

**Core Seminar**

**Evangelism**

**Class 7: What if They Reject Me?**

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Welcome to the Evangelism C.S., Introduce yourself / co-teachers, Handout, Pray

**Introduction**

It might be hard to believe, but we have now come to the eleventh class in our evangelism course. That means that after today, we have only two classes remaining. Next week, we will look at some common objections to the gospel that we are likely to encounter in evangelism. Then, we will conclude the course the following week with a panel of CHBC members who are actively pursuing evangelistic opportunities in various contexts, from the workplace and the home to college students and the mission field. Come with your questions, to be sure, because we'll reserve some time for Q&A.

Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, however, we should focus in on our topic of discussion for this morning, and that is: What do you do when the person you've shared the Gospel with does not react the way you had hoped -- rather, they have reacted in the exact opposite way you had hoped? How do you deal with rejection?

Now, let me say up front, that there are lots of reasons that we can get rejected. For being jerks, for instance. For not letting up when someone has asked us to. For treating people poorly. For not listening to them. For being manipulative. For sinning against them. For being recklessly provocative. This morning, when I refer to rejection, I am not talking about that kind of rejection. That's the subject of another class. This morning we are talking about getting rejected as a result of our witness for Christ in relationships with people God has put around us.

**I. A Hypothetical That Isn't So Hypothetical**

To set the stage, I thought I would begin by laying out a hypothetical situation. It might seem far-flung for some of us, but it is a situation that many of us have already found ourselves in -- and, if we would endeavor to be faithful evangelists in the future, will very likely find ourselves in with some frequency.

Here's the situation:

After praying, as we've been entreating you too over these 11 weeks, for God to give you a passion for evangelism. After praying that he would lay on your heart people around you who need to hear the gospel. After asking for opportunities to share with people at work, or in your neighborhood, or in your family. After doing all of that, you finally step out in faith, in confidence -- sure, with some nervousness, but trusting God nevertheless -- and you begin to engage, to think strategically about sharing the Gospel.

You begin to engage with your unbelieving co-worker with whom you've worked on lots of projects and always sit beside in meetings and sometimes grab a beer with after work and generally enjoy being around and even occasionally talk to about your personal life and about your favorite British rock bands …

Or, with your unbelieving parents, the two people that you know and love more than anybody in the world and whom you are certain know you and would take a bullet for you in a heartbeat …

Or, with your unbelieving child, the human being whom you brought into the world and served and supported and made sacrifices for, thanklessly, throughout elementary school and high school and college …

Or, with your unbelieving neighbors, the couple you feel comfortable having over for dinner and whom you went to see at the hospital when they got sick and let borrow your car when their ride was in the shop and with whom you share an affinity for congressional politics or Alabama football or gardening or travel …

Or, with one of your closest friends, the person who is part of so many of your sweetest memories, the person who was there for you in the hard days following a breakup or a career disappointment, the person who knows you like a sister or brother and in front of whom you hold little to nothing back …

Or, on the mission field with someone from the people group you've been praying for months, even years, someone who may never have met another Christian had you not introduced yourself and struck up a conversation with them …

… With that person, in conversation at your desk at work or over coffee or around the kitchen table or driving in the car or talking in front of the apartment complex, you find yourself, by God's grace, turning the talk towards spiritual things. With your coworker, the one who likes British rock bands, you start talking about Coldplay's new album. There's a song on there called, "Paradise," a song about hoping for a better life, and you ask your coworker what they think about the idea of paradise, of heaven. They ask you what you think.

Before long, you are sharing the Gospel, sharing with them about how God made us to love and worship and live for him but instead of doing that we've all rebelled against him and lived as if we were God. You point their attention to how the fallout of that rebellion is evidenced in how broken the world and our very own lives are.

