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EVANGELISM
& YOU



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SERMON SCHEDULE

November 3
Will You Preach the Word?
 II Timothy 4:1–8

November 10
Only the True Gospel
 Galatians 1:6–10
 Associate Pastor: Bryan Pillsbury

November 17
Will You Give God the Glory?
 II Timothy 4:9–22

November 24
A Broken People
 Isaiah 51:9–52:12

FIGHTER VERSE

¹⁹ Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19–21

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THE New Testament DOCUMENTS



ARE THEY RELIABLE?

F. F. Bruce

with a new foreword by N. T. Wright

The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?

by F. F. Bruce

Reviewed by Dustin Butts

Are the New Testament documents historically reliable? Evangelical Christians know the answer to that question. With confidence we answer, “Yes! The New Testament documents are reliable.” But if pressed, many—if not most—of us would not be able to give evidence as to why we so confidently answered the question in the affirmative. Apologetically this is problematic, especially in a world in which The History Channel and PBS regularly air documentaries that claim to tell us all about the real, historical Jesus. But is the historical reliability of the New Testament documents merely a matter of apologetics? No. To relegate the issue of the historicity of the New Testament to the realm of apologetics is, as the late F. F. Bruce put it, to “ignore the real essence of Christianity.”

Bruce, one of the most distinguished New Testament scholars of the 21st century, was convinced of this fact and spent a significant amount of his time and energy writing about the reliability of the Old and New Testaments. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* is Bruce’s first book on the subject, and the first book he ever wrote. Originally published in 1943 and now in its 6th edition (last updated in 1981), the book

is a modern classic in New Testament studies. As New Testament scholar N. T. Wright notes in the foreword, “There are many recent books which explore the New Testament from a wide variety of angles. But this book is far from being out of date. Indeed, it remains one of the best popular introductions available.” Those are pretty strong words of praise for a 70 year old book that saw its last update the year before I was born.

Bruce wrote *The New Testament Documents* as a primer for “non-theological students”—laypeople, to be more precise. The book is short (124 pages) and incredibly accessible. Though Bruce clearly has a firm grasp on the ancient sources he cites and thorough understanding of all the issues he presents, he labors to give readers the most simple (though certainly not simplistic) and straightforward picture possible. For those who want to dig deeper, Bruce provides numerous footnotes to aid in further study.

Three paragraphs into this review, you may still be wondering if this is a book for you. Surely the historical reliability of the New Testament documents is important. But, ultimately Christianity is a matter of

faith, right? Absolutely. But, faithfulness to the gospel does not allow us to stop there. Our faith is in a Person who actually lived and a series of events that actually happened. As Bruce explained, “[T]he gospel of our salvation... owes its eternal and universal validity to certain events which happened in Palestine when Tiberius ruled the Roman Empire” (xvi). The historical reliability of the New Testament documents is a gospel issue. If the historical Jesus is anything other than the New Testament Jesus, our faith is in a false Messiah. If the cross is simply historic fiction, we are still enemies of God. If the resurrection never really happened, our preaching is in vain, our faith is futile and we are still dead in our sins. If the New Testament documents are not historically reliable, we Christians are of all people most to be pitied.

Bruce further highlights the importance of the book’s subject matter in the first chapter, entitled “Does It Matter?”:

[T]he Christian gospel is...first and foremost good news... And this good news is intimately bound up with the historical order, for it tells how for the world’s redemption God entered into history, the eternal came into time, the kingdom of heaven invaded the realm of earth, in the great events of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ...The historical ‘once-for-all-ness’ of Christianity, which distinguishes it from those religious and philosophical systems which are not specially related to any particular time, makes the reliability of the writings which purport to record this revelation a question of first-rate importance. (1–2)

The rest of the book can be broken down into four sections. Chapters 2–3 focus on the date and attestation of the New Testament documents as well as their adoption into the canon of Scripture. The gospels and the gospel miracles are the topics of chapters 4–5. The next two chapters examine the evidence for the reliability of the gospels found in Paul’s letters and the historical accuracy of Luke’s writings, with a particular focus on his use of dates and names in the book of Acts. Bruce closes out the book in chapters 8–10 by looking at the archaeological evidence for the reliability of the New Testament documents and the evidence found in both early Jewish and early Gentile writings. The chapters are short, but filled with fascinating and helpful information.

In my opinion, some of the most powerful evidence for the historical reliability of the New Testament is found in chapter 7, “The Writings of Luke.” Bruce began the chapter by pointing out the importance of the prologue to Luke’s gospel. Luke wrote to Theophilus in order that he might have “certainty” concerning the things he had been taught. Luke was writing history. Not only that, he was writing history that could easily be tested by his contemporaries. Bruce explained:

“[Luke] sets his story in the context of imperial history. Of all the New Testament writers, he is the only one who so much as names a Roman Emperor...Names of note in the Jewish and Gentile world appear in Luke’s pages...A writer who thus relates his story to the wider context of world history is courting trouble if he is not careful; he affords his critical readers so many opportunities for testing his accuracy.” (81–82)

As Bruce went on to show, “Luke takes this risk, and stands the test admirably” (82).

