

SELLING THE GOSPEL

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In the business world, businesses must sell their product or service in order to survive. Whether it is a large global corporation or a "mom and pop" shop, they won't last long if they don't reach some sort of a sales goal. Many companies will spend millions of dollars on advertising and a top notch sales team to boost their revenues. As long as their net income can cover all of these costs, it doesn't matter how much is spent if it will help them get there. There is another market out there that is every bit as competitive as the business world, although it has nothing to do with dollar signs—the spiritual world. There are two competing sides in the spiritual world: Satan in hell and Christ in heaven. Both parties are competing for the souls of men. I'd like to take a look at how the business world compares with the spiritual, why it is our duty as Christians to "sell the Gospel," and how to do it.

The first questions that must be answered are: "What does it mean to sell the Gospel?" and "Why should I sell the Gospel?" Selling the Gospel is simply teaching others about Christ and what one must do to be saved, or evangelism. Selling in business involves marketing which, according to Wikipedia, is the process which creates, communicates, delivers the value to the customer, and maintains the relationship with customers. This process has very similar characteristics to evangelism because when we teach others the Gospel, we must explain the value of obedience to the Gospel and it certainly helps if you can maintain a relationship with that person. The value of obedience is eternal life in heaven with Christ as opposed to eternity in hell with Satan. This value leads us towards an answer to the question of why we should sell the Gospel. The first response that I would submit to you is the fact that Christ commands us to teach others about Him. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." In Heb. 5:12, the writer states, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." We can see from both of these verses that we are commanded in the scriptures to be teachers of the Gospel of Christ as we grow. Certainly, this is sufficient to show us that we are to teach others, but another important reason we must evangelize is that Christ died for the whole world. John 3:16-17, a scripture we are very familiar with says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the

world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Christ died for all of humanity and it is our duty to see that his death was in vain for no one. The souls of the lost are worth saving! Christ died for them too. Let's face it, most of us are Christians because: A) we were born into a Christian family that taught us the truth or B) someone else loved us enough that they taught us the truth. Those of us in one of those categories are extremely blessed and it is our responsibility to share those blessings with others. Another familiar scripture for most of us is found in Matt. 22:36-40, where Jesus answers the question, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." When you truly love someone you want what's best for that person. You certainly wouldn't want a loved one to suffer, and if there was joy to be had, you would want them to experience that joy. So if we love our neighbor as we love self, wouldn't it give us that much more motivation to help save them from eternal pain and suffering?

Earlier, I referenced a passage in Hebrews 5 which reveals there is a progression in the life of a Christian. The people that are to teach others are those that are knowledgeable of the scriptures and can defend the truth. In James 3:1, James states, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment." I have struggled with this verse trying to understand why not many were to be teachers, but when you look at the context it is understandable why James would say this to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. James is not saying that there should be only a couple of teachers per region; rather, the emphasis is, in a day where they had no New Testament Bible, to let the teachers be those who were more learned in the Gospel of Christ and perhaps those who had received the Holy Spirit. Today, we have the Bible in its complete and perfect form and we are to use it not only for personal benefit, but also for the benefit of others.

We shouldn't be discouraged from teaching because of past sins—nowhere does scripture say that one must be perfect, before he/she can teach others. However, we must remember verses like Matt. 7:4-5, "Or how can you say to your brother 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." The idea is that to become teachers we should be knowledgeable of the truth and repentant of our sins. If we look at our lives and we cannot say these things, we need to study and become a better student of the Gospel or we need to repent of our sins and ask forgiveness, or both. Hopefully we can see a little bit better why we should be "selling the Gospel" and when we should do so.

Lessons on why one should evangelize are pretty common in churches today; however, sometimes we don't study enough on how we are to evangelize, or "sell the Gospel." This is where I think it is beneficial to look back at the business world and see how companies use marketing to reach new customers and maintain relationships with customers.

