



## **Keep It Clear And Simple**

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**Synopsis: Good communication is an art--especially appreciated when it comes to sharing the gospel. Here's how to keep the content and condition clear.**

### **Introduction**

What does a person have to believe in order to be saved? I have heard everything from "Believe in God" and "Obey the Ten Commandments" (or "Obey the Sermon on the Mount") to "Just believe that Jesus loves you."

### **Defining the Content**

Nowhere in the NT is the Gospel laid out more clearly than by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul reminds the Corinthians about the Gospel that he preached, that they received, and by which they were saved. The message was the one Paul received personally from God (v 3; cf. **Gal 1: 12**).

In vv 4-5 we find two great propositions of the Gospel and their supporting evidence. We could diagram the verses like this:

- First proposition: Christ died for our sins
  - la) Scriptural proof: According to the Scriptures
  - lb) Physical proof: And was buried
  
- Second proposition: He arose
  - 2a) Scriptural proof: According to the Scriptures
  - 2b) Physical proof: And was seen

In summoning the evidence for his propositions, Paul is arguing his case like any good lawyer (the possible oxymoron noted!). A brief explanation of each of the statements follows.

*Christ died for our sins.* That He died for our sins implies that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. The word "for" (hyper) conveys the idea of "on account of," i.e., to deal with our sins.

*According to the Scriptures.* The OT Scriptures pictured or predicted the suffering of God's Messiah (e.g., Exodus 12; Leviticus 16; Psalm 22, 110; Isaiah 52-55, especially 53:4-6).

*And was buried.* This statement functions as Jesus' death certificate. It reminds the reader of the many eyewitnesses to His death, the best evidence which could be summoned. Only *dead* men are buried. Christ's death was witnessed by multitudes, including the soldier sent to break His legs. The grave and body were also attended by Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, the women, and soldiers sent to guard the tomb.

*He arose.* The second proposition attests to Christ's resurrection from the dead, which implies that God accepted the sacrifice. A dead man cannot save anyone. A Savior has to be alive. Only then can He offer and effect salvation.

*According to the Scriptures.* It is harder to find the resurrection of Christ in the OT. However, it is there not only explicitly (e.g., **Ps 16:8-11; 110:1**), but also implicitly. When the suffering and death of the Messiah is discussed, this is often followed by a declaration of His reign (cf. Isaiah 53). The implication is clearly that He rose from the dead.

*And was seen.* Paul lists those who were eyewitnesses. This included the apostles (men of repute), a multitude of five hundred, and himself (vv 5-8).

## **Communicating the Content**

Having reviewed the biblical content of the Gospel, what errors do Christians commonly make in articulating its contents? The art here is discerning how much to say. We can say too little or too much.

### **Saying too little**

People can be told that God loves them, but certainly that is not enough to save them. They can be convinced they are terrible sinners, but still not know how to deal with that sin. A persuasive speaker can move people to some kind of response without them knowing exactly what they are responding to. Evangelists know this. Some abuse this. Much so-called "evangelism" is more hype than substance. No wonder there are so many false professors in the church!

### **Saying too much**

A witness is not the time to dump our "smarties" on a bewildered unbeliever. Too often we try to give too much biblical data. If we start in Genesis, there's a good chance we will lose our audience by Leviticus, the Bermuda Triangle of the Bible. How much Bible did Jesus use with the woman at the well (John 4), or Paul with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16)? We can tell people only what they need to know from the Bible to be saved, unless circumstances require more explanation. Having said all that, we state an important caveat: It does no good to talk about concepts like sin unless our audience has an idea of what it means. We must be careful not to assume too much biblical background for our audience.

## **Conclusion**

Clear communication is an art. When it comes to telling the Gospel, it is an art worth refining. We must work to tell the Gospel as clearly as possible. Not always will we succeed. But isn't it a wonderful fact of life that God can still use us in spite of the misplaced approaches and methods that we use? We know, however, that He can accomplish more through us according to how clear and biblical our message and our methods are. Given all that is at stake, we want to share the Good News as clearly as possible in a way that is pleasing to God, not just convenient to men.

We give the last word to the Bible:

*But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.*

**-1 Thessalonians 2:4-**

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