



Answering the Right Questions

OPEN: Somebody speculated about how certain people would answer the age old question: "Why did the chicken cross the road?"

- They speculated that former President GEORGE W. BUSH would say: *"We don't really care why the chicken crossed the road. We just want to know if the chicken is on our side of the road or not. The chicken is either with us or it is against us. There is no middle ground here."*
- Former Vice President AL GORE might have said: *"I invented the chicken. I invented the road... Therefore, the chicken crossing the road represented the application of these two different functions of government in a new, reinvented way designed to bring greater services to the American people."*
- RUSH LIMBAUGH could have said, *"I don't know why the chicken crossed the road, but I'll bet it was getting a government grant to cross the road. Can you believe this? How much more of this can real Americans take? Chickens crossing the road paid for by their tax dollars, and when I say tax dollars, I'm talking about your money, money the government took from you to build roads for chickens to cross."*
- ARNOLD SCHWARTZENAGER: "I don't

know why the chicken crossed the road, but I do know.... IT VILL BE BACK!"

- DR. SEUSS *"Did the chicken cross the road? Did he cross it with a toad? Yes! The chicken crossed the road, but why it crossed, I've not been told!"*
- And lastly, someone supposedly asked BILL GATES and he replied: *"I have just released "eChicken 2004," which will not only cross roads, but will lay eggs, file your important documents, and balance your checkbook."*

It's intriguing to ask ourselves how certain men and women down through history would answer certain kinds of questions. Of course, this one about the chicken crossing the road is meant to be humorous... BUT there are times when we really would like to know how would others deal with the situations we face - QUESTIONS that we consider to be important.

For example: How would Jesus witness to the people we live with every day? How would He talk to my relatives and my friends about their need for salvation.

FOUR POINTS TO PONDER

- First, I want to make certain *we understand* the gospel message for ourselves. I want to be sure we know how to answer the right questions. What questions do people need to have answered in order to come to a place of salvation?

This begins the third part of our formula for maximum impact - Clear Communication. *High Potency + Close Proximity + Clear Communication = Maximum Impact.* Remember that?

- Then I want to give you one simple method to share those truths with people you know. One I particularly like and use.

So let's start. We're going to look briefly at four primary points we need to know in order to get a firm grasp of the gospel. They are God, People, Christ, and You.

I. GOD

There are many aspects of God's nature that we could study, but He has three characteristics that are especially relevant in evangelism.

The first one is that **He is LOVING**. Out of His compassion He made us and desires to have a relationship with us. Even though we're sinners who have rebelled against Him, He continues to patiently extend His love to us.

Many people you talk to have stopped right there, but there's more that needs to be understood. You see, **God is also HOLY**. This means that He is absolutely pure, and He is separate from everything that is impure, even our sin.

This week something happened to me that reminded me of this truth. Nina and I are in the process of remodeling our kitchen. This week I had the wonderful privilege of finishing sheetrock. After putting on three coats of "mud" and painstakingly sanding it off to cover all the nail holes and seams, I put the primer on Friday night. At first glance it looked pretty good.

However, after letting it dry I **took a work light and looked more closely**. What did I see? Little imperfections...everywhere! And some not-so-little ones too. So midnight Friday I was filling in the mistakes.

That incident reminded me of God's holiness and its affect on us. *Under normal lighting, our lives tend to look pretty good*, with no serious moral flaws or blemishes. But then God comes and shines the brilliant light of His holiness on our actions, thoughts, and intentions, and what shows up is not pretty.

That leads us to a third characteristic of God: **He is JUST**. In other words, He's like a good judge who can't wink at a broken law: Rather, He must carry out justice.

A few years ago in Scotland, a man murdered a member of his family. But by the time he was brought to trial, the judge decided he'd already punished himself enough, and he let him go. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to guess how the public responded: "What? That's not fair: We want justice! Get that judge out of there, and replace him with a good one who'll uphold the law."

Well, God is a perfect judge who will dispense justice to everyone fairly. Numbers 14:18 says, *"The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and*

forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished;"

II. PEOPLE

Just as there are many aspects of God's nature, there are many of people, but one is especially relevant. When God first created us, He made us good, without sin. But we abused our freedom, rebelled against Him, and became **fallen and sinful**.

Furthermore, as we've just seen, God's holiness exposes us for what we are and His justice deals fairly with the sin we've committed. Unfortunately, the seriousness of our sin requires God to pronounce upon us the death penalty. This means both physical death and spiritual death, which is separation from God in a place called hell.

And to cap off the bad news, we're helpless to initiate any action that can change our situation. . Thankfully, the story doesn't end there.

III. CHRIST

Jesus Christ was uniquely able to solve our dilemma because He was **both God and man**.

- As God, He had the power and authority to devise a plan for our salvation.
- As a man, He was able to execute the plan by taking upon Himself the punishment we deserved.

The central truth of the gospel is that **Jesus died in our place, as our substitute**. He suffered the penalty of death for us.

In so doing, He

- expressed the love of God,
- upheld the holiness of God,
- and satisfied the justice of God.

He did all of that so that He could turn around and offer us His forgiveness, friendship, and leadership as a gift. We don't deserve it, we didn't pay for it, and we can't earn it. The only way we can receive it is to humbly bow before Him, admit our waywardness, and say yes to His incredible offer. That is called Faith.