You tell them about how God, because he is perfectly good and perfectly just would be right to punish us for those sins forever and ever. Then you tell them how God, because of his great love, sent his son, Jesus, into the world, and how this Jesus, though he never sinned, died on the cross as a sacrifice for sinners, and then raised from the dead three days later, proving that God has accepted the sacrifice. You tell them how they can be forgiven of their sins and made right with God if only they will repent of their sins and put their faith in Christ.

In your heart, you are praising God. He has answered your prayer. He has given you the chance to share the Gospel, but your joy is soon interrupted by what follows. In the ensuing days, your co-worker begins avoiding you in the office and talking about you behind your back. Your parents get up form the table -- as mine did on numerous occasions -- and storm out of the room. Your child laughs at you and begins coming around less and less.

Your neighbor puts a finger in your face and says don't ever talk to me about that again. When the bowl game rolls around, the game you always watched at their house, there is no invitation this year. "You have a lot of nerve," your best friend says -- and when you bring up the gospel again, and again, you see them mentally turn off. In pictures on Facebook you start to see other faces where your face used to be. And on and on.

You feel almost unbearably let down. Perhaps you feel abandoned. Perhaps you even, in the back of your mind, silently wish you'd never opened your mouth to begin with. After all, weren't things better, or at least more enjoyable, more comfortable before? Why is this happening, you wonder? Are you just an awful evangelist? What does it mean that the people you love the most, and whom you always thought loved you the most -- what does it mean when those people reject the gospel, and seem to reject you because of it?

As I was writing this manuscript, I was struck by the weightiness of what we have been teaching you over these past weeks. The reality is this: The things we have tried to impart to you -- the great commission that is held out to believers in Matthew 28, Peter's enjoiner in 1 Peter to always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in you with gentleness and respect -- these things, if employed, may very well result in hardship for you, not because sharing the Gospel is a burden or some sort of joyless drudgery -- no, in fact, it is a privilege to be entrusted with the Gospel and it often results in all kinds of joy -- but because sharing the Gospel sometimes can come at great personal cost, as many in this room can undoubtedly attest.

So, having laid out for you that series of hypothetical situations that are, in reality, not all that hypothetical, I want to spend the remainder of our time answering a couple of questions and then I want to leave you with a handful of encouragements in the hopes that you will recall them if and when rejection comes in response to your evangelism.

**II. A Couple of Questions**

1. Why do people reject the gospel?

I ask this question because I want to reprise a theme from earlier in this course but which seems especially pertinent given our subject for this morning and which we may have relegated to the back of our minds by now. Why do people reject the gospel? I want to tell you as clearly as I possibly can that it is not, fundamentally, because of the seamlessness, or the lack thereof, of your gospel presentation.

God is the one who saves. God is the one who saves. I'll say it one more time -- God is the one who saves. Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." John 6:63 says, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing." Salvation belongs to our God.

We, his people, are responsible for sharing his good news, for being ambassadors for him in this world, but he is the one who saves. We, therefore, are not responsible for the affects of our evangelism -- and that's true if the person with whom we share the gospel repents and believes and becomes a member of a church and eventually an elder and leads others to Christ, or if the person with whom we share the gospel shoves us away, slanders our name, and never speaks to us again.

If you have stepped out in courage and faith and shared the gospel with someone -- whether that's in one conversation or over a series of conversations -- and they have rejected it and rejected you, be freed from the lie that would tell you that if only you had said it this way or put it that way then they would have repented and believed.

The fact of the matter is that we are all sinners who have broken God's commands and lived in active opposition to him -- and that includes our unbelieving friends and family members and coworkers and children. We all, by nature, have hearts that are hardened towards God and towards the good news about Jesus. We have brought this upon ourselves because of the way we have lived.

John Piper, in a sermon, describes sin like this: "The glory of God is not honored. The holiness of God is not reverenced. The greatness of God is not admired. The power of God is not praised. The truth of God is not sought. The wisdom of God is not esteemed. The beauty of God is not treasured. The goodness of God is not savored. The faithfulness of God is not trusted. The promises of God are not relied upon. The commandments of God are not obeyed. The justice of God is not respected. The wrath of God is not feared. The grace of God is not cherished. The presence of God is not prized. The person of God is not loved."