Luke’s historical accuracy is incredible. From dates, to people (including the proper titles of notable officials), to the descriptions of the atmosphere surrounding the events he relates, Luke’s record is spot on. Even in places where his accuracy was once doubted by scholars, new

evidence has shown that he gets it right. “Now, all these evidences of accuracy are not accidental,” Bruce noted. “A man whose accuracy can be demonstrated in matters where we are able to test it is likely to be accurate even where the means for testing him are not available. Accuracy is a habit of mind, and...Luke’s record entitles him to be regarded as a writer of habitual accuracy.” (90–91) Even those who are critical of much of the New Testament acknowledge Luke’s trustworthiness as a historian.

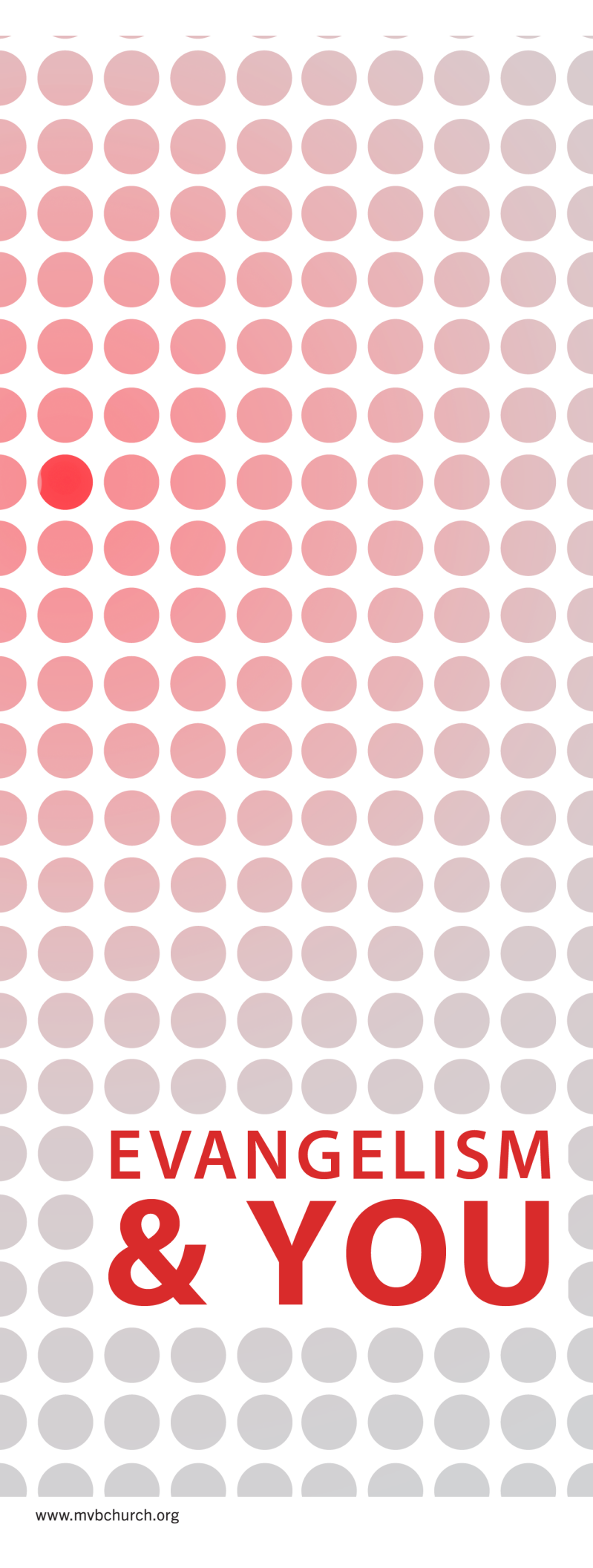
Another chapter I found quite helpful was chapter 3, “The Gospel Miracles.” Rather than offering an apology for the signs and wonders performed by Jesus, Bruce chose instead to focus on their purpose and meaning. As he explained, “Our first concern about the Gospel miracles should be not to ‘defend’ them but to understand them. And when we have learned to do that, we shall find that their defence can take care of itself” (62). With that in mind, Bruce proceeded to examine the gospel miracles, beginning with “the chief Gospel miracle of all, the resurrection of Jesus Himself.” According to Bruce, the resurrection is the means by which we understand the rest of Christ’s miracles:

It was the grand demonstration of the Messiahship of Jesus...It was the grand demonstration of the power of God...Jesus on the cross had been a spectacle of foolishness and weakness, so far as the eyes of men could see. But when we look at the cross in light of the resurrection, then we see in Christ crucified the power and the wisdom of God. And only thus can we properly consider the miracle-stories of the Gospels. If Christ is the power of God, then these stories, far from being an obstacle to belief, appear natural and reasonable; from him who was the power of God incarnate, we naturally expect manifestations of divine power. Our estimate of the miracles will depend on our estimate of Christ. (66–67)

That last sentence is what Bruce meant when he said the defense of the miracles could take care of itself. In the case of the Gospel miracles, historicity is important, but it is not ultimate. “The question of whether the miracle-stories are true must ultimately be answered by a response of faith—not merely faith in the events as historical but faith in the Christ who performed them” (67). Those are freeing words for anyone who has tried to convince a skeptic that Jesus actually did turn water into wine. Christians are first and foremost called to preach the gospel. Apologetics are important, but apart from faith in Christ, we should not expect to find faith in his miraculous works.