When we do that, our sin-debt is paid in full, and we receive the promise of eternal life in heaven. We also gain the ongoing companionship of the God

Himself, who will be there to lead us, guide us, and lovingly bring us correction when we need it

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,

That saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but now I'm found,

Was blind but now I see.

Two Questions

Before we go on to the last of our four points, let's look at a couple of questions people often raise about the role Christ played in gaining our salvation. First, some people ask why any price had to be paid at all. "Why couldn't God just forgive and forget, as we can?"

Suppose you had a brand new car parked in front of your home, and a neighbor accidentally ran into it. Though you can forgive him and release him from any responsibility, you'll still have a problem: Who's going to pay for the damage? Since you let him off the hook, you're going to be left having to pay for the repairs yourself.

Similarly, we've done damage by sinning against God. And He, too, was willing to forgive us and restore our relationship with Him. It's ours for the asking. But He still had to pay for the damage. He was left holding the bill—the death penalty—which He paid by coming as one of us and dying on the cross in our place (Acts 20:28).

The second question some people ask is why Christ had to pay that penalty: "What kind of justice is there in having Jesus, an *innocent bystander*, suffer instead of me?"

Some people have even compared this to the old "whipping boy" practice, a horribly unjust system of substitute punishment used in medieval times. When a young member of a royal family broke the rules, the child's teachers did not dare discipline him directly. Instead, they would whip a slave boy in front of the offender. This was supposed to make the child feel bad enough to reform and stay in line. Of course, it was grossly unfair and in no way served justice.

How is this different from what Christ did? The answer lies in His identity. He's not some reluctant bystander who God forced onto the scene as a "whipping boy" to take our punishment. *He is actually the God we have sinned against!*

Philippians 2:6-8 spells this out when it says that Christ was "*in very nature God,*" but that He was willing to let go temporarily of His lofty position for us. It says He "*made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

And He says to us, "*I love you, I've willingly paid the penalty you owed, and I want to forgive you. Would you trust and follow Me?"*

IV. YOU

The last essential is YOU. The ball is now in your court. Jesus paid the price of salvation for the whole world, but only those who say yes to Him will actually receive His forgiveness.

It's perplexing to me that in spite of the Bible's emphasis that we must individually receive Christ and His gift of salvation, *this is the most overlooked part of the message in a lot of churches today.* A personal Faith commitment is essential!

Many people are left with the impression that if they go to church, or are born into a Christian family, or try to be moral and religious, then they are automatically made right with God. But it's not true.

Anyone who relies on their personal efforts to get into God's family is eventually going to experience the world's worst nightmare.

Listen to the warning Jesus gave in Matthew 7:21-23: "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*"

So for the sake of those who need to be reached, we've got to be crystal clear about the fact that a personal response is essential. Each of us has to receive the forgiveness and leadership of Christ individually. And when we do, the Bible assures us that the Holy Spirit will immediately take residence within us and begin to change us from the inside out.

We can't make that decision for others and we shouldn't push them to make it prematurely. But we've got to be sure they understand that there is no other way. Furthermore, we need to be prepared to help them take that step across the line of faith.

SUMMARY

I hope that by going over these four points—God, Us, Christ, and You—It has helped clarify the basic elements of the gospel message.

Now today I want to give you one of many practical tools by which you can use to communicate this message to others (you will learn many others like this in the workshop that starts in two weeks - sign up).

Do vs. Done

This is the most simple and succinct tool I know for telling others about Christ. Let me encourage you to understand it well. It's an easy yet effective as a tool to help people understand the central tenets of the Christian faith, especially those who think they can get to heaven by being good enough.

It gets right to the heart of the issue so many people are confused about, so its also great as a conversation starter. You might say something like, "If you ever want to know the difference between religion and Christianity might be happy to tell you." They might respond, maybe after thinking about it, "A difference? I thought Christianity was a religion?"

Then you can give them this explanation.

"Not really. Every other religion in the world can be spelled '**D-O,**' because it consists of the things people do to try to somehow gain God's acceptance. You either have to do religious rituals or do good works to become pleasing to God. That is the heart of every other religion, and some people mistake Christianity to be the same.

"But the problem is that can never be sure that you've actually done enough. Worse yet, the Bible tells us in Romans 3:23 that we never can do enough. We'll always fall short of God's perfect standard.

"But Christianity is spelled differently. It's spelled '**D-O-N-E,**' which means that what we could never do for ourselves, Christ has already done for us. He lived the perfect life we could never live, and He willingly died on the cross to pay the penalty we owed for the wrongs we've done.

"To become a real Christian is to humbly receive God's gift of forgiveness and to commit to following His leadership. When we do that, He adopts us into

His family, and begins to change us from the inside out."

From this point you can ask if they like you to explain better. Then you can go over the Four Points and ask them if they will receive Jesus by trust and commitment.....

Conclusion

You will never be able to "Clearly Communicate" the Gospel unless you know it.

- Learn these four points.
- Know Bible passages that illuminate them.

Assignment

- Find someone to share "Do vs. Done" with this week.
- And sign up for the Contagious Christian workshop. Six weeks on Wed. Evening starting Sept 12.

How about you? Have you received God's gift of forgiveness and committed to the leadership of Jesus Christ in your life?

Maybe today you understood the work of Christ clearly for the first time? Don't wait to receive Him. Don't miss another minute of his loving leadership.