

a essay:

SIX PRINCIPLES NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. A BIBLE PASSAGE – PROVERBS 18:13

II. 2 EARS, 1 MOUTH

III. CHRIST AND NICODEMUS – “C-R-E-A-T-E”

IV. WHY BOTHER TO TAKE THE TIME?

V. THE SCENE IS SET

VI. “C” IS FOR COMMON SENSE

VII. “R” IS FOR REASONING

VIII. “E” IS FOR EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

IX. “A” IS FOR AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

X. “T” IS FOR TRADITION AND THEOLOGY

XI. “E” IS FOR EXPERIENCE

XII. WHAT CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM THROUGH DIALOGUE SHOWS

XIII. GO THEREFORE AND DO LIKEWISE

XIV. REFERENCES

## I. A BIBLE PASSAGE – PROVERBS 18:13

He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.<sup>1</sup>

## II. 2 EARS, 1 MOUTH

What is dialogue, and why is it needful for effective Christian evangelism? And what principles may we identify for this purpose? Note that The LORD gave us 2 ears, but only 1 mouth. We are to speak The Gospel to lost men in all truth and love, but should we not listen before opening our mouth to so testify? We should listen to our audience, that we might better appreciate their troubles, thoughts, needs and burdens. In listening, we then show compassion for the lost soul as an individual. It is then that we may better speak as a friend with compassion and relevance. It is then that we better win the right to preach The Word of GOD to the unsaved. For PROVERBS 18:13 declares, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”<sup>2</sup>

## III. CHRIST AND NICODEMUS – “C-R-E-A-T-E”

In JOHN 3, when our Lord met with Nicodemus. He did not merely pronounce His Messiahship to this man, but took the time to dialogue with him. In doing so, CHRIST showed His love for Nicodemus, working to “CREATE” the faith in this man necessary for his salvation. JESUS here models for us 6 principles that we, showing the love of GOD by taking the time to dialogue with the lost and the suffering, should employ in our Christian evangelism: 1. “C” for Common sense; 2. “R” for Reasoning; 3. “E” for Empirical evidence; 4. “A” for Authority of Scriptures; 5. “T” for Tradition and theology; 6. “E” for Experience.

## IV. WHY BOTHER TO TAKE THE TIME?

As we walk together through JOHN 3:1-21, note how our Lord CHRIST JESUS Himself takes the time to both listen and speak - to dialogue - with Nicodemus. And it is here that we may discern these 6 principles needful for effective Christian evangelism. Here we may note that The Messiah, though GOD Incarnate, is taking time to build a personal relationship with Nicodemus. CHRIST does not simply declare, but allows a give and take, in which He and Nicodemus question and answer one another. JESUS challenges Nicodemus to consider Who He is and his need for spiritual rebirth, though He shows no condescension or disrespect for this spiritually blind teacher of Israel.

The Saviour with Nicodemus is both light and salt to this man: He shines the light of Divine Truth upon his heart, soul and mind; He is in the world with Nicodemus and meets him where he is in his understanding and faith in love. This even though JESUS is The very King of The Universe Incarnate! If our Lord took the time to so dialogue with this one man, should not we as Christians take the time to do the same in our evangelism to the lost and suffering around us?

## V. THE SCENE IS SET

The scene is set in JOHN 3:1-2, “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him,

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<sup>1</sup> 1, KJV, PROVERBS 18:13.

<sup>2</sup> 1, KJV, PROVERBS 18:13.

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”<sup>3</sup> Nicodemus, the only one recorded as coming to CHRIST at this time as one of the rulers of Israel - a member of the ruling Jewish Sanhedrin parliament - arrives under the cover of night. Here is a man who recognizes, with others in authority, that JESUS is “a teacher come from GOD.” They acknowledge His miracles, and conclude that He can do such things only because GOD is with Him.

Nicodemus may well be seeking to converse undisturbed with JESUS, both being rabbinical teachers of The Law, as equals. Perhaps Nicodemus, like many of his fellow Israelites, is hoping for the reestablishment of the earthly Kingdom of Israel. Perhaps he expects CHRIST to lead the nation after miraculously expelling the occupying heathen Roman army. Yet Nicodemus, although less so than most of his fellow judges of the nation, lacks the discernment to see Who JESUS is, the true nature of the Kingdom of GOD and for what purpose He has come. But CHRIST, knowing all these things beforehand, nonetheless takes the time to dialogue with Nicodemus.

