Vs.	Affirmation (Petersen) ¹⁵¹⁶
Propositional	Vs.	Point-of-Need (Hunter) ¹⁵¹⁷
Stereotyped	Vs.	Service (Armstrong) ¹⁵¹⁸
Contact	Vs.	Conversational (Pippert) ¹⁵¹⁹
Functional	Vs.	Friendship (McPhee) ¹⁵²⁰
Rational	Vs.	Relational (McDill) ¹⁵²¹
Traditional	Vs.	Target-Group (Neighbour) ¹⁵²²
Individual	Vs.	Household (Green, <i>et al</i>) ¹⁵²³
Lips	Vs.	Life-style (Aldrich) ¹⁵²⁴

¹⁵¹⁵From Delos Miles, *Introduction to Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983), 254. The following footnotes found in Miles' chart, are taken directly from Miles' book.

¹⁵¹⁶Jim Petersen, *Evangelism as a Lifestyle* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 1980). [Five years later Petersen wrote *Evangelism for Our Generation* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1985); the two books were combined to form *Living Proof* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989).]

¹⁵¹⁷George G. Hunter, III, *The Contagious Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 35-39. These are not Hunter's actual terms. He prefers the terms *deductive* and *inductive*, but his new inductive-grace model and inductive-mission model boils down to a point-of-need approach.

¹⁵¹⁸Richard Stoll Armstrong, *Service Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), especially Chapter 4. Armstrong bases his service evangelism on the model of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant. His is also very much a point-of-need approach.

¹⁵¹⁹Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 127-151, 173f.

¹⁵²⁰Arthur G. McPhee, *Friendship Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

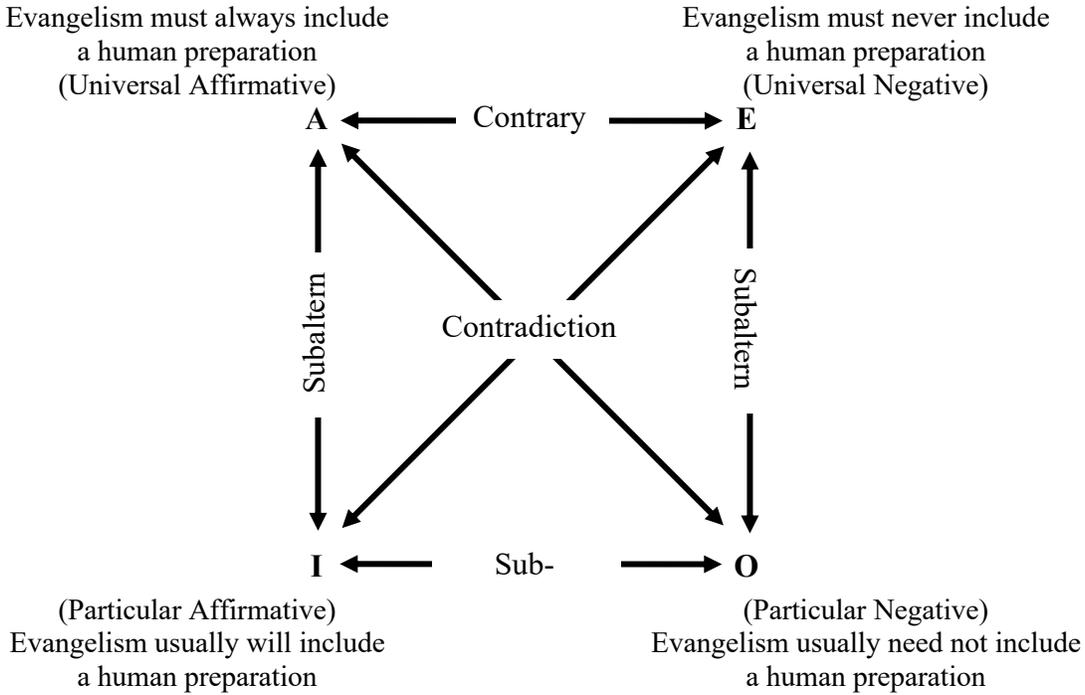
¹⁵²¹Wayne McDill, *Making Friends for Christ* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979). McDill prefers the term *relational evangelism*.

¹⁵²²Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr., and Cal Thomas, *Target-Group Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman, 1975).

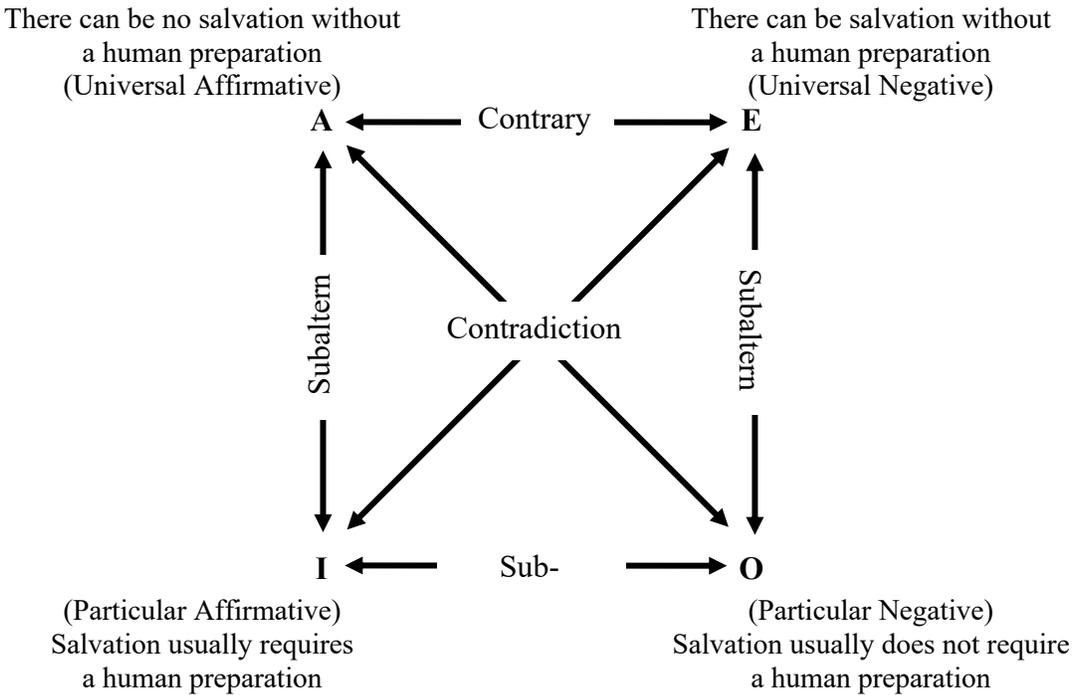
¹⁵²³Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 207-229. Green uses the term *household evangelism*. See also: Thomas O. Wolf, "Oikos Evangelism: Key to the Future," Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr., compiler, *Future Church* (Nashville: Broadman, 1980), 153-176; Ron Johnson, Joseph W. Hinkle, and Charles M. Lowry, *Oikos: A Practical Approach to Family Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman, 1982).