Advertising is a huge component of marketing and can be defined as a form of communication used to encourage or persuade an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to continue or take some new action, according to Wikipedia. Television, radio, print publications, internet, direct mail, signage, product placement, mobile devices and sponsorships are different mediums of advertising that businesses use to promote their product or service. Sales, another important part of marketing, has different mediums as well, some of the more common being: direct sales (person to person contact), agency-based sales (ex. travel agent), retail sales, telemarketing sales, door to door sales, internet sales, mail-order sales, etc. The types of sales and marketing strategies vary from company to company depending on their particular target market, or the type of customer they are targeting. For example, lets say ABC corp. sells action-figure toys. Do you think ABC will advertise through direct mail and have a telemarketing sales strategy? Of course not! Since children (or their parents) would be the target market for their products, ABC would most likely advertise their toys on television, specifically on kids channels like Disney or Cartoon Network so that it will be seen by children. Since most people buy toys in retail stores this would be the sales strategy that ABC would attempt to employ.

What does all of this have to do with evangelism? I believe that understanding how different types of people react to different types of sales pitches, whether they be business or evangelical, can greatly improve the number of sales, or souls, gained. In the parable of the sower found in Matthew 13, we see that when the Gospel is preached it will be heard by all kinds of people. Some will not believe, some will believe only to fall away later, and some will believe and stay faithful. It's important to note that the sower doesn't discriminate as to where the seed falls (that is, to whom the word is preached). All are worthy to hear the Gospel; what they do with it is their responsibility. Like the business world, due to increasing denominationalism, Christian doctrines have become very competitive and, to use another business term, market-share is tough to gain. So, how do I sell people, or convince people, to obey the Gospel? When the apostle Paul preached to a new group of people, usually he would establish some common ground and build rapport with them before revealing their need to repent and obey the Gospel. This is exactly how sales people operate. It works for them and it worked for Paul, why wouldn't it work for you or me? The person that you are teaching should feel the love and genuine care and concern for their soul when you are speaking to them (after all, they are your neighbor and you do

love them, right?). Like business advertising and sales strategies, you can reach the lost in a variety of ways. There's nothing wrong with door to door teaching, as is the notable practice of certain denominations. I would recommend starting with people you already know and with whom you already have that common ground and rapport. There are a thousand ways to spark conversations with co-workers, friends and family members. It's just a matter of busting out of our comfort zone and risking a friendship that probably wasn't worth having in the first place if they respond negatively towards you. It's possible that most people will not really listen to what you have to say, but continue being friends with you just the same. Some might even look at you crazy, but eventually someone may respond as did three thousand Jews in Acts 2. That someone will make it all worth it, I assure you!

There are several other ways to evangelize in today's world. The internet has certainly been used for much evil, but it can also be utilized for good and it should be. You can use social networks, chat rooms, email, forum discussion boards, instant messenger, and the list goes on of ways to reach people online. Personally, I have used an East Texas-based website that has forum discussion boards on all different kinds of topics, although it is mostly about sports. In the General Topics Forum, I have been involved in several different religious discussions and used those discussions to defend the truth. Even though no one (that I know of) has been converted from the different discussions, many people were introduced to the truth and I gained a lot from the amount of study that it involved. Whether or not the internet is your thing, opportunities abound to teach others and a simple invitation to come to church or a Gospel meeting goes a long way. It is always important when "selling the Gospel" to establish common ground, build rapport, treat them as you would want to be treated, and most of all show them love and a genuine care and concern for their soul.

This article is to myself first, but hopefully there is something written here that will be beneficial to you as you grow spiritually and win souls for Christ. I've heard people say that they would rather see a sermon than hear one, emphasizing the importance of being a good example for others to follow. Certainly, being a good example is essential, but it shouldn't stop there. In order to convince someone to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of their sins, confess Christ, be baptized for forgiveness of their sins, and continue living a faithful and obedient life, they must to hear the word of God. You have to sell the Gospel! Businesses sometimes will send out thousands of direct-mail marketing materials, only to gain a handful of customers. Similarly, when we sell the Gospel, we shouldn't expect three thousand converts each time, but with every soul the truth is exposed to, there is a chance!