Do you see what unifies all of those statements -- they are all a belittling of God. To belittle the God of the universe is a major blunder; it is a death sentence. That's the state that all of us find ourselves in when we are confronted with the gospel -- we are major league belittlers of God -- and that's the state we would remain in, each of us, unless God acts to change us, replacing our heart of stone with a heart of flesh, softening us to him and to his word. He doesn't have to do this. Him not doing this is proof only of man's rebellion against God and of God's perfect righteousness and opposition to sin.

That's why people, when they reject the Gospel, reject the gospel. It's not because of the lucidity or choppiness of our gospel presentation but because they choose to. Because in their natural state they are opposed to God and love almost everything else more than God. In its rejection of the Gospel, we see the true colors of mankind. We see just how lost -- and hardened against the Lord -- we really are.

Which raises a second question …

2. Why then should we evangelize?

So if we are all, whether privately or publicly, hell-bent in our opposition towards God, and if God -- and not us -- is ultimately the one who saves, then why should we build relationships in hopes of sharing a message that might put those very relationships in jeopardy?

The reason is because it brings glory to God. God is the ultimate evangelist. He is all about making his name known, and he loves it when his people are about the same thing. That's the most important reason.

Another reason is because there is only one way for people to be reconciled to God and that is through Jesus Christ. In order for people to be reconciled to God they must first hear about Jesus Christ, who he is and what he has done. In his providence, has tapped us to be the ones to tell that story, to spread the good news.

God is the one who saves, but the heart work that He does on people through the Holy Spirit -- replacing their heart of stone, giving them a heart of flesh, revealing their sin, revealing their need for a savior, granting them repentance and faith -- is always done in conjunction with the facts of the gospel being presented. That's why we should share the Gospel -- because the Gospel is, as Romans says, "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

Yes, our relationships with unbelieving parents and friends and coworkers and roommates and children will probably be easier and more comfortable if we refrain from sharing the gospel, if we just keep our mouths shut.

The Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote a short book called "Chronicle of a Death Foretold." The story takes place over one day. A man named Santiago Nasar has offended a couple of guys in his town, and in response to that offense, the brothers have resolved to kill him. They plot their strike and they tell any and everyone who will listen about it. As the day goes on, pretty much everyone in the town knows what they are going to do, and yet no one warns Nasar. They're either too lazy, or too apathetic, or they secretly harbor their own ill wishes against him, or they figure he must already know. Sure enough, when the time comes, the brother follow through on the plot.

We have to ask ourselves are we really being good friends, good parents, good children, good co-workers if we don't endeavor to share the gospel? If one day you walked out of your front door and saw your best friend standing in the street oblivious to the semi truck barreling down the road straight for them and you didn't attempt to holler out a warning but just sat there for several minutes in silence, what kind of friend would you be?

God's judgment was barreling down on us. We were, as Ephesians 2 says, "dead in our transgressions and sins" and "by nature objects of God's wrath" but someone loved us enough to tell us about how much God loved us in Christ. We should do the same regardless of how sharing that gospel might stir things up or break the seal of tranquility between us and others. The most loving thing we can do in our relationships is to share the gospel, whatever the cost.

To summarize what we've covered so far. First, when someone rejects the Gospel it's not fundamentally because of us … God is the one who saves. Second, given the reality of God's holiness and our need to be reconciled to him, evangelism is a good and loving thing to do, regardless of how people respond.

But that still leaves us with the fact that rejection is unpleasant, even devastating. When someone rejects the Gospel that we love, it's difficult not to take it personal. It can kick the wind out of us. It can make us question lots of things. It's never fun to lose friends or be at odds with family. No one looks forward to going to a job that is hostile.

