

A God-Centered Motivation For Reformed Evangelism

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This article presents how a reformed scholar would present the need for Christians to do evangelism according to what the Reformed Churches teach. In the days ahead, we will list how other Christians inside different denominations approach this important topic.

Introduction

Luke records one of the last things Jesus told His disciples before ascending into heaven, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Why do you suppose that Jesus said that? Because “...you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Nothing less than being motivated by the power of the Holy Spirit is adequate for sharing the Gospel! It is better not to share the Gospel than to share it “in the flesh” – in our own strength. Why? Because if the Holy Spirit is not working, evangelism is not happening!

With the right message, method and motivation in evangelism, we can please the Lord in this ministry. Whenever evangelism does not occur, lack of motivation or in some cases, improper motivation, is almost always at the root of the problem! Methods are strictly secondary compared to motivation.

The relationship between the Reformed Faith and the motivation for evangelism is often misunderstood. Some critics ask, “*If God has already predestined those who will be saved, why should we be involved in the ministry of evangelism?*” The same God, who ordains the ends, also ordains the means—the Gospel.

What is the Gospel? What is evangelism? What is the Reformed Faith? What is the proper motivation for evangelism? What motivates us to want to share the Gospel?

What is Evangelism?

When we hear the word “evangelism,” many false stereotypes may come to mind. Whatever our understanding of evangelism, it needs to be tested by the Scriptures. The underlying assumptions of an unbiblical understanding of evangelism involve: an unbiblical theology regarding the goodness and freedom of the will of a sinner and a failure to understand what it means for God to be sovereign in

salvation (Rom. 9:16). It is unbiblical to:

- 1) Demand that someone express repentance and faith by walking to the altar.
- 2) Equate coming to the altar with repentance and faith and thus with salvation.
- 3) Obtain the desired result by psychological manipulation or emotional/social pressure.

All these tactics were introduced by evangelist Charles Finney in the early 1800's.

The English word "evangelism" comes from the Greek "*euangelion*," which means good news. Evangelism is the activity of publishing, announcing or preaching the good news or the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Evangelism is preaching the Gospel! Specifically, it is the activity of proclaiming the Gospel to those outside the congregation.

Christians are motivated in evangelism by their trust in God's power to save through His appointed means – the preaching of the Gospel and the work of the Spirit (Rom. 1:16, 17)

Reformed Christians are motivated not by our love for the goats (those who will never respond to the gospel) but for the lost sheep – those who will ultimately respond to the gospel – those who are elect but who are not in the sheep fold and do not enjoy its privileges.

In 2 Timothy 2:10 Paul says, "Therefore I endure all things **for the elect's sake**, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

Titus 1:1 says, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ **for the faith of God's elect** and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness...."

In Luke 15:11-29, it was the love for the lost son, not the lost servant, that Christ says ought to motivate the Pharisees to preach the Gospel.

What Are the Four Basic Dynamics of Biblical Evangelism?

1. **Message** – we need to be *biblically faithful*. Paul said, "*Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel*" (1 Cor. 9:16b). Every Christian needs to have a clear understanding of the message of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4) and be willing to adapt our methods to that message. We must never subjugate the message to the method. The ends do not justify the means. Paul says, "*This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words*" (1 Cor. 2:13).

2. **Method** – we need to be *culturally flexible*. We need to do God's will God's way. We must not seek to eliminate the "offense" of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:23-24). "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*" (1 Cor. 1:18). We must never capitulate to the culture. On the other hand, we must avoid any unnecessary cultural offense (1 Cor. 9:19-22). Where we can, in good conscience, be like the world in order to reach the world, we ought to consider doing it.

3. **Motivation** – we need to be *motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit*.

God's Spirit provides the love, boldness and enthusiasm that we need to be effective witnesses. We must seek to appeal to an individual at their level of motivation, otherwise the Gospel will seem irrelevant. We must also be sensitive to what God's Spirit desires to accomplish in a person's life. "*None are as blind as those who will not see.*" We are not to cast our pearls before swine. What can motivate anyone more than God's love for us? (2 Cor. 5:10-15)

4. **Man** or individual – we need to be *person-oriented*. God is sovereign in the providential circumstances and ministry context in which we are called to witness to Christ. We need to share God's love at the individual's point of need. We are motivated to do this out of gratitude in response to God's grace. In order to do this we need to be aware of where a person is coming from: his worldview, values, lifestyle, open nerves and felt needs. It is the Holy Spirit's responsibility to convict of sin and give spiritual illumination to the sinner.

