

Ten Sayings Of Modern Evangelism To Avoid

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I remember sitting at my seminary graduation banquet dinner where students were giving testimonials and one evangelist got up on the platform and said, "Last week I was holding a crusade and 1,100 people got saved," and everybody there applauded like crazy except me. I thought to myself, "How in the world can he make a statement like that when he doesn't know for sure if out of those 1,100 responses to his invitation, if anybody really got saved at all?" All he knows is that he counted numbers and he counted 1,100 who responded to his invitation but we don't know what kind of invitation he even gave, if it was even the true gospel or if it was a half a gospel. Your typical evangelist is obsessed with numbers and they love to boast how many people they led to the Lord but I can't find that in my New Testament. I can't find that passage that says, "Peter stood up at his next meeting and said, Friends, I want you to know that just last week on the day of Pentecost I led 3,000 people to Jesus." No, I don't see that. I can't find a place in my Bible where the Apostle Paul gets up before a crowd and declares, "Dear friends, last week I preached a crusade and I led 1,000 people to the Lord." I just don't see Peter or Paul or anybody else patting themselves on the back for their evangelistic endeavors in my Bible but we do.

During the Great Awakening in 1740, the great British evangelist, George Whitfield, was preaching in Boston when a minister approached him and asked, "Mr. Whitfield, how many converts have you had since you've been among us?" To which the great Whitfield replied, "I don't know sir, but I shall return to these parts in a year or two and look for the evidence of their salvation." I believe there is wisdom in that, friends. I'm afraid our brand of modern day evangelism has taken the gospel and reduced it to a simple formula designed to make it easy for folks to respond to a statement or a saying. Modern evangelism has come up with a plan of salvation that if you follow it, you will be saved. But preachers back in the days of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield didn't act that way, rather, they proclaimed the gospel in its full counsel. Their sermons searched the hearts and conscience of their hearers. They thundered the law about the ears until they saw Sinai altogether on a smoke. They preached up man's duty of repentance and the necessity of regeneration. They didn't have the man-centered evangelistic formulas that we have today that elicit a quick response.

But in the last 60 years in America, modern evangelism has been reduced to a simple formula full of time-worn sayings that get passed on from generation to generation of seminary students as tools for evangelism and most of these evangelistic formulas are

nothing more than an insurance policy against going to hell because they do not allow the Holy Spirit room to operate in awakening conviction, repentance and faith. They hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in true conversion and it's high time we get rid of them. If you are a seminary student or a gospel worker, please don't fall into the same trap that most soul winners do by adopting this shopworn expressions that do no good. I know what I'm talking about. I've graduated from two seminaries and I've gone door-to-door in evangelism for years. I have mistakenly used some of these approaches and sayings myself. I'll never forget the time I was going door-to-door one hot summer evening during the week and I saw an ice cream man sitting in his truck and I approached him and bought an ice cream bar and I used a couple of these shopworn sayings and he agreed with what I said and I told him he was now a Christian. Then I ran back to the church and bragged to my friends that I led the ice cream man to the Lord and they all rejoiced and jumped up and down but all I did, friends, was do that poor sinner harm. I showed him a Jesus before he even knew why he needed a Jesus. I'm afraid I made my false converts in my time back in my ignorance but don't you make the same mistakes I did, friend. You can avoid them.

My message this evening is entitled "Ten Modern Evangelism Sayings To Avoid" and we should avoid them like the plague. Before I begin my message this evening, I want to read you a description of modern evangelism written by my good friend, William MacDonald, who is now in glory. Bill is best known for his Bible commentary, "Believers Bible Commentary," which is a bestseller. He and I often talked about evangelism and discipleship and he summed up, in my opinion, modern evangelism pretty good. Allow me to read you his observations because they hit the nail on the head. These are his words,

"We want to keep the message simple — uncluttered by any suggestion that man can ever earn or deserve eternal life. Justification is by faith alone, apart from the deeds of the law. Therefore, the message is 'only believe.'

"From there the message is reduced to a concise formula. For instance, the evangelistic process is cut down to a few basic questions and answers, as follows: 'Do you believe you are a sinner?' 'Yes.' 'Do you believe Christ died for sinners?' 'Yes.' 'Will you receive him as your Savior?' 'Yes.' 'Then you are saved.' 'I am?' 'Yes, the Bible says you are saved.'

"At first blush the method and the message might seem above criticism. But on closer study we are forced to have second thoughts and to conclude that the gospel has been over-simplified.

"The first fatal flaw is the missing emphasis on repentance. There can be no true conversion without conviction of sin. A second serious omission is a missing emphasis on the Lordship of Christ. Jesus is first Lord, then Savior. A third defect in the message is the tendency to keep the terms of discipleship hidden until a decision has been made for Jesus. Our Lord

never did this. The message He preached included the cross as well as the crown.

“The result of all this is that we have people believing without knowing what they believe. In many cases, they have no doctrinal basis for their decision. They do not know the implications of commitment to Christ. They have never experienced the mysterious, miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.”

