



What is an Evangelist?

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By John Lynn

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What is an evangelist? That's a good question even if you are not called to be one, because (a) you want to recognize those who are and benefit from their ministries, and (b) every Christian is called to proclaim the "[Good News](#)," so we can all learn something about how to do that. And declaring the glad tidings of salvation is basically what being an evangelist, or "doing the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5)," is all about.

As we look into this, we will also answer the question, "What is evangelism?"—

something every **Christian** is to be wholeheartedly engaged in. Yes sir, if you are a Christian, *you're in sales!* Well, sort of. Actually we're not selling anything, but we are all about *persuading people*. What are we trying to persuade them to do? Sign up for *forever*. How so? We want people to make Jesus Christ their Lord, get born again, and thus have everlasting life, otherwise known as "forever." How long *is* that, anyway? Well, let's just say that, compared to forever, 20 million years is a temporal *hors d'oeuvre*. So signing up for forever is a **big** decision for someone.

Suppose you are looking for a new home, and your real estate agent calls, saying that he has found what he thinks is just the place for you, with the only stipulation being that if you buy it, you must live there forever. Would you have any questions, like "Location? Location? Location? Where will I be forever?" Or, "What are the neighbors like? With whom will I be forever?" Or, "What activities are available nearby? What will I be doing forever?" Or, "What's the climate like—forever?"

Don't you think those are the questions that Christians hear from people we are trying to interest in an eternal home? Sure, and answers like: "Heaven, maybe sitting on a cloud," "I'm not really sure who all will be there," "Playing a harp," and "Thin air" may not get folks to sign on the dotted Romans 10:9 line. The point is that as The Manufacturer's representatives, we Christians must be knowledgeable of the **truth** that appeals to those whose hearts are open to and searching for God.

Now then, the Bible in the room at the last hotel where you stayed was not left there by the Apostle Paul, or the Apostle Gideon—it is not the original copy, nor was English the original language. In fact, had those who penned the New Testament looked at an English manuscript, they would have said, "It's Greek to me." So if we are to look into the English words "evangelist, evangelize, etc.," we must use some tools to dig below the surface of Scripture and "find out what they are made of," so to speak. In this brief article we cannot lay out all that you will find if you study the pertinent Greek words, but we will point you in that direction, and also set forth an overview of these truths.

The relevant Greek words are *evangelizo*, used 55 times, *evangelion*, used 77 times, and *evangelistes*, used 3 times. In Greek, *eu* means "good" and *angelos* (nearly always translated "angel") means "messenger," "one who is sent in order to announce, teach, or perform anything" (E.W. Bullinger Lexicon). The idea conveyed by the *evangelizo* word group is that of proclaiming a good message, or good news. In the KJV, the verb *evangelizo* is translated "preach," "preach the gospel," "bring good tidings," "show the glad tidings," "addressed with the gospel," and "declared." Bullinger's Lexicon says it is "to bring someone into relation with the divine glad message of salvation." The noun *evangelion* is always translated "gospel," and the noun *evangelistes* is transliterated into "evangelist." OK, pass the *baklava!*

Interestingly, a corresponding Old Testament Hebrew word was often used of a messenger coming from a place of battle and proclaiming victory over the enemy. In Greek literature, *evangelizo* was also used of liberation from enemies, as well as deliverance from demonic power.

Some excerpts from Kittels' *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Vol. 2) are insightful:

Unique to the NT usage of *evangelizo* is Jesus, "who is himself the content of his message...If we were to sum up the content of the Gospel in a single word, it would be Jesus the Christ." He "brings the good news of the expected last time" that was foretold in the OT. *Evangelizo* is "not just speaking and preaching; it is proclamation with full authority and power. Signs and wonders accompany the evangelical message. They belong together, for the Word is powerful and effective. The proclamation of the age of grace... creates a healthy state in every respect. Bodily disorders are healed and man's relation to God is set right. Joy reigns where this Word is proclaimed."

"The Gospel does not merely bear witness to an historical event, for what it recounts, namely, resurrection and exaltation, is beyond the scope of historical judgment and transcends history. Nor does it consist only of narratives and sayings concerning Jesus that every Christian should know, and it certainly does not consist in a dogmatic formula alien to the world. On the contrary, it is related to human reality and proves itself to be the living power" [Romans 1:16, anyone?].

"The Gospel does not merely bear witness to salvation history; it is itself salvation history. It breaks into the life of man, refashions it, and creates communities...Since the Gospel is God's address to men, it demands decision and imposes obedience...The Gospel is not an empty word; it is effective power that brings to pass what it says because God is its author."

