



## **NO CONTEST**

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People don't need to know what you know; they need to know what Jesus means to you.

You don't need to impress anyone with your Bible knowledge. You don't even need to prove the reasonableness of the Scriptures.

People want to know if your faith is genuine: Is it more than a doctrinal position? Is it an effective guide for daily living? Does it help you make sense of life's inconsistencies and injustices?

Let me pause for a moment right here, because I realize that what I just suggested with those questions may puzzle you. That's a tall order, isn't it? Let's look at each one for a moment...

### **Is my faith more than a doctrinal position?**

As Christians, we believe the Bible is God's message to humanity—about Himself, about the human race, and about the relationships for which He designed us. But there is much that the Bible offers that we are unaware of, or unfamiliar with, or uncertain of. What is most important is that you believe in the God of the Bible, not that you know with certainty everything that can be known about Him.

A creedal statement (like our Statement of Fundamental Truths) summarizes the most important things the Bible teaches—the foundation of our faith. But the depth of each truth will take a lifetime of prayerful research to explore. While we are exploring and learning and growing in our familiarity with the truth, and developing our ability to live it and express it to others, we need to offer each other a lot of grace and encouragement.

Faith has not been given to me in order to wrestle with others, but in order to be faithful to my Lord. Am I faithful? Am I obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit? That's what's important.

### **Is my faith an effective guide for daily living?**

There will be no written exam concerning my faith. And yet, I am being examined every day! The exam is not about my head knowledge, but about my submission. Have I surrendered my

will to the will of the Father? Not only as I know it, as if the bar is set by my understanding, but as I encounter it? For the bar is not set by me, but by God, through the circumstances He allows in my life.

If you believe that God is sovereign—that He has and exercises control over everything, and nothing happens apart from Him—then there really are no accidents. Our actions may be unintentional, but they are not outside of God’s permissive oversight. He allows nothing to touch you that He has not planned to help you face and overcome.

If you exercise your faith within the events of each day, as they come to you, you will discover more and more of the overcoming power of faith in Christ. If, instead, you grumble and complain (like a victim) about the circumstances you encounter, or the things that happen to you, it is unlikely you will overcome or learn anything new about the Lord’s wisdom and power. Probably, you will just become stressed and anxious and bitter and hardened in your heart.

Don’t think for a moment that God intended that for you; He did not. But your lack of confidence in His wisdom and power has led you to blame others for the trouble you face and rely on yourself to fix it.

Of course, others may be responsible for your trouble, but that’s part of your faith-challenge (How to love them, even so?). Their fault is not your concern; your faithful response is.

And of course, you may need to do something about the situation you find yourself in, but to do anything without asking God for wise direction and moral strength, is an exercise in faithlessness.

### **Does my faith help me make sense of life’s inconsistencies and injustices?**

If I believe in the God of the Bible, then I must believe also in sin as He described it. According to the Bible, sin is more than a human act that is contrary to God’s will; it is the human attitude of contrariness toward God Himself, especially His right to rule. It is our inclination to choose our own way through life (as if we know what we’re doing and what is best).

Sin not only infects my will and corrupts my relationships (generating my inconsistencies), but it sets the entire human race on a collision course with one another, like a massive bumper car field (creating all manner of injustices)—only this is no game; it can be deadly.

If God grants me free will, and my will is corrupted by sin, I’m going to do bad things, intentionally or unintentionally. I’m going to step on your toes. I’m going to act contrary to your wishes. I’m going to be thoughtlessly unkind. And so are you. When we do, we can either love and forgive one another, as Christ commanded, and win a victory in the spirit, or we can retaliate in the flesh and lose the prize.

My faith in God explains the source of the problems of life, even when it cannot prevent them. And, my faith gives credence to the goodness of God, even when He allows us to behave evilly.

People don't need to know what you know; they need to know what Jesus means to you. People want to know if your faith is genuine and effective. If it's not, you have some work to do. Get after it!

Sharing your faith in Christ with other people is called "evangelism." It comes from the Greek word *euangelion* which has been translated "glad tidings" or "good news." It is a verbal proclamation of the Good News about Jesus Christ—who He is and what He's done for us—with the intent of awakening similar faith in those who listen.

Can you see now that if you are *not* persuaded that God is good, regardless of your circumstances, you will have no "good news" to share? That is the path of your faith journey: to discover and embrace the goodness of God in your circumstances. How are you doing with that?

### **Evangelism is Not a Contest**

Evangelism is not a contest.

Evangelism is not a contest of texts.

Evangelism is not a contest of beliefs.

