

Evangelize or Disciple? Discerning a Counselee's Spiritual State

Randy Patten

1. Shaping influences in how I approach this subject
 - A. I was born again at age ten so I know young people can understand the gospel
 - B. The special joy I have had in leading people to repent of their sins and trust Christ as their Savior and Lord
 - C. Observing that the more time I spent explaining Christ and the gospel to a person the better disciple he was after conversion.
 - D. The rich opportunities for evangelism that counseling has provided
 - E. People seem to be more ignorant of Bible truths today than ever before.

2. Experiences & Scripture that have prompted reevaluation of evangelistic efforts
 - A. Matthew 7:21-23
 - B. Speaking with individuals doubting the reality of their salvation and concluding that many of them had not been truly born again but had had a meaningful religious experience
 - C. Dealing with some individuals that I had led to the Lord (I thought) but who never grew in godliness
 - D. Being challenged by a counselor in training after I did not present the gospel in session one after it became clear that the counselee was unsaved
 - E. Supervising an ACBC applicant who quit data gathering in session one and began presenting the gospel after it became evident that the counselee was unsaved. The session ended with the counselor leading the counselee in a prayer to accept Christ and then used 1 John 5:13 to give assurance of salvation. The counselor was rejoicing in a great victory. I questioned the wisdom of the counselor's procedures and the reality of the person's conversion. It was a difficult conversation.
 - F. 2 Corinthians 5:17

3. Theological Considerations

- A. The new birth or regeneration (Titus 3:5) is the act of God which gives eternal life to the one who believes in Christ. As a result, he becomes a member of God's family (1 Pt. 1:23) with a new capacity and desire to please his heavenly Father (2 Cor. 5:17).
- B. The Great Commission is to make disciples (Mt. 28:18-20). A disciple is a long-term follower, a long-term student. Our goal is disciples not professions of faith.
- C. 1 John teaches that assurance of salvation is grounded in life characteristics, not a particular religious experience
- D. It is possible to hear a believable testimony of faith from someone who is not genuinely born again. It is also possible that a person can be born again and not be able to express it in a convincing manner.

4. Suggested Questions to Help Clarify a Person's Spiritual Condition

- A. Have you come to a place in your spiritual life where you could say with confidence that if you were to die that you would go to heaven?
 - 1). If yes, then, tell me about that time and what led you to that confidence.
 - 2). What impact did that experience have on your lifestyle?
- B. If you died and stood before God and he asked you, "Why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say?"
- C. If a coworker or a neighbor asked you, "What is the gospel?" what would you say?
- D. How many times did you read your Bible last week?
- E. How many times did you read it the week before that?
- F. What is your favorite Bible verse? Please quote it for me.
- G. Are you a member of a church?
 - 1). If yes, why did you join that church? What do you like about it?
 - 2). If no, why have you not joined a church?
- H. In what ministries are you serving?

5. Knowledge Minimums to be Born-Again

- A. God is holy
- B. We are sinful
- C. There is a penalty for sin
- D. God became a man, and his name is Jesus Christ
- E. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins on the cross
- F. Forgiveness is available if you repent of your sins and if you trust in Jesus' righteousness *alone* for your acceptance before this holy God
- G. God will begin a life-long process of changing your thinking and behavior to become more like Christ. You are to seek and embrace these changes.

6. Suggested Strategies

- A. Default to viewing counselees as lost until they give you a compelling testimony supported by a lifestyle that is, at the minimum, somewhat Christian.
- B. Assign reading in the Gospel of John. Urge the counselee to pay attention to what Christ says about himself and to his deeds.
- C. Assign memorization of John_3:16-18
- D. Use an evangelistic tract, booklet, CD or DVD that you find beneficial
- E. Use part of each session to discuss the gospel and answer questions
- F. Be alert to opportunities to present Christ and explain the Christian lifestyle as you address presentation problems
- G. When appropriate, call the person to repentance and saving faith

7. How I Usually Present the Gospel in the Counseling Room

To "Believe" involves:

- A. Facts
- B. Commitment
- C. Change

8. Helpful Resources

- A. Presenting the Gospel in its Context (PPt.) by Stuart Scott.
<http://oneeightycounseling.com/resources/the-gospel-in-context/>
- B. “The Liberating Gospel: A Call to Salvation” by Susan Heck (Focus Publishing)
- C. Good News Publishers / Crossway <https://www.crossway.org/tracts/?category=EVGL>
- D. Paul Washer re The Gospel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhoYXcoylBs>
- E. The CrippleGate blog. <http://thecripplegate.com>
- F. Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life by Jeff Vanderstelt (Crossway, 2017)