The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? is a concise, accessible introduction to what I believe—and I hope I have convinced you—is a very important topic. There are a number of ways that the book could be used by members of Mount Vernon. It would be a great book to read with a non-Christian friend or family member who understands the gospel message but struggles to believe that the events recorded in the Bible actually happened. It would also be a great book to read with another Christian who struggles with doubt about the historical reliability of the Bible.

Finally, I think the book has great potential to be an encouragement to your own soul. It certainly was to mine. Knowing *that* the New Testament is reliable is very different than knowing *why* it is reliable. It is one thing to sing, “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!” It is another thing to take the time to thoroughly examine that foundation and come to grips with just how firm it really is. After reading *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* I have a whole new appreciation for the firmness of the foundation on which I stand. I pray that if you have the opportunity to read *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* you will too. ■



I am very grateful that the future of the church is in the hands of God. The Bible, cover to cover, makes this point. The God who *is* before there was time (Gen. 1:1), is the God who *reigns* for all time (Rev. 22:12). It's silly to think or to act as if God is not in control. In Isaiah God declares, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" (Isa. 46:9–10). Passages like this may puzzle me, as I wonder how an all-powerful God would allow even a nanosecond of rebellion against him. But passages like this make me feel safe. Life, at times, feel like it's spinning out of control—but it's not. My God *is* and my God *reigns* and no one and nothing can foil his plans. And therefore, I am convinced that the future of the church is in God's hands.

WILL THE CHURCH EVER DIE?

But perhaps a more specific question needs to be asked, "What is the future of the church?" This question takes us back, many years, to a conversation between a fisherman and a carpenter. The fisherman's name was Peter. The carpenter's, Jesus. This carpenter was unlike any man Peter had ever met. Jesus asked people to follow him, and they did. He preached about a kingdom that would never rust, a people that would never cry, and a home that would never be lonely. This lowly carpenter from the backwater region of Nazareth healed the sick, soothed the scared, and he even calmed the storms. Finally, the carpenter looked into the eye of the fisherman and asked, "Who do you say I am?" And in a moment of brilliance or, more accurately, of revelation, the fisherman declared, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15–16).

It's been said before that this fisherman responded better than he really knew. We might say that his head was further along than his heart. Peter knew Jesus was the Christ, intellectually, but he wasn't really ready to follow him. He wasn't ready for the cross. But that's another story. On that particular afternoon, Peter spoke the truth, and the carpenter added, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). This reply has erupted into no small amount of controversy. Yet it's teaching is clear enough: 1) Peter proclaimed the gospel; 2) the gospel is the foundation of the church; and 3) the church will be victorious. Let me take just a moment to unpack this.

First, Peter proclaimed the gospel.

The gospel is the Good News about Jesus. Peter understood, as Josh McDowell so famously put it, that Jesus was more than a carpenter, he is the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah who had come to deliver Israel from its enemies. Most of the fisherman and farmers and shepherds and blacksmiths in Peter's day thought that Israel's enemies were political—vicious nations who stole Israel's independence. But Jesus knew that Israel's greatest enemy was God. Israel had sinned against God, stood under God's wrath, and deserved God's judgment. Israel didn't need a Savior to bring peace with Rome; Israel needed a Savior who would bring peace with God. But in order for this to happen, in order for peace to come, sin had to be punished.

This, of course, is hard for the modern mind to accept, but the Bible makes no sense without it. Why were Adam and Eve expelled from the garden? Because sin had to be punished. Why was Cain forced to become a nomad? Because sin had to be punished. Why was the earth submerged under a global flood? Because sin had to be punished? Why were sacrifices commanded to be made year after year after year? Because sin had to be punished. Why did Christ come and die? Because sin had to be punished.

Perhaps you know the story of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The most detestable character in that story is not the White Witch—

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we know she's wicked from the very beginning. The real scoundrel is that little boy, Edmund, who betrays his own brothers and sisters, and eventually all of Narnia. He is nothing more than a traitor, and everyone knows he deserves whatever he gets; he deserves death. The great King, Aslan, agrees, as does the Witch who demands Edmund's life, "unless I have blood as the Law says all Narnia will be overturned and perish in fire and water." There is no question, no question at all as to what Edmund deserves. He must pay for what he's done. The Law demands it. Edmund was to be bound, beaten, and killed—just what every traitor deserves.

