

How to Communicate the Gospel in Our Post-Christian Context

Most of Europe is now a post-Christian mission context. Christianity is thought to have been tried in the past and found inadequate, and as a result, churches are declining, evangelism is growing slower, and secularism is dominant. Evangelicals face a new challenge of sharing the good news of Jesus with people who think that it has nothing to offer them. This session will consider the specific difficulties of evangelism and ministry in a post-Christian context and offer three key principles for responding to it. We need to grasp the emerging opportunities for gospel ministry in our contemporary culture.

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1. The Post-Christian Context of Europe

- a. 522m people and 18m evangelicals (2.5%)
- b. Postmodernism rather than modernism
- c. Ignorance of the gospel
- d. Prejudice against the gospel
- e. Fear of the gospel (not that it is untrue but that it is socially dangerous)
- f. Church discredited (especially child sex abuse scandals)
- g. Society liberated from Christian moral conservatism
- h. People do not fear judgement after death
- i. Growth is slow with fewer conversion taking longer time (1.1% per year)

2. Our Confidence in the Gospel

- a. Jesus is Lord (Romans 1v4; 10v9; Philippians 2v9-11)
- b. The gospel is true (1 Corinthians 15v1-8; Galatians 1v11-12)
- c. The gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1v16-18)

- d. People were created to know God (Genesis 1v28)
- e. People's felt needs (for identity, security, love, meaning, etc.) point them to their need for God
- f. People's idols fail them

3. Responding to the Challenge

a. PRAYER

- i. Pray for opportunity (Colossians 4v2-3)
- ii. Pray for boldness (Colossians 4v4; Ephesians 6v19-20; Acts 4v29-30)
- iii. Pray for God to be honored (John 12v28)

b. CONTEXTUALLY APPROPRIATE GOSPEL PROCLAMATION

- i. Meet people where they are (1 Peter 2v12)
- ii. Remove unnecessary cultural barriers to the gospel (1 Corinthians 9v19-23)
- iii. Preach the good news through relevant categories (Acts 17v16-34)
- iv. Live good lives amongst the pagans and responsive evangelism (1 Peter 2v12 & 3v15)
- v. Call people to faith in Christ, not mere morality (1 Corinthians 5v12-13)
- vi. What is the irreducible content of the gospel? (Jesus' Lordship, sin, coming judgement, repentance)

c. THE APOLOGETIC IMPACT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

- i. Local church as the "advert" for the gospel
- ii. Local church as a mutual community of love (John 13v34-35)
- iii. Local church as a place of personal transformation (2 Corinthians 3v18)
- iv. Local church as a context for care (Acts 4v32-37; 6; 1 Timothy 5v3-16)
- v. Local church as honest and authentic (1 John 1v8-2v2)

4. Encouragement from the Early Church

- a. Gospel triumph over 300 years

- b. Slow steady growth
- c. Attractiveness of Christian community
- d. Bravery in the face of persecution/martyrdom

Suggested Readings:

Sam Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World*

J Mack Stiles, *Evangelism*

Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God*

Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*

Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*

Steve Timmis & Tim Chester, *Total Church*

Leslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*

John Stevens, *Knowing Our Times*

Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*

Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*

Larry Hurtado, *Destroyed of the Gods*

Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*