

What Is Evangelism?

Basics of the Faith

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Sean Michael Lucas, Series Editor

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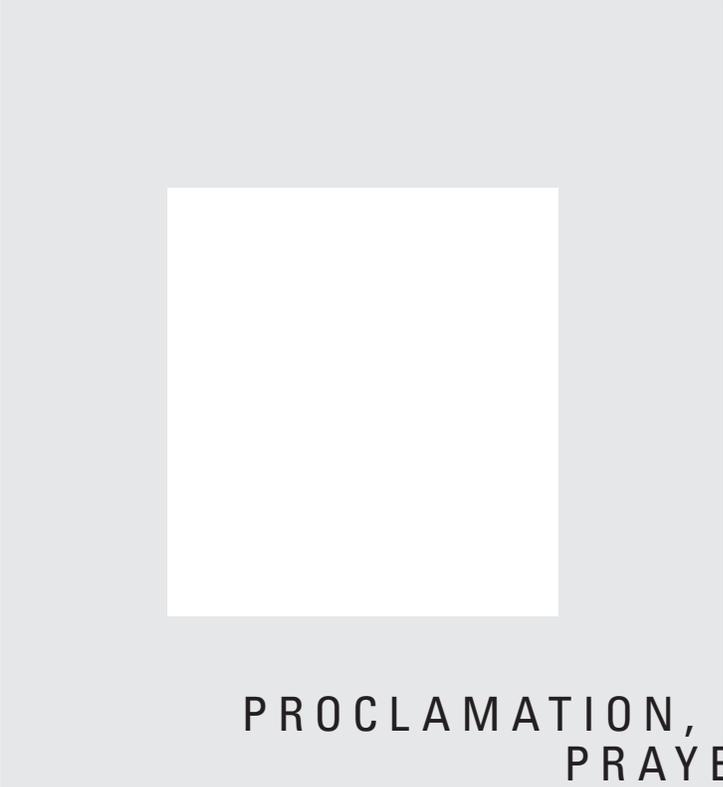
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PROCLAMATION, PERSUASION, PRAYER

What is evangelism? How could a term so basic to the Christian faith be the subject of such divergent opinions? Opinions range between two extremes: those who think that evangelism is any church activity and those who consider someone evangelized only when he or she becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ and a responsible member of a local church.¹ Rather than defining evangelism, the Bible describes it. Our English word is a transliteration of the Greek word *euangelizo*, which means “to proclaim good news.” And that is what is being described when the word is used in Scripture—someone’s declaring the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ (Luke 9:6; 20:1; Acts 8:25, 40; 16:10; Rom. 1:9, 15; 15:20; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:14, 16, 18; 2 Cor. 11:7; Gal. 1:11; 2:2, 7; 4:13; 1 Thess. 2:9; 1 Peter 1:12; 4:6). While those occurrences are typically translated “preach the gospel,” there are only a few occasions when the gospel is said explicitly to be “preached” (*kerux*) (Matt. 24:14; 26:13; Mark 13:10; 14:9). Ordinarily, the action of one person or a group taking the gospel to unbelievers is just described as “good-news telling.” The most basic thing then that can be said about evangelism is that it is any manner of *proclaiming* the good news of Jesus Christ.

Though they did not know all the details of Jesus' incarnation and sacrifice, Old Testament believers were not bereft of the good news. The message of redemption proclaimed to the people of God from the time of Abraham to Moses is also called "the gospel" (Gal. 3:8; Heb. 4:2, 6). Additionally, Paul desired to "preach the gospel" to the "saints" in Rome (1:7, 15). So the argument could be made that the whole Bible is the gospel and to preach any of it therefore is to preach good news. However, the focus of this booklet is on proclaiming the salvific work of Jesus Christ in such a manner that those who have never done so will receive him by faith and prove their regeneration with discipleship.²

Jesus' parables and the example of the apostles lead us to conclude that the good news is so great that it must be proclaimed with a desire to *persuade* (Luke 14:23; Acts 18:4; 2 Cor. 5:11). The Bible never hints that the herald is the converter. Persuasion or conversion is possible only when the Spirit removes a "heart of stone" and replaces it with a "heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26) and "opens" it to receive the free offer of grace (Acts 16:40). That means that the believer's responsibility is not just to proclaim the gospel but also to *pray* for its effectiveness as the Holy Spirit applies it to the heart. Interestingly, the Bible never commands or even describes believers praying for people to be converted; rather they pray for "more laborers" (Matt. 9:37), "open doors" (Col. 4:3), and "boldness" (Acts 4:29). The implication seems to be that praying for someone's heart to change would give the impression that somehow the power to convert lies within the person. Praying for multiplication of witnesses, opportunities to speak, and courage to persist against opposition emphasizes that all the gospel's power comes from God. It comes from the Holy Spirit who empowers its ambassadors (Acts 1:8), who in turn through the "foolishness" of proclamation (1 Cor. 1:21) have the privilege of unleashing a message that conquers unbelief.