Evangelism is not a contest of morality.

Evangelism is not a contest of ideologies.

Evangelism is not a contest of local churches.

Evangelism is not a contest of religious preferences.

Evangelism is *not* a contest.

Some people will try to draw you into a contest. Your own human nature may want to go there, to win your point. Don't. Evangelism is not a contest.

You won't win people to faith in Christ by loudly disagreeing with their beliefs, or insisting that they are wrong and you are right, but you may win some by showing them Christ's love and light so brightly that they want with all their hearts to know where it comes from.

### **Evangelism is not a contest of TEXTS.**

If you are trained in apologetics, and familiar with ancient documents and languages and archeology, then you may be able to defeat their conjectures, but it's unlikely you will win them to Christ on that basis.

The Jewish sect of the Pharisees created an elaborate system for preserving the written record of God's truth (the Bible)—the truth about Himself, about His chosen people, and about His design to bless all the peoples of the world.

Yet, God's Word is not just a scroll or a book. It is *“alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joints and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.”* (Hebrews 4:12-13)

God's Word is a Person—the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the living, breathing Messiah. Jesus confronted those who made a god of the text, saying, *““You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me! Yet you refuse to come to Me to receive this life.”*

I have a painting that hangs in the hallway of our offices that shows John Wesley—a powerful evangelist himself, and founder of the Methodist Church—sending a boatload of young ministers from England to the American frontier with these simple, yet poignant, words, “Give them Christ.”

### **Evangelism is not a contest of BELIEFS.**

If you attempt to show someone that your belief yields greater benefit than their belief, you will end up in a shouting match. People adopt beliefs because to them they make some sense of the world; they provide some comfort or hope, or at least, a sense of security. Those are emotional positions, not intellectual ones. As such, they are tightly held, and seldom let go long enough to test another position.

James wrote, *“You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?”* (James 2:19-20)

And that is what “beliefs” are: faith without corresponding actions. They may motivate such actions, but in themselves, beliefs are incomplete—seeds that have not yet germinated.

To believe in God is good, but having right beliefs about what is true or false, what is right or wrong, what is good or bad, cannot MAKE a person true or right or good.

The world is full of people whose consciences condemn them, because what they believe and what they do are not aligned. And the world is full of others who play the hypocrite, who only pretend to believe.

Yet, *“if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.”* (Matthew 17:20)

## **Evangelism is not a contest of MORALITY.**

My morals are superior to yours. We don't smoke, we don't chew, we don't run with those who do. We drink only non-alcoholic beverages. We worship on the seventh day (sabbath). And the lists go on and on.

We DO this. We DON'T DO that.

We GO here. We DON'T GO there.

We SAY this. We DON'T SAY that.

This is the moral yardstick. Each of us has one (that's a given). But you're supposed to use it for SELF-evaluation, not for judging others. How are you living up to the standard of behavior the Holy Spirit has called you to? Is your conscience clear? Or cloudy?

*"Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye, but fail to see the beam of wood in your own?" (Luke 6:41)*

*"Therefore do not let anyone judge you with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or Sabbath days—these are only the shadow of the things to come, but the reality is Christ! 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!' These are all destined to perish with use, founded as they are on human commands and teachings." (Colossians 2:16-22)*

If you believe that and have found spiritual freedom from such things, rejoice! But be careful that you don't turn it around and harp on others for such things—judging them *"with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast... or [holy] days."*

## **Evangelism is not a contest of IDEOLOGIES.**

Some propose that Christianity just makes more sense. Some emphasize its religion, while others emphasize its social justice. Some want to turn faith in Jesus into a system of psychology for improving relationships. Others want to use it for economic enrichment and business empowerment. Some propose that Christianity serves as a fitting political platform. Some like it for theological sparring. Others use it for moral policing.

However, ideologies (Christian or not) are temporal, serving only for this life and impacting only this world.

*"If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world." (1 Corinthians 15:19)*

The Gospel that we preach is a glorious truth from an eternal realm that has the power to transform the values, methods, and aims of life in this world, to produce a lasting impact and beauty in the next.

### **Evangelism is not a contest of LOCAL CHURCHES.**

Our church is better than yours. Bigger. More popular. We offer more programs. Better music. Automated lighting. And we require only an 8% tithe!

We provide off-street parking. With parking attendants. And reserved spaces for VIPs. And a shuttle to the front door.

Friendly competition, it's called. Until it isn't. Poaching sheep from one fold to another. Putting down the preacher who serves across town. Gossiping about fellow believers. Pretending that our church has the richest anointing. The deepest worship. The soundest Bible teaching.

