

Evangelism and the Ten Commandments

Have you used the Ten Commandments as your foundation for preparing the self-righteous for the gospel? I've been sharing my faith for over 20 years and see three primary methods of evangelism- all that have benefits:

1. Lifestyle Evangelism: the witness and testimony of a changed life.
2. Apologetics: Evidences that the Bible is accurate, that all prophecies point to Jesus Christ, that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and that He rose from the dead and that God exists.
3. The Ten Commandments: "the Law"

The goal of evangelism is always the same: to get people to embrace the gospel. What is the essence of the gospel? Paul tells us in Romans and summarizes in *1 Corinthians 15:1-5*: That man has sinned against a holy God and is deserving of hell. That the 2nd person of the Triune God, the Lord Jesus Christ, became a man, died on a cross and rose again on the third day, and that through repentance (forsaking all our sins) and faith in Him, we become saved out of our sin and inherit eternal life.

Probably you've noticed what I have when I started evangelizing- this "good news" that was so good and powerful in my life wasn't embraced readily by the vast majority of those I shared it with- family, friends, schoolmates- and I became greatly frustrated, asking myself how I could better prepare people for the gospel- in essence, "Lord, what am I doing wrong?" This led to two approaches that are readily being taught in the church in the 20th Century: learn apologetics, and tell people the benefits of following Jesus- how He's changed your life.

Are these two methods to be the primary drawing cards to bringing people to Christ? What drawbacks are there to these two methods and how does the Law address these?

The Limitations of Apologetics

If we try to approach a person through apologetics, we are doing something that is scriptural- after all, Paul reasoned in the synagogues from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Christ (*Acts 9:20-22*), and Jesus declared Himself as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (*Matt 5:48*). Apologetics primarily focus on winning a person's intellect over to Christ, but it is the conscience where the true battle lies. We all must learn to grow in apologetics, but that is truly not the main battleground to a person's conversion as we shall see. I've preached and written on apologetics for many years and enjoy the subject deeply- it appeals to my intellect, but it is not what brought this atheist to Christ. I now see apologetics as a drawing card in preaching and in one on one evangelism- if I can draw in a person into a discussion on apologetics and satisfy him/her with a few answers, then I can switch to the Law to deal with the real issue: their conscience.

The Dangers of False Conversions

Another drawing card is the witness of our lives and our verbal witness of what Christ

has done for us. After a demon-possessed man in the country of the Gadarenes was healed, Jesus told him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.’ And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.” (*Mark 5:19-20*)

A changed life is a powerful testimony. There are dangers, however, in telling a person to come to Christ so that he/she may be healed of whatever vice is currently wreaking havoc in their lives, or so that they may be fulfilled and receive the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace- or to live a life of happiness. Many evangelical churches today promise fulfillment in Christ and then slip in a quick gospel message at the end with “every eye closed” and the music gently wooing the sinner out of the dark, gently stating our need to trust Christ for the forgiveness of sin. The danger is that a person may not truly understand what sin is and how tremendously he/she has offended a holy God- and thus never experience true repentance, but rather a false faith- a fire insurance.

Nowhere in the scriptures did Jesus or the disciples say, “follow Jesus and have a fulfilling life.” On the contrary, Jesus said, “count the cost” (*Luke 14:28*) and promised hardship, rejection, persecution and hatred from the world to those who would follow Him (*Matt 10:16-40*). Paul promised, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (*2 Timothy 3:12*)

Ray Comfort noted that a major denomination had 284,000 “conversions” in their congregations in one year, only to have 14,000 of them still in the church a year or so later. These results were typical of such evangelism campaigns. What happened to the other 270,000? The vast majority are the false converts described in the parable of the sower and the seed who “when they received the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble.” (*Mark 4:16-17*) Yet others fall away after receiving the word because “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” (*Mark 4:18-19*) Jesus stated this parable of the sower and the seed as the most critical parable, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” (*Mark 4:13*)

Many of the parables have to do with mixture of false and true converts in the church. A false convert is twice dead and much more difficult to reach with the gospel because of the false security that they are saved when they have never truly repented and trusted in Jesus Christ, and in addition, they are yeast mixed in with the dough, greatly damaging the church- indeed, “the last state of that man is worse than the first.” (*Matt 12:45*)

I’ve seen several people pray the sinner’s prayer before me while witnessing one on one in street evangelism years ago and I have to wonder, “Lord, did they really understand repentance?” I can only hope so, for at that time I gave them general passages on sin such as “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (*Rom 3:23*). Let us now take a look at the Ten Commandments and how they are to be properly used in evangelism.