¹⁵²⁴Joseph C. Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism* (Portland: Multnomah, 1981); See also W. Oscar Thompson, Jr., *Concentric Circles of Concern* (Nashville: Broadman, 1981); C. B. Hogue, *Love Leaves No Choice* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976).

➤ The following logic chart may explain some of the theological considerations in evangelism:



➤ Or consider the following:



➤ Conclusion: The link between theology and practice is strong and important. Let us find at the cross the perfect balance of grace and truth, as well as be wise as serpents and gentle as doves!

Conclusions for Personal Evangelism

1. Several Dangers to Avoid in Personal Evangelism:

- a. Becoming **routine** or **nonchalant** in the proclamation of the Gospel:
 - 1) Perhaps this is because of a loss of one's first love
 - 2) Some danger signs:
 - a) Evangelism without fervent prayer in advance
 - b) Sharing the Gospel without eye contact with the lost, including...
 - c) No concern for the responses or thoughts of the prospect
 - d) Lack of concern in beginning the conversation or in the end of the conversation
 - e) Lack of urgency in calling for decision, or if the right words are used, they may seem fake

- b. **Self-righteousness** regarding the proclamation of the Gospel:
 - 1) The Elijah attitude, "I alone am left," 1 Kings 19:10
 - a) "I am the only one sharing the Gospel around here"
 - b) "No one else cares for souls like I do"
 - 2) A pride resulting from obedience in this vital area can cause the evangelist to act without love, 1 Cor 13:2-4, leading to a critical spirit, and leading to a lack of the Holy Spirit's presence and power in witness
 - 3) Protect us, Lord!

- c. **Narrow-mindedness** and/or **rigidity**:
 - 1) Focusing on a method, rather than the Gospel:
 - a) "My Gospel tract is the best" [implied, "and the only good one that should be used"]
 - b) "My Gospel plan is the most effective" [or the only effective plan]
 - c) "My evangelism methodology is the best or most effective methodology" [I have been using it to save souls for years, and it works!]
 - 2) Looking to the temporal rather than the eternal, 2 Cor 4:18;
 - 3) Seems to imply a focus on a personal methodology, sometimes religiously and culturally confined, rather than a New Testament evangelism methodology

- d. **A critical spirit**, leading to a **root of bitterness**:
 - 1) Becoming judgmental of other people's methods of evangelism and/or of their lifestyles
 - 2) Jesus gave a poignant warning against this danger in Matt 7:1-2:

"Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matt 7:1-2)
 - 3) When dealing with evangelism methodology in the Book of Galatians, Paul wrote:

"But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another" (Gal 5:15)
 - 4) Paul reminded the Corinthians in 1 Cor 8:1, "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies."
 - 5) Therefore, wrote Paul elsewhere:

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (Eph 4:31).

2. Some Closing Thoughts:

A. Are You Teachable?

There is much to learn in the area of evangelism. Unfortunately mistakes are made on real people. But this should not hinder anyone from sharing Christ. "Doing it" is the most important thing. A humble openness to continue to learn is also needed.

B. Are You Available?

No one will ever master evangelism completely except for Jesus Christ Himself. Likewise, no one will be able to master what is in these notes—I certainly have not! However, learning these principles and applications can

allow the Holy Spirit to bring them to mind in the midst of a sharing situation. Intellectual preparation for maximum usefulness to the Holy Spirit is the goal in studying evangelism.

C. Are You Faithful?

See what works for you. Continue on with it. There is no boxed method for perfect evangelism—other than the clear teachings of and examples from the Word of God. Evangelism needs to come from the depths of your soul. “Let the word of Christ dwell richly within you” (Col 3:16), then go forward for Him. The last thing these notes are ever meant to do is discouragement anybody from evangelism. Be encouraged and go for it!

R. G. Lee once said:

“Fishing for men is the greatest business in the entire universe. ... We must believe that it is the most important work that ever moved God’s arm in power or sent a man’s feet on Christian visitation—as well as the greatest work that ever laid claim upon the talents, education and abilities of Christians everywhere.

“... A winner of souls has the biggest job in the world.”¹⁵²⁵

Do you believe it?

¹⁵²⁵“Interview with the Prince of Preachers, Dr. Robert G. Lee” (Studio Hall, CA: World Literature Crusade, n.d.), 7. “Interviewed by its founder and president, Dr. Jack McAlister.”