"Judgment and grace are combined. Judgment is joy, for it destroys sin... Faith arises through the Gospel and is again directed to it...The message demands and creates faith. It contains and imparts peace. It effects regeneration and gives new life...It is an eschatological [that which regards the end times and life after death] event, bringing the fulfillment of hope."

One more Greek word pertinent to this topic and worth studying, because it is connected with *evangelion* in Scripture, is *kerusso*, which is used 61 times and translated in the KJV as "preach" or "preaching" (54), "published" (5), and "proclaimed" (2). *Kerusso* means

“to announce publicly” (which could be one-to-one), and it is more than a lecture, it’s an event. The word has more to do with heralding, or making known, a message than with the subject matter, and to *kerusso* is to tell people what is available, and expect action by the hearers.

OK, so functioning as an evangelist or being active in evangelism—“breaking into the life of man”—has something to do with talking—to live humans. Hey, that sounds a little scary. Well, then we had best think about “what to do with your head to get your [mouth open](#).” And after that we will point out in Scripture some truths about an evangelist and also about evangelism in general.

When it comes to a Christian being energized by the Lord to function as an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher, it seems that, along with one’s desire to serve the Lord in a particular way, he often matches one’s temperament and personality with the ministry he gives a person. For example, one called to be a pastor is often by nature a very easygoing, patient, understanding person, whereas a prophet may be a headstrong, confident, thick-skinned individual. People do change and “grow into” ministries in the Body, but what might be some of the traits of one whose calling is that of an evangelist?

He may well be “Greg A. Rioux,” someone who finds it easy to talk with people. You might say that he thinks of himself as “everybody’s pal.” He may have “the gift of gab.” He may be a “natural born salesman,” someone who finds it rewarding to persuade others to come over to his way of thinking. He might be one who has little fear of people, and a genuine concern for their welfare. He may be a natural motivator, given to inspiring pep talks. Or he may be so enthused about the Good News of Jesus Christ that he pushes himself and grows into these qualities.

How can you find out if you are called as a prophet? Take advantage of every opportunity to utilize the [manifestation of prophecy](#), and see if it flows out of you. How can you discover if you are called as a teacher? Start teaching and see if it comes easily to you, and whether or not you enjoy it (You might also want to notice whether *anyone else* enjoys it). How can you know if you are called as an evangelist? Start telling people about Jesus—which is what every Christian is supposed to be doing anyway—whether one to one or in front of a group.

Here are some practical tips to help you get jumpstarted in bringing others into [relationship](#) with the Good News. Tell yourself, until you are convinced, that you are “everybody’s pal.” Expect people to respond to your friendliness. Make a conscious effort to *smile* at people, even if you do not speak to them. Start saying an upbeat “Hello” to those you might normally pass by. Branch out from that to multi-word greetings, showing yourself friendly to others. Read a book about how to strike up a conversation—or write

one. Ask people questions about themselves and then *listen* to their answers, watching for an open door to relate more deeply with them. People usually don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Surveys show that public speaking is by far most people's greatest fear, other than Rosanne Barr on steroids singing the National Anthem. And for most folks, speaking to even one person is "public speaking." I have too often given in to fear and "baaled out," if you will, on sharing my faith with someone, even people with whom I was acquainted. So how can we as Christians not only get over our fear of telling people the Good News, but also become totally enthusiastic about doing so, to the degree that we salivate for, and seldom miss, an opportunity? [For further study listen to our audio teaching "[Everything You Wanted To Know About Fear, But Were Afraid To Ask.](#)"]

The idea of someone announcing the joyful message of salvation implies that his own opinion of the message is that it is so fabulous that he cannot keep quiet about it, much like whoever first discovers the cure for cancer no doubt will be. He will be driven to boldly share the cure with everyone who has cancer, and will likely not be easily discouraged by an initial rebuff. Of course, only a small percentage of the population has cancer, so he may eventually run out of "customers." "Got sin?" Because every human being's answer to that question is "Yep," that means that there will always be a market for our message.

The key is to know him who is the message, [Jesus Christ](#)—both biblically and experientially—so well that we are absolutely convinced that *he* is the only answer for what ails mankind. In that vein, look at these verses:

2 Corinthians 4:13 and 14

(13) It is written: "I believed; therefore have I spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,

(14) because we know that the one who [raised the Lord Jesus from the dead](#) will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

Energized by a personal relationship with The Evangelist and by the godly desire that "all men be saved and come unto a knowledge of the truth," an evangelist pushes himself or herself (for the sake of grammar, I will use masculine pronouns) not only to learn the basic message of salvation, but also how to present it more and more effectually. He realizes that every time he preaches is another opportunity to improve his communication of the greatest story ever told. Learning to use both [logic](#) and [emotion](#), he hones his ability to vividly set forth the facts of redemption and bring people to a point of decision.