Having acknowledged that, and not in any way wanting to make light of the pain that comes from getting rejected for sharing the Gospel, I want to leave with some encouragements that I pray will help you to endure and to persevere and to truth the Lord when evangelism doesn't go the way you'd hoped.

**III. Five Encouragements**

**1. Be comforted**

"Remember the words I spoke to you," Jesus says in John 15:20-21, "‘No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also … **21** They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."

“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed,” the apostle Peter encourages a group of believers in 1 Peter 4:12, “for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” According to both Jesus and Peter, suffering because of our faith is actually a proof that we are in the faith. For Christians, they say, persecution for following Christ is actually par for the course. We should not be surprised when it happens, and should even “rejoice,” when the world rises up against us because of the opportunity it gives us to share in Christ’s sufferings and bring glory to God.

But not only that, elsewhere in 1 Peter it talks about how one day our suffering will end and we will be vindicated. Peter presents Noah as an example of one who was vindicated in chapter 3, verse 20-22. In the ark built by Noah, it says:

only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Recall how Noah was ostracized by his neighbors for trusting God and building the ark. Recall God’s faithfulness to him, and his small crew, during the flood. So you, if you struggle in the face of opposition, wondering if something is wrong because only a few stand with you, then look to the example of Christ. Look also to the example of Noah. God vindicates those who truly follow him.

So, be comforted because the rejection we sometimes face for sharing the Gospel is a way to share in Christ's sufferings -- and be comforted because the rejection will not last forever.

**2. Be merciful**

1 Peter also calls on us, in the midst of suffering, to be witnesses to non-Christians and even to desire the good of those who persecute us. Peter, the disciple who denied Jesus three times and then watched Jesus suffer for him, learned this from Jesus’ example. He writes,

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness (2:23-24).

Peter knew firsthand the forgiveness of Christ. He knew firsthand how good Christ could be even toward one who had denied him. We must also remember how good God has been to us. We deserted him, yet he responded with incredible love toward us. How then can we treat in any other way those who reject us?

3**. Be available**

It may very well be the case that the wisest course of action after sharing the Gospel with someone and seeing them reject it is to take a step back. It may be wise not to bring up the Gospel the next time you see the person, and that's especially the case if someone has asked you explicitly not to talk with them about Christ. I think there's a sense that once you have shared the Gospel with a person like that, you have done your duty and, yes, you want to follow up and go deeper and explain the good news to them again, but only as occasion requires, if the person expresses interest in hearing more, for instance, or if the situation clearly presents itself.

And yet we don't want to go out of our way to avoid them. We should live holy lives around them, lives that give credence to our gospel claims. We should forgive them. We should pray for them. And we should, when possible, be available in case something happens that makes them reconsider. In case God begins to work in them and they start to give Christianity a second thought. In case a need arises and they ask for our help.

When I was in college …

**4. Be hopeful**

You never know how the Lord may use your evangelism. Just because someone rejects the gospel when you share it with them does not mean that they are beyond hope. Two girls in my wife Emily's sorority invited her to a Bible study in college and Emily went but she didn't really pay it much attention until after college when she returned home to a broken home in Northern Virginia and started reading the Bible for herself and going to a church that preached the Gospel and all of the sudden the bells started ringing and the things that those girls had taught her in college started to make sense.

Do you know the story of Jim Elliot, the man whose words -- "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" -- are on a plaque out there in the parking lot? Elliot and several friends moved to Ecuador to share the Gospel with an unreached group of Indians there only to be massacred by them on a beach in January of 1956. But in subsequent decades, other missionaries followed -- including the wives and children of some of the men who'd been murdered -- and they were able to lead many Indians from that same tribe to Christ. **My buddy Brent …**

**5. Be prayerful**

God hears prayer. To pray for someone is not a copout. To pray for someone, that they would come to know the Lord, is a valiant act of love … Get others to pray, too. Alec story