#### VI. “C” IS FOR COMMON SENSE

First, CHRIST assesses the understanding, faith and common sense of Nicodemus. He appeals to this man’s common sense, as in JOHN 3:3-6, “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

Wycliffe observes of "Ye must be born again" the following, "This is not merely a personal but a universal demand. The necessity lies in the inadequacy of the flesh... [Man is in his fallen state] born into this world and lives his life apart from GOD's grace. Flesh can only reproduce itself as flesh, and this cannot pass muster with GOD." <sup>5</sup> The soul of man must be regenerated in righteousness by being remade by The HOLY SPIRIT. Thus Saint Peter writes in I PETER 2:23 that we are to be reborn in The Spirit: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by The Word of GOD, which liveth and abideth for ever." <sup>6</sup> Common sense then should tell us that a man, to be no longer a son of the kingdom of darkness and to enter spiritual The Kingdom of GOD, must be born again in The HOLY SPIRIT.

#### VII. “R” IS FOR REASONING

Second, the Son of GOD reasons with Nicodemus, as in JOHN 3:7-10, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How

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<sup>3</sup> 1, KJV, JOHN 3:1-2.

<sup>4</sup> 1, KJV, JOHN 3:3-6.

<sup>5</sup> 2, Wycliffe, JOHN 3:5-8, page 1078.

<sup>6</sup> 1, KJV, I PETER 2:23.

can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"<sup>7</sup> Here is a play on the word "pneuma" in the Greek text of JOHN, where Walvoord and Zuck note that "...it means both wind and Spirit. The work of The Spirit (pneuma) is invisible and mysterious like the blowing of the wind (pneuma). Man controls neither."<sup>8</sup>

CHRIST here reasons with Nicodemus who, though a rabbinical teacher and leader of Israel, does not see that the coming of the spiritual Kingdom of GOD will be accompanied by the anointing and indwelling of The HOLY SPIRIT in men. If Nicodemus would have recalled the words of Isaiah on this matter, he perhaps would have more fully understood, for we read in ISAIAH 36:26-27, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them."<sup>9</sup>

#### VIII. "E" IS FOR EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Third, JESUS presents empirical evidence to Nicodemus, as in JOHN 3:11, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness."<sup>10</sup> Nicodemus and his fellow Israelites were gravely ignorant of the coming spiritual Kingdom of GOD and spiritual rebirth being brought forth to the world by CHRIST. These Israelites would thus, because of their blindness and hardness of their hearts, not accept the testimony of The Gospel, nor the miracles done by CHRIST which validated His Messiahship.

Only some of those who followed CHRIST themselves were only at this time were just beginning to understand the meaning of the empirical evidence of The Lord's witness and miracles. Sadly, while the everyday people of ancient Israel were more open to receiving the empirical evidence that the Kingdom of GOD was at hand, the learned rulers of the nation would not and could not accept these signs. Thus CHRIST prays in MATTHEW 11:25, "...I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."<sup>11</sup>

#### IX. "A" IS FOR AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

Fourth, The Messiah speaks of the authority of The Holy Scriptures, as in JOHN 3:12-13, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."<sup>12</sup> Here this GOD-fearing rabbi, teacher and judge of Israel could not understand from The Scriptures that The Day had arrived when GOD would write His Law upon the hearts of men by causing spiritual rebirth and indwelling of The HOLY SPIRIT within men's souls.

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<sup>7</sup> 1, KJV, JOHN 3:7-10.

<sup>8</sup> 3, Walvoord and Zuck, JOHN 3:8, page 281.

<sup>9</sup> 1, KJV, ISAIAH 36:26-27.

<sup>10</sup> 1, KJV, JOHN 3:11.

<sup>11</sup> 1, KJV, MATTHEW 11:25.

<sup>12</sup> 1, KJV, JOHN 3:12-13.

For Jeremiah had foreseen That Day, as in JEREMIAH 31:31-33, “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah... After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”<sup>13</sup> Even from the authority of Scripture, Israel did not comprehend the dawn of The New Covenant Incarnate before their eyes.