Some of the questions we will need to ask ourselves are: How can I establish a personal relationship with a non-Christian? How will I address the needs he knows he has? How will I address the needs I know he has? What is the next step a person needs to take in their spiritual journey? How can God use me to help someone take the next step? When a person responds in faith and repentance, how can I help assimilate him in the life of the church?

What Is The Reformed Faith?

The Reformed Faith believes in God's sovereignty in general and God's sovereignty in salvation in particular. It believes God's grace will ultimately triumph – God's grace is greater than our sin. Salvation is by grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8, 9). God's Sovereign grace is the source and foundation of salvation. God has predestined the elect to eternal life. God gave His only begotten Son to die for those He has given to Christ. Jesus said that He laid his life down for the sheep, not the goats. Those whom God predestines, He calls by the gospel and the Holy Spirit into a saving relationship with Christ. To know God through Christ is eternal life. God's Spirit is at work within us to will and work His good pleasure and He promised that He would continue and complete the work of salvation which He began.

The Reformed Faith also holds that because of the fall of Adam, all men are like Adam; they are dead in their trespasses and sins, totally depraved slaves of Satan, having wills that are not free to be able to choose Christ and salvation and are incapable of initiating or obtaining their own salvation. In short, the Reformed Faith affirms an almighty, gracious God who is sovereign in salvation and a powerless, totally depraved mankind. This truth has huge implications for evangelism!

Many sincere Christians have certain preconceived notions about evangelism that aren't necessarily based on Scripture. For example, there's the notion that:

1. The motivation of evangelism is God's love for all men and His desire to save all men.

2. The Gospel message is the universal love of God, a universal atonement and a universal grace all dependent on the free will of sinners, who, it is thought are able

to choose Christ.

3. The efficacy of evangelism is the persuasiveness of the evangelist and the decision of the sinner's willed will. The Reformed Faith is not only compatible with biblical evangelism; it enables it. What is the Reformed (biblical) evangelism's message, method and motivation?

What Is the Message of the Reformed Faith?

The message of the Reformed Faith is the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). The message never changes although it may be applied differently to different audiences.

A Reformed understanding of the Gospel message needs to include the following:

1. God's Law which the sinner has transgressed and can't keep. (God's law – holy, just, good)
2. A clear analysis of sin and its consequences (Sin and guilt – liability to punishment).
3. The response of a holy and righteous God toward our sin (Wrath and punishment)
4. Christ's death on the cross for the sake of the elect (Substitutionary atonement)
5. Christ's glorious resurrection on the third day after His death on the cross (1 Cor. 15:3, 4)
6. The regeneration of the individual by the Holy Spirit (Regeneration precedes faith)
7. The repentance and remission of sins (Repentance is a gift of God)
8. The response of faith and our justification by faith (Faith also is a gift of God)
9. The imputation of Christ's righteous to the believer (new creatures with new natures)
10. The engrafting of true believers into a biblically based (Reformed) congregation.

Since Jesus clearly taught in John 6:44 that "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...*" the sinner comes to see his great need and utter helplessness. The coming to Christ required in the Gospel-call requires God's efficacious calling or drawing. Repentance and faith are both gifts of God, not human works. The grace of God is irresistible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reformed evangelism is grounded in the gracious election of God. In John 6:37 Jesus said, "*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*" Reformed evangelism does not merely involve a message of the possibility of salvation. Jesus is not one who likes to save but cannot save. A message of salvation dependent on human effort and human will is no gospel at all. It is only in God's sovereign grace that a sinner has hope. It is God alone who saves in every element in the saving process. *Salvation comes from the Lord!* (Jonah 2:9) Our message is the good news of God's sovereign/victorious grace. If this is our message...

What Is the Method of Reformed Evangelism?

The method of Reformed Evangelism is the biblical methods of preaching, teaching and testifying or witnessing for Christ. Christ instructed His followers that

repentance and the remission of sins should be preached in His name among all the nations (Luke 24:47). Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2 that he declared to them “*the testimony of God.*” He said that it pleased God to call His people to salvation by the foolishness of preaching (1 Cor. 1:21). Paul says, “*This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words*” (1 Cor. 2:13).

Preaching is the announcing of the gospel of God’s love in Christ by one called by God and empowered by His Spirit. Every believer is a “*living letter*” to be read and known by all men. We should all be prepared to witness to the truth as God gives us opportunity (1 Pet. 3 :15). We witness with our lives as well as our lips as we speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). We are to live together in such a way that the Spirit will bless our witness to non-Christians (John 13:34, 35). Evangelism depends wholly on the Spirit. We are ambassadors for Christ who bear witness to His grace expressed in His loving forgiveness of our sins (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

The power of evangelism is the Holy Spirit. He sends His laborers into the harvest, He opens doors and hearts to receive the Word of God; He regenerates and unites the elect to Christ; He gifts and places us in the body as it pleases Him. One of the temptations we must avoid is resorting to unbiblical methods or falling back on our own human resources.