Well friends, I agree with Bill MacDonald's sentiments exactly and I want to go over this evening certain sayings that have become popular in modern evangelism over the last 60 years or so because of their tradition. They are so fully entrenched in most of our evangelistic appeals, many pastors and evangelists say them mainly because they've heard some other preacher say them but I can't find one of them in my Bible. They are slick little sayings that make it easy for someone to give a response to. I wish I could place a moratorium on all evangelism in this country until we got it right, right back to the New Testament.

In my message this evening, I have outlined what I feel are the most commonly used expressions or sayings of modern evangelism and the best thing you can do with them, friend, is to avoid them, just don't ever say them again. They are hindrances to the true gospel message. I know I'm going to have a fight on my hands with many evangelists out there with this message but it's time someone stepped up and said something about these man-centered methodologies used in modern evangelism today. They rob God of his glory and they do more harm than good.

For my message this evening, I've made a list of these ten sayings to avoid and I will elaborate on each of them as we proceed. Are you ready? Get your pen out. Get your paper out. Here is #1.

1. “Put your faith in Jesus, friend. See this chair here? You trust that chair to support you when you sit on it. You have faith that the chair will support you before you sit on it. That's what faith in Christ is like. Just trust him like you trust that chair to support you.” I've heard some big preachers use this through the years and it sickens me every time I hear it. That kind of faith is the faith of an atheist for an atheist sits on a chair just like you do: he believes it can support him just like you do; he trusts in that chair just like you do. That's not saving faith, friend, saving faith is something God gives you through grace. It is not the faith of trusting in a chair. Please, Brother Evangelist, don't use the chair illustration ever again. You're doing nobody any favors by using it.

2. “Just open you heart to accept Jesus, friend. Open your heart and let him in.” I get riled up when I hear this one. Listen friend, a dead man cannot open his heart; a sinner is dead in trespasses and sins. He's got no power to open his heart to Jesus. It is God who opens the heart of stone and turns it a heart of flesh. He opened the heart of Lydia in the book of Acts. Let me read it to you. “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened.” I

cannot tell the number of times I've heard some seminary-trained pastors use that one, "Just open your heart, friend, and accept Jesus." Brother Pastor, a dead man cannot respond to your simple invitation to open his heart to Christ. It's like asking a stone to fly through the air. Please avoid that one, friends, as you would avoid a deadly snake because it takes salvation out of the hands of God and places it in the hands of men.

3. "Now friend, just repeat this prayer and you will be saved." When in the world did the Sinner's Prayer become the focus of our evangelism? I can't find anywhere in my Bible where someone was brought to Christ by repeating the Sinner's Prayer. The prayers I see in there are like Peter's, "Lord, depart from me for I am a sinner." And the publican who beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me a sinner." But both of those are starting points to getting saved because we cannot be saved until we realize we are a big sinner in need of a Savior.

4. "Just walk this aisle, friend, and make it public. Jesus said, 'If you deny me, I will deny you before my Father,' so you must make it public, friend, if you want to be saved so come down this aisle now and say yes to Jesus." Listen friend, no one gets saved by walking an aisle. If the Holy Spirit is applying the gospel to your heart, you can get saved staying in your seat. That evangelist just wants to see how many people are responding to his message so he can brag at his next meeting on how many people he led to the Lord. Read your Bible, friend, in the book of Acts on the day of Pentecost, did the Apostle Peter say, "Okay friends, those of you who want to accept Jesus, just stand up and walk this aisle because you must make it public." Did he say that?

5. Using Revelation 3:20 in evangelistic appeals. How many times have I heard this I can no longer count, even by good men through the years. First the evangelist will quote Revelation 3:20 which states, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Then the evangelist says something like this, "Friend, Jesus is standing at the door of your heart. He is knocking. Won't you let him in?" When I hear this, I picture a poor pitiful Jesus who is so impotent that he can only stand at the door of the sinner's heart like an insurance salesman waiting to come in with his hat in his hand and he has to wait until you agree to let him come in. And the text is out of context when we apply it to evangelism because Jesus is not standing outside the door of the sinner's heart. In this passage from Revelation, the Lord of glory is standing outside the door of a self-satisfied church in need of repentance. This evangelistic appeal makes Jesus appear like he has no power and it shrinks God down to man's size. It removes all the authority of Christ Jesus. Listen friends, when Christ saves a person, he comes in with power, majesty and authority. He's not some little old beggar at your door hoping you will let him in. Please, Brother Evangelist, get rid of this shopworn tool of evangelism for it robs God of his glory.

6. "God has a wonderful plan for your life, friend. God loves you. He loves you so much he sent his beloved Son into the world to die on a cross for you. Do you believe that? Do you? Then just invite Jesus into your heart right now and you will be saved. Just accept Jesus." Listen friends, I don't think we're doing anybody any favors with this half-gospel

formula. First, we have so simplified the gospel message to boil it down to a few sentences that only part of the gospel is shown. Besides, when a person comes to Christ, they don't accept Jesus, rather they receive a revealed Christ. Never use a formula that makes it easy for a person to accept Jesus. That's one of the best ways to make a false convert who will be gospel hardened the next time someone comes along with a tract and tells him about Jesus. He will say, "I've already done that." Where did we get all this nonsense anyhow?