But do you remember what happens next? Aslan took Edmund's place:

When once Aslan had been tied (and tied so that he was really a mass of cords) on the flat stone, a hush fell on the crowd. Four Hags, holding four torches, stood at the corners of the Table. The Witch bared her arms as she had bared them the previous night when it had been Edmund instead of Aslan. Then she began to whet her knife. It looked to the children, when the gleam of the torchlight fell on it, as if the knife were made of stone not of steel and it was of a strange and evil shape.¹

That day, on that stone table, in the land of Narnia, Aslan died for Edmund. But Lewis's story is rooted in a real story, *His-story*. It was not on a stone table, but on a cross that the knife of sin took Jesus' life. He died, willingly, in the place of all who would ever turn and trust in him (Mark 1:15; Matt. 16:24–25; 2 Pet. 2:24; 1 Cor. 5:21). On the cross sin was punished, and peace brought between God and man. This is the very heart of the gospel.

Second, this gospel is the foundation of the church.

There is no church without the gospel. The gospel means everything to us. It's the message of power we proclaim (Rom. 1:16). And when this message of power is believed upon, people are saved (Rom. 10:8–13). The gospel is what makes the church the church. Only the church has received the mandate to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). Apple makes the iPhone, Nabisco sells cookies, and Warner Bros. produces entertainment, but the church preaches the gospel. Only the church has this sacred responsibility. So when I say that the gospel is the *foundation* of the church, I mean it's the power and the point behind everything we do. Humanity is lost without Christ, deserving of God's wrath and judgment. In the gospel we find humanity's only hope. It is the job of the church to let humanity know there is a way to escape death and judgment. We call this "way" the gospel.

Third, the church will be victorious.

In Matthew 16:18, we find an explicit promise from the Messiah himself that the church, in the end, will win. This should not surprise anyone who has carefully read the Gospels and come away with faith that Jesus is who he said he is. The Man who raised Lazarus from the dead is supreme. Furthermore, he has chosen to exercise his supremacy through his lordship of the church. As Paul noted about Jesus:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. *And he is the head of the body, the church.* He is the beginning, the firstborn

from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15–20).

It is no accident that at the heart of this passage is Jesus' lordship over the church. Jesus did not tell Peter *why* the gates of hell would not prevail against the church. But here we see why: Jesus is no mere carpenter, he is no mere prophet or priest, he is not even merely a king. Jesus is God,

Only the church has received the mandate to preach the Word.

himself, the One through whom everything was created. And he has chosen the locus of his authority to be the church of the living God. Jesus could never stand idly by while the church failed any more than a mother bear could simply watch while wolves snack on her cubs. That would never happen, and neither will Jesus allow his church to be destroyed.

Commenting upon Matthew 16:18 and the invincibility of the church, D. A. Carson explains how the church will survive because it's a people gathered by God: "Because the church is the assembly of people Jesus Messiah is building, it cannot die. This claim is ridiculous if Jesus is nothing but an overconfident popular preacher in an unimportant vassal state of first-century Rome. It is the basis of all hope for those who see Jesus as the Messiah who builds his people."² It is *not* possible to be overly optimistic about the future of the church. God is at work, building his people. His people are a people of faith, gathered into local communities or families of faith, which we call "the church." These communities are flawed, but they will never fail. And so the Christian is to live with the utmost confidence that God will never lose, and the church will never die.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH EVANGELISM?

So many people start to think about evangelism with the wrong mindset. They assume that their evangelistic success is dependent upon them. If only they were smarter, more eloquent, more passionate, more whatever, then God would use them to build the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. God promises the church will grow, and his promises never fail.

Please don't misunderstand me. There is much evangelistic work for us to do. The Apostle Paul worked night and day to "persuade" people to follow Christ (Acts 18:4; 26:28; 2 Cor. 5:11). Do you think Paul thought for a moment that the church was ultimately his responsibility? Of course not. Paul knew that the church was firmly fixed in the hands of God, "who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (2 Tim. 1:9).

But Paul's conviction that the church is in the hands of God propelled him to share the gospel faithfully. He evangelized in Antioch (Acts 13:16–41), and many were saved. He shared the gospel in Lystra and Iconium and Derbe (Acts 14:20–23), where scores came to faith in Christ. He shared the word in Athens (Acts 17:16–32) and in Corinth, too. Paul was afraid for his life in Corinth, and he wanted to run away. But the Lord reassured

¹C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, First adult American edition (Collins, 1998), 181.

²D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Zondervan, 1984), 370.

him that God had work for Paul to do. God told him, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people” (Acts 18:9–10). Who are these “many” people? They are the men and women and children that God destined to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul didn’t have to worry about gospel fruit — God would provide that. Paul simply had to faithfully plant gospel seeds.

WHY DON'T WE FAITHFULLY SHARE THE GOSPEL?