#### X. “T” IS FOR TRADITION AND THEOLOGY

Fifth, The Saviour appeals to tradition and theology, as in JOHN 3:14-18, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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...”<sup>14</sup> CHRIST here refers to the traditional theology of Israel from NUMBERS 21:4-9. As Walvoord and Zuck phrase it, JESUS was telling Nicodemus that He Himself must be raised up in like manner, so that all who look upon Him in faith shall be delivered from spiritual death: “Moses raised a bronze snake on a pole as a cure for a punishment due to disobedience... So JESUS would be lifted up on a cross for people’s sin, so that a look of faith gives eternal life to those [otherwise] doomed to die.”<sup>15</sup>

#### XI. “E” IS FOR EXPERIENCE

Sixth, JESUS CHRIST appeals to experience which shows that men love sin, as in JOHN 3:19-21, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”<sup>16</sup> Experience teaches that unregenerate men prefer the darkness of the world and avoid the light of GOD’s Presence and Truth, lest they be obliged to turn from their wickedness and live. In NEHEMIAH 9:12 the Israelites are reminded that GOD led their fathers “in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go.”<sup>17</sup> Here CHRIST shows Nicodemus that men who do not love GOD and their neighbour prefer not to be lead by The Almighty through the dark wildernesses of life, but remain in spiritual night so as to dwell in the presence of their sins instead.

#### XII. WHAT CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM THROUGH DIALOGUE SHOWS

Why then does dialogue as the basis of Christian evangelism best model what our Lord Himself teaches us in reaching lost men? Because it shows, as in the case of

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<sup>13</sup> 1, KJV, JEREMIAH 31:31-33.

<sup>14</sup> 1, KJV, JOHN 3:14-18.

<sup>15</sup> 3, Walvoord and Zuck, JOHN 3:14-16, page 281-282.

<sup>16</sup> 1, KJV, JOHN 3:19-21.

<sup>17</sup> 1, KJV, NEHEMIAH 9:12.

CHRIST to Nicodemus, GOD's love for all men. Evangelism that employs dialogue touches most deeply because it shows on our part authenticity and humility.

Authenticity: When we proclaim the triumph and victory of CHRIST from a distance, our personal authenticity is suspect. But when we enter a man's world and befriend him face to face, we show GOD's love to those whom we seek for The Kingdom. Humility: When we show respect to the other person, as one also created in the Image of GOD. For then we can not simply brush away without explanation what that person believes, lives by and is grappling with.

Our evangelism must also show forth integrity and sensitivity. Integrity: As both salt and light to all men of this world, coming to know personally those whom we seek with The Gospel sets forth our righteousness in greater clarity, while also keeping us in the world to minister to the lost. Evangelism in friendship with the unsaved is best done by living at all times The Gospel and, when necessary, using words. Sensitivity: When we earnestly and intently listen to the lost before we speak, we show that we care about the individual personally, just as does our Father in Heaven. Knowing the lost personally and being aware of their burdens, needs, talents and joys gives us a window to reach him as is most needful.

### XIII. GO THEREFORE AND DO LIKEWISE

So CHRIST Himself took the time to dialogue with Nicodemus, building a personal relationship with him and working to "CREATE" the faith in this man necessary for his salvation. We then should go and do likewise. We should take the time to show GOD's love in our Christian evangelism to the lost and suffering with these same 6 principles of dialogue modeled for us by our Lord: 1. "C" for Common sense; 2. "R" for Reasoning; 3. "E" for Empirical evidence; 4. "A" for Authority of Scriptures; 5. "T" for Tradition and theology; 6. "E" for Experience. In so doing, our Christian evangelism will show forth greater authenticity; humility; integrity; sensitivity.

In this way, evangelizing in the love of GOD with dialogue in word and deed, and beseeching The HOLY SPIRIT to bring a new birth to men's souls in prayer, is The Gospel best shared with our neighbour. And thus do we end as we began, seeking to understand that evangelism based on dialogue is the most likely to touch the hearts of the unsaved, hearing – that they may hear, and seeing – that they may see. For it is truly written, as in PROVERBS 18:13, "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> 1, KJV, PROVERBS 18:13.

XIV. REFERENCES

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