The Purpose of the Law: *Romans 1-7*

Many are concerned that using the Law for evangelism is the equivalent to legalism. Paul noted the proper use of the law in evangelism of unbelievers, “We know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and the insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.” (2 *Tim 1:8-10*)

In the book of *Romans*, Paul lays out the purpose of the law to lead us to the gospel of salvation (1:18-7:27). The purpose of *Romans* is laid out in 1:16-17- that Paul is not ashamed of the gospel that shows “the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes.”

The next verse introduces the desperate condition that mankind is in apart from the gospel: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” (1:18) How does God use us as messengers of the gospel to break through such a powerful suppression to the truth of the gospel- by apologetics or a fulfillment gospel? Such methods will not generally separate men from their cherished sin. God has given us a formidable weapon in evangelism that bypasses man’s intellect. The problem with apologetics is that the carnal mind has two problems with the gospel:

1. “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.” (1 *Cor 1:18*) Before I was saved, I couldn’t imagine why God would have to come down and become a man and die on a cross- it was foolishness to me.
2. The gospel is offensive. “Who are you to call me a sinner? I’m a pretty good person- I’ve never murdered or raped, etc.” Proverbs says, “Most men will proclaim each his own goodness.” (*Prov 20:6*) One of the first questions we often ask people to turn the conversation to spiritual issues is, “Do you consider yourself to be a good person?” Most people say “yes”. An unbeliever will naturally say “yes” if he/she is self-righteous. So here we have the problem: the message of the cross starts out with a fundamental understanding: that we are sinners destined for hell. Thus the gospel is very offensive to the self-righteous unbeliever! Find sounding apologetics will not change this offense, but the Law is a cannon to destroy man’s self-righteousness.

Paul continues in *Romans 1:18-31* to describe the downward spiral of sin leading to judgment. In chapter two he turns the conversation to the self-righteous who see such sin in others but have a hard time seeing it in themselves. Ask a person whether Hitler or Saddam Hussein should go to hell, and there are very few who will try to say that no one deserves hell. Those that deny the need for justice are simply trying to suppress the truth (and such people aren’t worth wasting any more time with!) But then once there is acknowledgement of the need for justice for evil, the person must be aware that he/she

too will face justice: “You are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?” (2:1-3)

Where do we start to help people understand their own sin? Paul goes on to point out something about God’s justice, “There is no partiality with God.” (2:11) When Judgment Day comes, we will all face the same standard.

And what is that standard? Are all sufficiently aware of that standard to be able to be fairly judged by it? Paul continues, “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.” (2:12-15)

We have a powerful ally in witnessing- no matter if the person has ever heard of the Bible or Jesus Christ before- our ally is the person’s conscience. The word “conscience” comes from the Greek “con” which means “with” and “science” which means “knowledge”- we all sin “with knowledge.” When you stole the cookie from the cookie jar, you knew it was wrong. When you lied, your conscience condemned you. We try to suppress our conscience, but it keeps beckoning to us. The law of God is written in our hearts, and we know the Ten Commandments are true- we can do our best to try to wiggle around them through justification, but our conscience is fighting against us while we try! Indeed, the law is written on all of our hearts!

Some people take pride in knowing God’s Law, thinking that because they are of Jewish (or some other religion- Muslim, Protestant, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, etc.) descent, that they are saved because of that. Paul strikes down that argument, “Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the Law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?” (2:17-23) Our upbringing won’t protect us from the righteous, holy demands of the Law. Our love for the Law and our teaching of the Law will not protect us from its demands.

Paul reminded them that the Law is righteous even though it condemns us (3:1-9) and then struck the death blow to all self-righteousness by quoting the Old Testament regarding our sinfulness, “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside.’”

(3:10-11) Paul then graphically goes through just how evil we all are in *verses 12-18*. In powerful conclusion he states the purpose of God's Law: "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it says to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty (accountable) before God." (3:19) As a person comes to grips with their violation of the Law of God written on their conscience, they shut their mouths. We've seen this repeatedly in evangelism- that blessed moment of truth when a person stops the justification and remains quiet, a bit alarmed, guilty, fearful of God. At this point we often see people give a nervous laugh and can tell from their demeanor that the Spirit is working on their conscience. The Law has done it's work- like watching someone being pulled over for a speeding ticket who has come to acknowledge guilt.