Our confidence in God ought to launch us into evangelistic lives. And yet often, it does not. We worship a God who will never fail, whose church will never die, and whose plan simply cannot be thwarted. We don't have to worry about being successful, just faithful. And yet, if we are honest, there are many in the church today (including Christians who would take the time to read an article about evangelism) who do not faithfully share the gospel. Why not? Let me suggest ten reasons.

First, we think we need the gift of evangelism.

The early church clearly had men and women uniquely gifted to share the gospel with others (Eph. 4:11). Paul charged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Philip is described as an evangelist (Acts 21:8). Many read passages like this only to conclude that evangelism is for a select group of spiritually superior saints. And yet the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20), properly understood, is a universal call to evangelism and discipleship. All of Jesus' followers are obliged to carry on the task of bearing witness to Christ's resurrection.

Second, we aren't clear on the meaning of the gospel.

Maybe this is the biggest reason we don't share it more. We don't know what, exactly, to share. If you don't know the recipe you probably aren't going to instruct someone how to cook. If you don't know the gospel, you probably aren't going to share it with someone in need. Thankfully, the gospel is easy enough for a child to explain. It is the message of a God who made us to know and love him. Yet all of us have rebelled against him and deserve eternal judgment. God, in his love, sent his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus lived the life we should have lived—he never sinned. He died on a cross, willingly, in the place of all who would ever repent and believe. Then, to prove everything he said was true, Jesus rose from the dead. Everyone is accountable to this risen Lord. We will either live life for ourselves or for him — there is no in-between. That's the gospel. If you want help unpacking this, pick up Greg Gilbert's *What is the Gospel?* or visit the website, “Two Ways to Live.” Don't be unclear about the meaning of the gospel.

Third, we don't have relationships with unbelievers.

It is tempting to fall into a Christian bubble. This is especially true if you are faithful member of a local church. We love to spend time with other believers, sharing life together. And that's the way it should be! And yet, there must be space in our lives for the unchurched. Therefore, we have to look at our schedules closely and ask the question (if it's true for us), “Why don't I spend more time with unbelievers?” Jesus said that if your eye causes you to sin, you should cut it out. Similarly, I would say that if you don't have any non-Christians in your life, then you need to do make a change. Buy a membership at the gym or the Y. Start inviting your neighbors over for dinner or dessert. Volunteer to help out at your kids' school. Get to know unbelievers in your life.

Fourth, we downplay the cost of following Jesus.

Make no mistake, the Bible presents following Jesus as painful (2 Tim. 3:2; Matt. 5:10–12; Luke 9:23). Many of us wrongly assume the Christian

life will be pleasant. My fear is that if you demand a pleasant life from Christ, you will never faithfully follow him into hard situations—like sharing the gospel with your family or friends. But if you are prepared for the cost and aware that there will be rejection for all those who follow Jesus, then perhaps you will be better equipped to speak up.

Fifth, we expect immediate results.

This is true across the board. Just think about microwave popcorn, drive through service, and weight-loss plans. We expect results today. Sadly, we have the same expectations in evangelism. Many churches have boiled it down to an outreach event downtown, where you hand out a tract and start counting the number of people you led in a prayer. But what if faithful evangelism is slower — more like a farmer tilling the soil, planting the seeds, and then waiting? I'm not opposed to asking people to make a decision to follow Jesus (see below). But let's not fool ourselves, evangelism is more than that; it is long, hard work.

Sixth, we don't want to ask people to make a decision.

I believe that the modern church has been gutted by easy-believism. This is the idea that because someone made a decision to follow Jesus when he was a teenager, he must be a Christian today — regardless of the lack of spiritual fruit in his life (see Gal. 5:22–24). But the fact of the matter is a mere decision can't make you a Christian. Not only that, there are many passages of Scripture warning us not to rely on one-time decisions but to be on the lookout for evidence in our lives that we truly know Christ (2 Pet. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Matt. 7:21; Luke 8:1–15). This is why a pastor in North Carolina wrote a popular book, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart*.³ He saw easy-believism in his own church.

**If you don't know the gospel,
you probably aren't going to
share it with someone in need.**

So let's be careful how we share the gospel, and let's be careful not to assume that just because someone made a decision to follow Christ, that person is really a believer. Time will tell. And yet, we need to be careful not to overcompensate. Let's not be so afraid of offering false assurance that we fail to tell people to commit their lives to Jesus. The famous pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards, once preached, “Our people do not have so much need to have their heads stored as to have their hearts touched, and they stand in the greatest need of that sort of preaching which has the greatest tendency to do this.”⁴ Our preaching from the pulpit and at the water cooler should be marked by a sense of urgency for the souls of the people we are evangelizing.

Seventh, we rest too easily in God's sovereignty.

God's sovereignty is a tremendously important doctrine that I argue should motivate us to share the gospel because we know that God's elect are out there (again, see Acts 18). And yet, if we are honest, we must admit the possibility of twisting this precious doctrine to soothe our consciences when we are disobedient to the task of sharing

³J. D. Greer, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart* (B&H, 2013).