We need to realize the limitations of the evangelist. In 1 Corinthians 2:14 Paul said, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” First Corinthians 2:10a says, “But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.” Christ also pointed out the indispensable place of the Holy Spirit in evangelism (Luke 24:49). Since the Holy Spirit is the power in evangelism, we must be filled with and depend upon Him. He gives us wisdom, boldness, love and the courage to speak the truth in love regardless of whatever persecution may come our way.

How Does the Reformed Faith Motivate Us to Do Evangelism?

The motivation of the Reformed Faith in evangelism is that God, by His eternal election of grace, has a people to be gathered by the call of the Gospel. Our motivation is obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus. A further motivation springs from our desire for God to be glorified in all His creation. We speak His truth in sharing the Gospel and we share His love as we seek and enfold His lost sheep. We love the people of God, including the lost sheep, who are to be converted and restored. Jesus had compassion on the fainting, scattered sheep who, without the Word, were sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36-38). Do we?

How is “motivation” generally understood?

Dennis Waitley, in “The Joy of Working” said,

“Motivation is an inner drive, an idea captured in the imagination.”

“Motivation can be harnessed to an intense drive toward a goal.”

“Men and women who are motivated push themselves forward, plow through

the inevitable setbacks, heading ever onward to their dreams.”

“Motivation is essential to succeeding in any endeavor you try.”

Motivation is like “steam.” Properly channeled it can move large objects, like a steam powered train. But without it, the train remains motionless. All the careful construction in preparation for travel is for nothing if there is no steam to propel the train.

So it is with us. If motivated and properly channeled, great things can be done in the area of evangelism. Unfortunately, many people, despite all of the spiritual education they have received on the subject of evangelism, still do very little with what they know. The reason? Lack of proper motivation! Is the Gospel good news to us? Do people have to be coerced or cajoled into sharing good news or does sharing good news just come naturally?

What Should Be Our Motivation in Evangelism?

Well, **what motivated Jesus?** Certainly He was successful in reaching His goals (John 17:4) Since He is to be our example (1 Pet. 2:21), whatever motivated Him should be the motivating force driving His disciples. Here are five things which moved our Lord. The first was...

1. Compassion for Lost Sheep

Jesus was moved with compassion when He saw those who were sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:35-36; 14:14; 15:32). Such compassion motivated Him to do two things:

- 1) To ask His disciples to ask God to “*send out laborers into His harvest*” (Mt. 9:37-38).
- 2) To do something about it (that is, to select and send out His apostles (Mt. 10:1, 5-7).

Are we ever so full of compassion for lost sheep that we do something about it? If we can only have this same compassion for lost sheep as Jesus, we will not rest till we are doing something to find them! We will leave the 99 found sheep to find #1 lost sheep.

How can we develop or strengthen this compassion for lost sheep? The best way is **let God teach us to love**, as He did with the Thessalonians (1 Thes. 4:9). This He does through the example of Christ (1 Jn. 3:16-17). The more we meditate upon God’s love for us as manifested in His Son’s sacrifice, the more we will come to love others!

It also helps to **be around people**. To love people, you have to get to know them. When we do, we can begin to appreciate the saying attributed to Will Rogers, “*I never met a man I did not like.*” So beware of becoming “*wrapped up in your own little world.*” Remember that Jesus was one to become involved with “the multitudes.” Have we allowed the love of God to fill our hearts with compassion for the multitude of lost sheep? Are we making an effort to be around people and getting to

know them? Jesus had,

2. A Sense of Purpose

This motivating force is seen in our Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. While speaking with her, His disciples marveled at what His motive might be (Jn. 4:27). Jesus explained: "*To do the will of Him who sent Me... to accomplish His work*" (Jn. 4:34). He stated this same purpose in life on many other occasions (Jn. 5:30, 36; 6:38; 17:4; 19:28-30). And what was the will of His Father? To save a dying world (Jn. 3:16). To "*seek and save the lost*" (Lk. 19:10).

Do we have this same "sense of purpose" in our lives—to put God's will above all else? Jesus taught that we should put God first (Mt. 6:10, 33). But people often have "**different purposes**" for living. The "workaholics" make their jobs their purpose in life. Many make their families, friends or hobbies the reason for living.

But the "**right purpose**" comes from studying God's Word. As we understand God's will for us, we learn that our purpose for being His special people centers around proclaiming the praises of Him who called us (1 Peter 2:9-10). One way we do this, of course, is through evangelism. Have we let the Word of God develop within us the "right sense of purpose"? If not, our motivation will be inadequate! Another force that moved our Lord was...

