

Coach's Corner



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“Responsible Evangelism”

This is our third issue of the *Coach's Corner* devoted to looking at *The Deliberate Church* by Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, a book which discusses how to build and lead a church deliberately upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. The third chapter, “Doing Responsible Evangelism,” deals with a topic I have been thinking a lot about lately. Let me start by sharing some of my recent discoveries.

Confessions Of A Man-Centered Evangelist

The Bible teaches us that our lifestyle is important in evangelism (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 3:1-6) and that some thought can be put into how we best go about reaching people (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Sometimes, though, we can hold to these principles in such a way we put too much emphasis upon the methods we use and too much emphasis upon testimony and building relationship, with the result we never share the gospel. Though usually God uses the context of a relationship, good testimony, and love shown by Christians to bring people to Christ, it is wrong for us to conclude that people come to Christ because of our methods or because they will first come to like us. If this is how we are thinking, we have ceased believing that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16) and instead have started to place more faith in us and our methods.

God has convicted me of late that I had fallen into this trap. I have repented of that sin of self-reliance and have recommitted myself to the passion of the Apostle Paul as seen in Acts 20:24: “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” I want to be passionate about the gospel because the gospel is about being God-centered, i.e. realizing He is our savior and He must save others. In other words, Christ is our only hope! That is one of the emphases that Dever and Alexander bring out in their chapter. It resonates with me since God has been “hitting me between the eyes” lately on that very need. Here are some other great points they make about evangelism in that chapter which arise from this central truth.

Set A Good Foundation

“The way we do evangelism will inform the way our hearers understand the Gospel. The way our hearers understand the Gospel will inform the way they live the Gospel. The way our hearers live the Gospel will have a direct bearing on the corporate witness of our churches in our communities... [which] will in turn make our evangelism either easier or harder....” After almost a quarter century of pastoral ministry I can affirm these statements. It is very true that how we present the gospel will have tremendous bearing upon our church and ministry! This means we must know the gospel.

Avoid Theotainment

Because much of the Evangelical church believes people get saved because first and foremost they come to like us and think what we do is cool, the tendency is to provide God-entertainment, rather than actually to proclaim the truth they need to hear to be saved (e.g. you are a sinner, repent, and trust

Christ alone). We must avoid this since it not only moves us away from emphasizing the gospel, but often drowns out the gospel.

Avoid Manipulation

Since many believe that salvation is about getting a person to make a decision in and of themselves (of their own free-will) and without God's grace initiating the work through the gospel, sometimes manipulation is used. With manipulation, we might get people to make professions of faith, but we will not see people truly come to Christ in humility, love, faith and repentance.

Lead To Assurance Biblically

Too often Evangelicals have sought to lead people to assurance of salvation as soon as they pray a prayer of salvation. Though I appreciate the desire behind this to protect salvation by grace through faith, the reality that true believers will persevere, and that there is such a thing as assurance, this is not how the New Testament approaches assurance. Assurance in the New Testament is based upon the fact that we can see our lives have been transformed as a result of faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:13; James 2:14-17; 1 John 2:4-6; 4:8). Assurance comes about as we teach people the gospel, which shows us we cannot save ourselves and, in fact, we cannot even add anything to our salvation. It also comes as we teach people that an entailment of the gospel is we change because of the transforming grace of Jesus Christ in us (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 1:3-11). When these truths are understood in tandem, an assurance of salvation will most likely be a true work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16).

Men, let's ask the Lord to give us both the wisdom and the boldness to make the gospel clear (Colossians 4:4), and to equip and lead our congregation to that same end.

Joyfully Following Him With You,

Tom