⁴Cited by Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Banner, 1987), 127.

the gospel. The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control (Gal. 5:23). This means we have to control ourselves when we have the overriding desire not to share the gospel. Instead of comforting ourselves with the idea that it's okay to be quiet since it's God who saves, let's remember that God has given us real work to do—evangelism is a command (Matt. 5:13–16; 28:16–20).

Eighth, we lack accountability.

In other words, there should be people in our lives challenging us to share the gospel regularly and faithfully. Of course, accountability is no replacement for the Holy Spirit. But God has put people in our lives for a reason. How often are we urging one another to share the gospel? I think not enough. Find a believer you are close to. Encourage him or her to ask you two questions whenever you meet: First, did you share the gospel this past week? Second, how are you pursuing relationships with your non-Christian neighbors?

To have a heart bursting with affection for Christ and his Word, we have to pursue him by reading the Bible and praying for the Spirit's help.

Ninth, we don't think about hell enough.

This is not a pleasant topic. I'll admit it. But it is one that cannot be ignored by those who take Scripture seriously. Jesus treats hell as a real, horrible place where God's enemies will be punished forever (Matt. 24:31–46). We have no right, therefore, to take it lightly or to simply ignore it altogether. I already mentioned Edwards, who exhorted us to plead with the hearts of unbelievers. He had a profoundly realistic view of hell. He wrote about with painstaking clarity because he didn't want anyone to go there:

Hell [is] a world of hatred, where there is no love, which is the world to which all of you who are in a Christless state properly belong. This last is the world where God manifests his displeasure and wrath, as in heaven he manifests his love. Everything in hell is hateful. There is no person or thing to be seen there, that is amiable or lovely; nothing that is pure, or holy, or pleasant, but everything is abominable and odious...All things in the wide universe that are hateful shall be gathered together in hell, as in a vast receptacle provided on purpose, that the universe which God has made may be cleansed of its filthiness, by casting it all into this great sink of wickedness and woe.⁵

We are guilty if we fail to warn people of this horrible future, just as Paul knew he would be guilty if he failed to teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26).

Tenth, we don't treasure the gospel enough.

The gospel is something to be valued above all else (Matt. 13:44–46). I would risk ridicule to keep my wife's hand. She is worth more to me than public embarrassment. How much more should we risk rejection, even death, for something as priceless as the gospel, for someone as glorious as Christ, himself? None of us can simply turn a switch on in our heart that leads us to treasure the gospel more. To get a roaring fire we have

to lay kindling on burning coals. To have a heart bursting with affection for Christ and his Word, we have to pursue him by reading the Bible and praying for the Spirit's help. Evangelism doesn't happen by accident. Let us be so enamored of God and of his gospel that we can't do anything but share it with others.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO BE MORE EVANGELISTIC?

If you are struggling with evangelism, there are some very practical things you can do to change course. I've limited myself to five pieces of counsel, but this list could be much longer.

First, pray for conversions.

Notice how regularly Paul prayed, or asked for prayer, regarding his evangelistic efforts. He prayed that unbelieving Jews would be saved (Rom. 10:1). He asked for prayer from the Corinthians that many would be saved as a result of his ministry (2 Cor. 1:11). He solicited from the

church in Ephesus prayers for boldness (Eph. 6:19). He urged the church in Colossae to pray God would open doors where he could preach (Col. 4:2–4). He requested the Thessalonians pray that the word of the Lord would be honored wherever he evangelized (2 Thess. 3:1).

Do you pray each day for unbelievers in your life? Do you pray that God would open up doors of opportunity for you to share the gospel? The prayers don't have to be long, but they should be bold. We should pray with the faith that God is eager to save sinners, and that he is at work building his church.

Second, fight fear of man.

Many of us are afraid of looking silly, appearing overly zealous, or of being belittled by co-workers. We are anxious about being poorly received by others. Paul, however, commands us not to be afraid, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

At the root of our anxiety may be fear of man. That's one of the reasons we decided to offer an entire Equipping Matters class not long ago on the topic. If you know that you struggle with people-pleasing, then you should give some attention to how this gets in the way of your evangelism. For all of us who are prone to be people-pleasers, the key is to find our identity in Christ alone. Take to heart the fact that if you are a Christian, you are no longer condemned, and you have no need to be ashamed, or anxious—Christ has borne your shame. Your biggest problems are all behind you, and you are now free to represent God on earth. So why fear anyone?

Third, look for the needy.

Jesus spent a great deal of time with the poor and needy. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). We shouldn't overlook the fact that Jesus presented the gospel to those his society counted worthless. Not only that, but it appears that the earliest disciples carried on this tradition. Many of the first believers in the Corinthian church were from society's lower ranks: "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble

⁵Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, (Banner, 1969), 359.

birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:26–27).