3. The Love of the Father

Jesus had experienced "*the love of the Father*", which prompted Him to love others (Jn. 15:9). But it went beyond that. This "love" was such that He wanted to share it with others (Jn. 17:26), even if it was necessary for Him to go the cross to make it possible!

Have we experienced "the love of the Father" in our lives? If so, how can we not be moved (motivated) to want to share it with others? Is it not worth sharing? Of course it is! But if we must confess that our sense of the Father's love is not as strong as we would like, how can we develop a greater sense of God's love for us?

The way to experience the Father's love is to "**keep the commandments of Jesus**" (Jn. 14:21, 23). A most important commandment in this regard is the one to love one another as Christ loved us (Jn. 15:12). This is because loving one another is crucial to experiencing the love of the Father in our lives. As John wrote: "*If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us*" (1 Jn. 4:12).

Another way to increase our experience of the Father's love is to "**make our love for Jesus stronger.**" This is because the Father's love for us is directly related to our love for Jesus (John 16:27). How can one increase their love for Jesus? The best way is to spend time learning more about Him from the Word of God. Have we experienced the Father's love by loving Jesus and keeping His commandments (especially loving one another)? If not, we will not have much worth sharing, nor be motivated to share it! We can also add to our list of the things that motivated Jesus...

4. The Fear of the Lord

Jesus was very much aware of God's "righteous indignation". He taught that we should "fear" God (Mt. 10:28). He warned of the judgment to come (Mk. 9:43-48). Knowing the "fear of the Lord", Jesus was willing to go to the cross that man might be saved. He even prayed for those crucifying Him (Lk. 23: 34). Are we willing to make the effort to save others, like Jesus? We may not have to die for them... But are we even willing to speak to them? Or could it be that we don't take the "fear of the Lord" as serious as Jesus' early disciples did (cf. 2 Co. 5:11)?

How can we develop a healthy appreciation for "the fear of the Lord"? I recommend frequent "**meditation on the Word of God**", especially those portions which describe God's judgments in the past (cf. 2 Peter 2:4-9), and that provide warnings of the Judgment Day to come (2 Thes. 1:7-10; Rev. 20:12-15; 21:8).

Have we, like many, become complacent to the fact that there will be a Day of Judgment and condemnation? Could it be we have not let the Word of God have its true affect on our lives? A lack of concern and involvement in trying to reach the lost for Christ would certainly imply this to be the case! Finally, we see that the Lord was moved by...

5. The Joy Set Before Him

Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus was motivated by the joyful prospect of being with His Father, at His Right Hand. Notice that this enabled Him to "endure the cross" and "despise the shame".

Does not the prospect of spending eternity with God move us to do what we can to save souls? It must, if we also are to be willing to "endure the cross" or "despise the shame" that might be involved in evangelism! To increase our level of appreciating what lies ahead for the faithful, I recommend regular "**contemplation on what God has prepared for us**" as described in the Word of God. I find especially helpful those scenes pictured in Revelation 7:13-17; 21:1-7. It also helps to "**think of what God will do for those we reach**". Paul did, as he describes in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; and it gave him great joy that I am sure helped him to **press on** teaching others.

Conclusion

The ability to press on...this is the **value** of proper motivation. Remember our earlier definition of motivation? "*Men and women who are motivated push themselves forward, plow through the inevitable setbacks, heading ever onward to their dreams.*"

Such was case with our Lord... He fulfilled His goals, being motivated by:

- Compassion for lost sheep
- A strong sense of purpose
- The love of the Father
- The fear of the Lord
- The joy set before Him

Since Jesus is the "**Author**" and "**Finisher**" of our faith (Heb. 12:2), we should be

“looking to Jesus” for the motivation we need to do His will. We should *“consider Him”* (Heb. 12:3), lest we become weary and discouraged in doing God’s will. I am convinced the early church looked to Jesus, and found the motivation necessary to grow as they did. I believe that we can do the same today!

It should be apparent by now that the **“key”** to developing and strengthening the proper motivation is to yield ourselves to the control of the Spirit and to let the Word of God have its intended effect on us.

But if Christians are not daily reading, studying, and meditating upon the Word of God, **then how can we ever hope to stay motivated like Jesus, Paul and the early church?** I believe that if we **do** read, study, and meditate upon the Word of God, then we will be like **Jeremiah**... who at first made excuses (Jer. 1:6), but as he fed on the Word found great joy (Jer. 15:16). So much so, that when ridiculed for speaking, he first tried to refrain, but found that he just couldn’t keep it in (Jer. 20:7-9)!

May we also allow God’s Word, the example of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit to motivate us in evangelizing the lost sheep!