The responsibility of church leaders is *"to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ... until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:12-13)

Because Jesus prayed, *"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in Me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as You and I are one—as You are in me, Father, and I am in You. And may they be in Us so that the world will believe You sent Me.*

*"I have given them the glory You gave Me, so they may be one as We are one. I am in them and You are in Me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that You sent Me and that You love them as much as You love Me."* (John 17:20-23)

Not uniformity, but authentic, loving unity is His goal—and should be ours, too.

### **Evangelism is not a contest of RELIGIOUS PREFERENCES.**

Our doctrine is purer. We only use the King James Bible. We take communion every week. Our rituals are less pompous, or more meaningful, or more Biblical. Our pastor wears a robe / necktie / 3-piece suit.

Most of the time, these are cultural customs, not commandments. Every Christian, and every church, develops its own customs and traditions. That's not wrong; that's how societies function.

But if our traditions replace the teaching of Scripture, or become the rule by which we imagine other Christians (or ALL Christians) are supposed to live, then our traditions have become our masters, and we their slaves.

*“For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity to indulge your flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law can be summed up in a single commandment, namely, ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’”*  
(Galatians 5:13-14)

Evangelism is not a contest.

In fact, if a person reads some non-Biblical spiritual texts, or has some non-Biblical beliefs, or engages in some questionable moral behaviors, or carries some strange ideologies, or doesn't participate in a local church, or holds to some weird religious preferences—*they can still get saved*. Such were every one of you! And look what Jesus has done!

These things, even all of them together are not deal-breakers for God. After all, He's a Savior. He rescues the lost. He mends the brokenhearted. He sets captives free. He encourages the timid. He soothes the anxious. He directs the confused.

If you've been caught in the very act of a grievous sin, Jesus says to you, *“I don't condemn you. Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace and sin no more.”*

Evangelism is not a contest.

If you approach sharing your faith as if it is a contest of sorts, then your focus will be on yourself. Perhaps you may be trying to prove yourself (out-argue their objections, put another notch in your Gospel belt, gain the admiration of your Christian friends), or conquer your own fear or anxiety (again, a focus on yourself), or fulfill a sense of Christian obligation (do your religious duty for Jesus).

What should be your focus instead?

First, focus on the person right in front of you. Think about their value in the eyes of God. Think of the Lord's longing to know them and show them His grace. Think of their need for forgiveness and a new birth. Consider the potential release of Kingdom virtue through their life into their home and their work.

If you can't get a glimpse of the end from the beginning, then you can't act in faith. You don't need the whole picture, and will never have that, but the Holy Spirit can give you a glimpse if you ask Him.

Don't get stuck (as so many do) on their past (their mistakes, their sins—all of which Jesus can manage very well). Don't get distracted by their present (their attitude or their appearance). You need to reach for their future.

Any ordinary person can see what they have failed to achieve and criticize them for it. But you, with the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus Christ, can see so much more (if you look with eyes of faith), and can begin to call them toward what Jesus can make of them. Deliver even the smallest part of their upward calling. Proclaim the Good News!

Here's how Paul described it (Philippians 3:12-16):

*"It's not that I've already reached the goal or have already completed the course. But I run to win that which Jesus Christ has already won for me. Brothers and sisters, I can't consider myself a winner yet. This is what I do: I don't look back, I lengthen my stride, and I run straight toward the goal to win the prize that God's heavenly call offers in Christ Jesus.*

*Whoever has a mature faith should think this way. And if you think differently, God will show you how to think. However, we should be guided by what we have learned so far."*

And, focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't make this about your knowledge or their lack of knowledge, nor about your understanding and their misunderstanding.

The Good News is not *about* news; it *IS* news; and the news is about Jesus Christ.

Make it about Him. What He's done for you, what He's done for them. The One who loved you and gave Himself for you. The One who died and rose again to bring everlasting life into our hearts. Think about the fulfillment of His saving grace. The extension of His kingdom.

Evangelism is not a contest. It's not a debate; it's a love story. The world's greatest love story. Let that come across as you tell it. In your attitude. In your words. In your goals and objectives.

You can't force love. But if it's real, it will persist. And God's love is real. Communicate that.

And when love persists, it will win, if you wait for it. And you must wait for it. You can't hurry it. It's like marinade and slow-cooking; not pressure-cooking.

Let's pray for those we want to tell. And let's pray for more of the Spirit's power to operate in our lives.

You have a story to tell that others want to hear, need to hear. It's not a contest; it's a gift of love.