It’s not that the physically needy are godlier or more deserving of the gospel. Not at all! But God does seem to delight in pouring out his mercy on those whom society looks down upon, doesn’t he? Where are the needy, in this sense, in your community? What can you do to bring them the gospel?

Fourth, look for low-hanging fruit.

Most of us interact each day with people that, for some reason, we think would never trust in Christ. They may be family members, mail carriers, co-workers, etc. I call them low-hanging fruit because God has *already* put them in your life. Remember, God is not asking you to save them, simply to make sure they understand the gospel.

Success in evangelism isn’t measured in the number of conversions — that’s in God’s hands. Success is measured by our faithfulness to accurately share the gospel message. The people you interact with regularly are the people most likely to know you, most likely to trust you, and most likely to sit down with you one day and talk more about the gospel that has changed your life.

Fifth, turn conversations to Christ.

All of us struggle having spiritual conversations with unbelievers. We may talk about all sorts of things: the weather, the team, our work, but talking about things that matter most of all is hard. Loving people well means strategizing ways to get them thinking more about the gospel.

Will Metzger in his book, *Tell The Truth*, provides some practical guidance to help us turn conversations toward Christ.⁶ He instructs us to take advantage of different situations that may come our way. For example, you may have a friend complaining about what’s going on in the world. Consider asking her *why* she thinks people do such awful things. That could open the door to a very helpful conversation about sin. Or, one of your neighbors whom you helped out one day may thank you. This is an opportunity to share more about why you try to be helpful. Perhaps someone praises you for something. Did you ever think about letting them know you are thankful to God for his work in your life? These spiritual conversation-turners are going to feel awkward at first — that’s because we’ve managed to erase a spiritual component from our modern, Western dialogue.

And what if, after really trying, your friend just doesn’t want to talk about Jesus? Metzger has some sound advice:

We let them go their way, as Jesus did the moral young man (Lk. 18:18–29). We should not feel guilty or embarrassed, even though we are disappointed. We do not fail when we recognize and follow the Holy Spirit’s leading. That young man would not bow to Christ’s lordship. Jesus loved him and bore the pain of rejection. So must we.

We can picture ourselves as fishermen who throw out the net as often and as wide as possible. Our net is made up of questions and statements about the gospel. As the net entangles a fish (as a person shows interest in spiritual things), we have an indication that God’s Spirit has gone before us creating interest.⁷

Much more could be said here. But let’s just recognize that all the books on evangelism and on the classes in apologetics aren’t going to make us evangelistic. By God’s grace, we simply have to recognize that God is calling us to turn conversations to him.

HOW DID YOU BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Before you get too discouraged about your evangelistic life, consider this: someone, sometime shared the gospel with you. Maybe it was a parent, a grandparent, a sibling, or a friend. It might have been a Sunday school teacher, or perhaps you happened to hear a preacher on television. One day, someone spoke the gospel to you, and you began to understand your desperate need for a Savior.

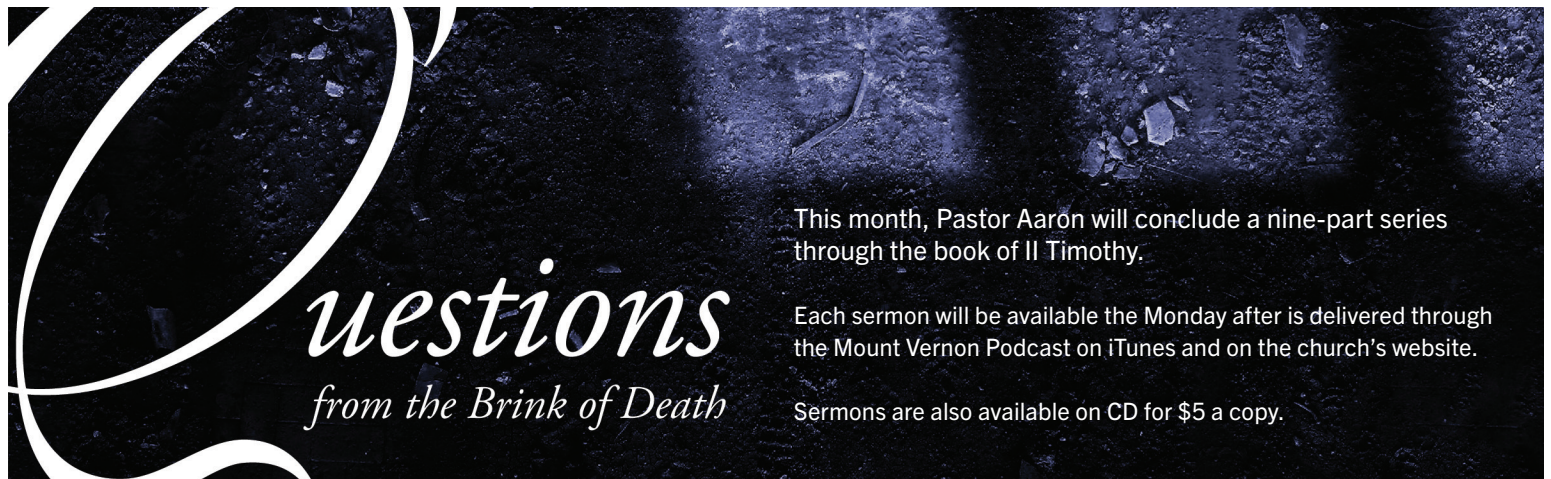
It happened my senior year of high school. I went to see a play as part of a class assignment with a friend from school. I don’t recall how she turned the conversation to Christ, but she did. And as we sat in that theater house, my mind started spinning. I discovered that she really believed that Jesus is God. Not only that, I asked her if she thought I was going to hell. She told me that based on how I live my life and based upon what I professed to be true, I was going to hell. I couldn’t believe it. Neither could I shake her comments. “What if she’s right about this Jesus?” I thought. That conversation started a year’s worth of seeking and praying and studying that ended with my baptism in the Spring of 1991. How grateful I am today that she turned that conversation to Christ.

