

LESSON ESSENTIALS

INTRODUCTION TO EVANGELISM

LESSON 5: IDENTIFYING WORLDVIEWS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

This lesson will help you understand why it's important for you to know your audience before you start sharing the Gospel. Apostles Paul and Peter made it a priority to learn about the people they shared the Gospel with, and we all know how effective their ministries were. Read on to find out how you can adopt their strategy of understanding different worldviews, so that you can relate to your audience better.

The Great Commission gives us the responsibility of preaching to 'all' the nations. So it is vital to understand our audience and their worldviews.

'All nations' include people of different races, cultures, religions, social backgrounds, economic status, etc. Even though the message does not change, we can't apply the same strategy to every individual we evangelise to. In the end, it is God who touches a person's heart, but we need to communicate the message in a way that is understood by our audience. That's where a little understanding of different worldviews can be helpful.

All effective communicators of the Gospel make it a priority to understand the background and worldview of their audience because a person's worldview and belief-system has a big impact on how they see the Gospel. A clearer understanding of both will help an evangelist bridge those barriers.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19) Have you ever spent some time thinking about what this verse means? 'Go' is a command given to us by our Saviour. Whether we like it or not, the range of people we are to reach is extremely wide and diverse. 'All nations' include people of different races, cultures, religions, social backgrounds, economic status, etc. Even though the message does not change, we can't apply the same strategy to every individual we evangelise to. In the end, it is God who touches a person's heart, but we need to communicate the message in a way that is understood by our audience. That's where a little understanding of different worldviews can be helpful. By worldview we mean the way in which a person sees the world, based on the environment that he's grown up in – his culture, economic status, religious beliefs, family background, etc.

An evangelist once went to preach the Gospel in a village. To his great joy, when he asked if anyone wanted to follow Christ, a good number of people responded. Unaware of the fact that those villagers worshipped a series of gods and their wives, the preacher went home feeling very happy and satisfied. It was only later when one of the villagers inquired about Jesus' wife that the preacher found out about their background and their belief in multiple gods. If he had preached to them with a prior understanding of their background, his message would have been different and probably more effective. You definitely wouldn't want that to happen! Even though the preacher went to the village with the good intention of saving the lost, he did not effectively preach the truth because forgot to study his target audience.

All effective communicators of the Gospel make it a priority to understand the background and worldview of their audience because a person's worldview and belief-system has a big impact on how they see the Gospel. A clearer understanding of both will help an evangelist remove barriers and communicate the Gospel in a way that their listener(s) will be able to understand.

Both Peter and Paul recognised the importance of learning about their audience beforehand. In Acts 17:22-33, Paul preaches a sermon to the Athenians that is relevant to them. He starts his message talking about them, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.'" Even though Paul hadn't spent a long time in Athens, he paid close attention to the indicators of

their religion and views. He observed that the Athenians worshipped many idols and loved discussions and rhetoric. He not only proclaimed the gospel to the people, but also ‘reasoned’ with them because they loved reasoning.

Like Paul, we too should approach people of different faiths and nationalities intelligently. A fair understanding of their religion and background can go a long way in presenting the truth to them. You can often learn some things about them based on what you know about their religion, culture, upbringing, economic status. But what do you do if you have just met them, or if you are going to speak to a group and you only have a little bit of time beforehand to meet with them? Ask them! They will be the best ones to tell you what they believe about the world, about God, and many other things. By talking with them and truly listening to what they say and how they say it, you will be able to fine-tune the way you present the Gospel. Do they worship many gods? Talk about God as Paul did, the one God, who is all-powerful in every way. Are they oppressed? Talk about the God who can save them from their trouble and bring them hope. Do they come from a culture that loves family? Talk about God as a loving Father, wanting to adopt us into his family. When we really listen to what our audience is saying, we can learn so much that makes us able to make our all-important message that much easier for them to understand and accept.

IN REVIEW

- When we communicate the gospel, it is essential to know the worldview of the receiver.
- A worldview is the way in which a person sees the world, and it is affected by their upbringing, religion, social and economic status, culture, and other things.
- In the Bible, Paul also communicated the Gospel based on the worldviews of his audience.
- We also need to identify the worldview of our listener or audience, so that we can preach the Gospel effectively.

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HAVE YOUR SAY

- How can you learn about the worldview of someone you are ministering to? What kind of preparation would it involve?
- What lessons can you draw from Paul's ministry?
- Think about the religion(s) or worldviews that are common in your area. What are they? How can you communicate your message in the most effective way to these people, while being sensitive to their worldview, beliefs and values?

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