7. "Let me read you this verse, friend, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.' Now friend, do you believe that to be true? Do you? Do you believe that God loves you enough to have his Son come die on a cross for you? Do you believe that? Then you are saved." I believe one of the biggest errors in our churches today is textual decisionists, people who have made a decision to become a Christian based on a text. They believe John 3:16 to be true and they join the church but they are still unchanged individuals. They've never been awakened to their lost condition, never convicted of sin, never regenerated by the Spirit of God. We need to be honest with folks. We need to be honest with men and women and boys and girls and warn them about a place of eternal punishment called hell and that God sends the wicked to hell and the wicked are people who die in their sins. We need to preach the full counsel of God to bring souls to Christ. We need to preach the gospel in its purity and proper order. We need to show man that they are guilty rebels in their ruin and sin, that man drinks iniquity like it's water and that man has a duty of repentance. And we must stress the necessity of regeneration through the new birth.

Listen friends, Jesus placed a great deal of emphasis upon all of these he said, "Unless you repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He said, "Marvel not at this. Ye must be born again." Jesus warned people about hell, "Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dieth not and they will be cast into outer darkness." But most of us won't mention those things when we witness to folks because we don't like rejection. But if we take the gospel and water it down a little, make it more appealing, more palatable so people can swallow it, so a sinner can swallow it easier, then more people will accept it and that's what a lot of us want: numbers so we can boast at our next meeting how many people got saved last week.

8. "I can tell you how to be saved. All you have to do is this, follow these steps, follow this plan of salvation laid out in this little booklet here." Stop right there, friend, never tell a sinner how to be saved before he knows he needs to be saved. This is the most glaring error in modern evangelism today. We lead folks to Jesus without ever showing them why they need him. We present the remedy for sin without ever showing folks why they need a remedy in the first place so they'll casually take your Jesus, accept that tract and make a decision or walk an aisle with a silly grin on their face and there goes another false convert who is also now gospel hardened and the next time someone tries to witness to them, they'll answer, "I'm already a Christians."

9. “Congratulations, you are now saved. 'I am?' Yes, you are now a Christian.” Listen fellow gospel workers, never, ever tell a person he is now saved. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. My Bible says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God.” My Bible says, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.” The great evangelist, D. L. Moody, knew better than most of us today. Moody would train his workers in the inquiry rooms with the following remarks. He'd say: “Dear friends, never tell a person they are saved. That's the job of the Holy Spirit.” We should be like Moody in that regard, friends. Please, Brother Pastor, fellow evangelist, never, ever tell someone they are now saved. Let us remember that the only one who has the right to tell a person that they have been brought out of death into life is God the Holy Spirit.

10. “Do you believe Christ died for you? Take God at his word, friend, he sent his beloved Son to die on a cross for you. Do you believe that? Then you can become a Christian.” Listen dear friends, my biggest fear is that there are many in the churches today who have believed on the fact of the death of Christ but they have never believed on the Christ who died. They became a Christian by agreeing with a fact or believing a fact and that's their foundation they rest upon. Listen friends, when Jesus was here in his earthly ministry, when he passed through towns and villages, those who encountered him experienced change. They were changed individuals. If you were truly saved, it's not because you believed a fact about the death of Christ but because you'd been transformed by the Christ who died.

As an appendix to all of this, I will add: do not heal the wounds of a person slightly. How many evangelists and well-meaning pastors will comfort an awakened sinner by telling them they are now a Christian. Never heal a wound slightly, friend, you do great damage to one's soul if you do. An awakened sinner is merely that: someone who is now aware of his need of a Savior. He still needs to get to Christ. He still needs to find Christ. But if we heal his wound slightly, we make a stillbirth instead of a rebirth through the new birth. Like I said, if we could only eliminate these ten sayings of modern evangelism, we would at least not do folks harm by making false converts. Let's preach the word and give the Holy Spirit room to operate on a poor sinner's heart.

I've been conducting evangelism for a long time now and I know that God can save the biggest sinner when the Holy Spirit applies the gospel to their hearts but we must, friends, present the gospel in its purity and proper order. We must preach up the great doctrines of ruin, redemption, repentance and regeneration. With this in mind, I have created an app on iTunes called “[Evangelism Awakening](#)” and in it I have suggestions on how to present a God-centered gospel that awakens man to his ruined condition and shows him he is in need of a remedy for sin in the person of Jesus Christ. I've made it easy for churches to adopt it into their evangelistic efforts to reach their community for Christ. In it is a presentation of the gospel of the full counsel of God using the great doctrines of ruin, redemption, repentance and regeneration. It's the gospel of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield. If we could only get back to a God-centered brand of evangelism rather than this man-centered stuff we have today, we would give people good instead of harm.