Think back to the people God put in your life to make the gospel known, and to help you understand the gospel better. Who are the people who challenged you to follow Jesus, even when you didn’t want to hear it? Now, may the Lord make you as faithful as them. ■

~ Aaron Menikoff

⁶ Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth* (1984), 127.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 133, 35.



This month, Pastor Aaron will conclude a nine-part series through the book of II Timothy.

Each sermon will be available the Monday after is delivered through the Mount Vernon Podcast on iTunes and on the church’s website.

Sermons are also available on CD for \$5 a copy.

November 2013

1	2							
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<small>Daylight Savings Ends</small> 9:15 am Knowing MVBC: Session 1 12:00 pm Knowing MVBC: Sessions 2-4 6:00 pm Lord's Supper	4	5	6 6:30 pm New Equipping Matters Class Begins	7	8	9	10	11
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Georgia Baptist Convention 10:30 am Guest Preacher: Bryan Pillsbury	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
4:30 pm Church in Conference Operation Christmas Child Deadline	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
		6:30 pm Thanksgiving Service	Church Office Closed No Evening Activities	28 <small>Thanksgiving Day</small>	29	30		

EVENTS

CHURCHWIDE

November 3 6:00 pm Lord's Supper

We encourage members to examine their hearts and relationship with one another in preparation for this celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

November 17 4:30 pm Church in Conference

All members are encouraged to attend our next regularly-scheduled Church in Conference as we consider many matters related to the life of Mount Vernon.

November 17 Operation Christmas Child Deadline

November 26 6:30 pm Thanksgiving Service

At our annual Thanksgiving service, we sing songs of praise, enjoy testimonies of God's grace in people's lives, and hear a devotional from God's Word. Childcare is available for children ages 3 and under for the service.

ADULT

November 6 6:30 pm New Equipping Matters Class Begins

A new Equipping Matters class begins in the youth room. Pastor Aaron will be leading a class on *Why Jesus Came to Die: The Doctrine of the Atonement*. This will be the only adult Bible study for the month of November and December.

November 18 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon

Everyone 50 and older is invited to lunch and fellowship as the RW&A's kick off the fall season. Please bring a covered dish.

NEW MEMBERS

November 3 9:15 am Knowing MVBC: Session 1

12:30 pm Knowing MVBC: Session 2-3

Knowing MVBC is a 4-part course introducing you to life at Mount Vernon in which you will learn our commitments and beliefs as stated in our Church Covenant and Statement of Faith. You'll also learn about our leadership and how to be involved in evangelism, discipling, and serving at Mount Vernon.

BIRTHDAYS

1	Kyle Blackburn	18	Brandi Payne
2	Margie Arnold	19	Leslie Phillips
3	Andrew Groslimond Patrick Hearn	20	Marion Clinton Patricia McDaniel
4	Bill Coen Nathan Pillsbury	21	Susan Wheaton
6	Celina DeSantis	22	William Terry Karen Frantz
7	Carolyn Shaw	23	Connie Heiskell
9	Styles Caldwell	24	Toni Winters Jane Vanderzee
11	June Dever Marsha Whelpley Larry Chandler Andy Merl	25	Pam Reimann
13	Nathan Payne	27	Sue Cranfill Chris Millen
14	Jane Hall Kathleen Ford	28	Violet Thompson Jo Davidson Darrell Ingram
15	Tawney Johnson	29	Terri Ingram
16	Michael Kirkland	30	Suzy Kauffmann
17	Eden Hutchins		

Women's Christmas Dinner

.. TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3 • 7:00 PM ..

.. FELLOWSHIP HALL ..

Tickets

\$15

- or -

\$20 FOR YOU & A GUEST

A GUEST IS DEFINED AS A NON-MEMBER

Speaker

ALICIA YOUNG

TICKET SALES BEGIN SOON



Mount Vernon

BAPTIST CHURCH

850 Mount Vernon Highway NW
Sandy Springs, GA 30327