Paul continues, "Therefore by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the Law is the knowledge of sin." (3:20) All religions other than Biblical Christianity depend in part on living up to the requirements of the Law. Some of the laws of the particular religion are consistent with the Ten Commandments; others are made up laws or rituals. Regardless of the laws of a particular religion, the conscience of the person bears witness that they have violated God's Law. As God's Law is clearly brought forth, the person will have to wrestle against their conscience to try to falsely justify themselves or come to the conclusion that they are a sinner in a desperate position.

It is at this point, after bringing his readers to the awful conclusion of their desperate situation, that Paul then shares the glorious gospel, "But now a righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, though faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe." (3:21-22)

We should follow in Paul's footsteps: until the mouth of a sinner has been stopped and they understand their guilt before the perfect Law of God, there is no benefit sharing the gospel with them. The gospel is the pearl of great price that we must be willing to sell all to receive- to repent and give up all sin. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." (*Matt 13:46*) To give the gospel to someone who hasn't repented would be what Jesus warned, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." (*Matt 7:6*)

In chapter four of Romans, Paul buttresses his argument that the Law cannot save us by pointing to Abraham and showing that he was justified by faith. "The Law brings about wrath; for where there is no Law there is no transgression." (4:15, *1 John 3:4*)

In Romans five Paul describes original sin in Adam and the resultant death and condemnation of all mankind, "Through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation." (5:18) The Law revealed the sin, "Until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed where there is no Law." (5:13)

The Law has control over our lives until we have died to it- that moment that we truly repent and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, we are dead to the Law and live for Jesus Christ. We enter into a covenant, a type of marriage to Him. The unbeliever is bound by the Law- in witnessing we must bring forth the Law to help the unbeliever see the slavery that they are in to the Law. Paul wrote, “Do you not know...the Law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?” (7:1) As an illustration, Paul chooses marriage, “For the woman who has a husband is bound by the Law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the Law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the Law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another- to Him who was raised from the dead” (7:2-4) As believers, we are free from the Law, but note the implications for unbelievers- they are enslaved to the Law- we must show them the Law to reveal to them their slavery. When they see their slavery, their mouths will be stopped, they will stop trying to justify themselves, and they will look for a Savior, and we know Jesus is the only Savior- it then becomes easy to share the good news!

Paul reminded us again how to show a sinner that he is a sinner: “I would not have known sin except through the Law.” (7:7) As a follower and soldier of Christ, the Ten Commandments are your weapons of modern warfare that will tear down the enemy of self-righteousness and clear the way for the gospel. Paul goes on to be specific: “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” (7:7) We can take unbelievers step by step through the commandments and their own conscience will expose their sinfulness. We don’t have to point any fingers- their conscience, fueled by the Holy Spirit, who, as Jesus said, “will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John 16:8) These are the three main tasks of the Holy Spirit in bringing a person to conviction that leads to repentance.

1. Of sin: the sinner sees himself/herself in light of the Law
2. Of righteousness: the sinner becomes aware of God’s righteousness and that He must judge sin- otherwise God lowers His justice and is no longer a just and holy God.
3. Of judgment: that there is a Judgment Day coming that all will face and have to answer for every sin, every motive, every thought, every deed.

Paul’s Conclusion of the Law’s Power to Condemn

The conclusion of the power of the Law that Paul gives is a personal testimony of where the Law brought Paul right before he got saved. Paul went to Damascus to throw Christians in jail and destroy the church. Jesus spoke to him from the blinding light saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’” (Acts 9:4-5) Paul was fiercely fighting against his conscience. Paul gave up fighting and believed in the Lord Jesus. In Romans 7 we read of the torment of a man convicted by the Law, “For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold

under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do...O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (7:13-24) The term "body of death"- tradition says that an ancient tribe near Tarsus tied the corpse of a murder victim to its murderer, allowing its spreading decay to slowly infect and execute the murderer.

Only the Law can bring a person to such a condition of brokenness- and once they arrive there, how blessed and sweet is the Lord Jesus, "I thank God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!...Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom 7:25-8:1)

Are you using the Law to prepare sinners for the gospel? It is the way of the Master!

In Christ's Love,
Mike Porter

See www.wayofthemaster.com

Matt 3:11,12, 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50, 25:31-33
1 Cor 5:6, Jude 4-23, 2 Peter 2:1-22, 3:16-17
1 John 1:6, 2:4, 18-19, 26, 3:6-8, 10-18, 4:20

This passage also talks of our flesh after we get saved and the battle of every Christian not to live in the flesh or by the Law but die to it and live for Christ and through Christ.

From "The MacArthur Study Bible" commentary on this passage