It is significant that the prophecy from Isaiah 61 that Jesus read in the synagogue in

Nazareth near the beginning of his ministry speaks first of his evangelism:

Luke 4:18 and 19 (KJV)

(18) The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel [*evangelizo*] to the poor [literally: “those crouching and cringing in fear”]; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

(19) To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

An evangelist is moved with compassion at the pitiful plight of mankind, and has confidence that the Gospel message will bring deliverance and wholeness to anyone who believes it. He also realizes that he will not know who that is until he speaks the truth in love to them. We find out who is hungry by setting good food in front of them. And, understanding that we are not the Cook, but the waiter, we do not take it personally and give up if people do not eat what we set before them.

The only person in the New Testament who is specifically called an evangelist is Philip (Acts 21:8), and Acts 8 tells us quite a bit about how he carried out his ministry, so let us dissect that record somewhat, with the Scripture references in parentheses for the sake of brevity. The first thing we note is that an evangelist is flexible, and “rolls with the punches” (vv. 2-5), realizing that if one door closes, God will open another and usually someone will believe (v. 12). First and foremost, he preaches Christ (v. 5). An evangelist heals people, does miracles, and casts out demons (vv. 6,7). He brings great joy wherever his message is believed (v. 8).

An evangelist is ready to act on the Word of God, be it the written Word or revelation (v.26,27). He is in the right place at the right time (v. 27,28). He recognizes the voice of God (v. 29), and eagerly and fearlessly “runs” to obey it (v. 30). He employs questions to open people’s hearts (v. 30), and is ready to open his mouth and answer their questions with the Word of God (v. 34,35). He brings people to a point of decision, and “closes” them (v. 37). He does not “rest on his laurels,” but takes advantage of spiritual momentum and keeps on preaching wherever he goes (v. 40). And finally, an evangelist saves money on plane fares (v. 39, 40).

If you look at Galatians 1:6-12, you will find four uses of *evangelizo* and three uses of *evangelion*, and it is very interesting. It’s sort of like, “I’ve got good news and bad news.” The true Gospel, which Paul received by [revelation](#) from Jesus Christ, who is the Good News, is that of salvation by [grace](#) through faith. But there is also a false “Gospel,” that which teaches salvation by works. And that, folks, is the Bad News. A true evangelist preaches the grace of God, and never compromises to please men.

By way of a few more uses of *evangelizo*, let us note other things we can learn about evangelism. An evangelist knows that people in seemingly hopeless situations can be set free (Matt. 11:5), and that they can live without fear (Luke 2:10). He may develop a systematic plan to share the Word in his area (Luke 8:1), knowing that nothing will stop those who hunger for truth from receiving it (Luke 16:16). An evangelist does not let persecution deter him from preaching the Gospel (Acts 5:40-42). His message brings peace to those who believe it (Acts 10:36). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the Good News (Acts 13:32). Evangelism turns people from [idolatry](#) (Acts 14:15). The Gospel message separates those who hear it into three basic categories (Acts 17:18-32)—a “No” today is better than a “No” tomorrow.

An evangelist is warmly welcomed by those who receive his message (Rom. 10:14,15). He is not happy if he is not preaching the Good News (1 Cor. 9:16). Central to his message is the [Secret](#), which he boldly proclaims in order to empower believers to stand against the [Enemy](#) (Eph. 3:7-10). An evangelist not only wins the lost, he also “fires up” believers to go and win them. 1 Thessalonians 3:6 is the only usage of *evangelizo* that does not refer to the Word, and it shows that precious saints standing strong by their faith in the Word is also good news!

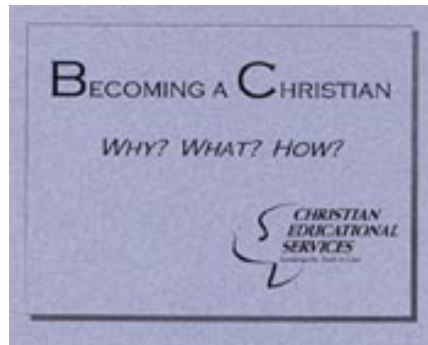
Romans 1:15 is a classic declaration by the Apostle Paul that exemplifies the heart of an evangelist: “So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.” In those days, Rome was about the most challenging place you could find to preach the Gospel (it’s no picnic today, either). So why was Paul so committed to preach the Gospel there? Because of what he says in the next verse: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.” An evangelist believes that with all his heart.

And he is moved to action by Paul’s three questions in Romans 10:14: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” An evangelist longs for others to believe the Good News about Jesus Christ, and realizes the he is one who is called to “go, stand, and tell the people the full message of this new life.” Whether or not you are called as an evangelist, you can do likewise. Maybe consider getting several of our booklet “Becoming A Christian,” and head outside!



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