

The Burden of Persuasion

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

We are on week 3 of our evangelism series. We've talked about what evangelism is, who should do it, and what our motivation should be. God is shining the light of Christ into the darkness of the world so that people will turn to him and be saved, and he partners with us to do that. We have received the light of Christ and we are to let our light shine in the darkness of the world. That's the heart of evangelism and all of us are part of it. We join in this great calling because we have experienced Christ's deep love for us that he demonstrated on the cross. It's his overwhelming love that compels us to devote ourselves fully to him and join his calling by engaging in the lives of unbelievers.

As we do that, God is going to give us opportunities to be a witness and talk about what we believe and this morning we are going to begin to talk about how to do that. To start I want us to think about: How do you feel when you're in those situations? You're talking with someone and all of a sudden you realize the door is open for you to share about your faith. Some of us have been there a lot and for some it's still pretty new. How do you feel?

I think for some of us, it feels kind of like we've just entered the Shark Tank. (Picture) The Shark Tank is a reality show where small business owners have the opportunity to appear before a panel of billionaire investors who could partner with them to take their business to the next level very quickly. They've got the capital, the contacts and the infrastructure to really make it happen and the small business owner has to persuade them to get on board. There's a lot on the line and a lot of pressure to land the deal.

I've been in situations where it feels like that with sharing the gospel. The door is open, I've got a person I care about before me. Their eternal destiny is at stake and this is my chance to say something to try to persuade them to trust in Jesus. It's go time. Sometimes when it comes to sharing our faith we feel like that. We've got to draw them in and win them over. Appeal to their emotions. Convince them to believe. The burden of persuasion rests on our shoulders.

I don't know about you, but my natural instinct in those pressure situations is actually to shut down. I would never appear on the Shark Tank because it's too

much pressure. If that's how evangelism works, I'm going to fail. If the burden of persuasion rests on me, I'm going to really struggle. But some people are different. Some people are very bold and outgoing. I have a friend named John that I'm pretty sure in literally every situation he's in, he's trying to fit in some kind of gospel presentation. I went on a bus tour with him one time and every time we stopped the bus to go sightseeing or get something to eat or go to the bathroom, he was talking to some stranger about Jesus. And it really didn't matter if their body language was saying: "Get lost buddy," he just kept on pushing.

The burden of persuasion affects people in different ways – shutting some of us down and turning others into pushy salesman, and this morning I want us to think about where that comes from and if that's the way things actually work? Does the burden of persuasion rest on our shoulders? What role do we have in winning unbelievers to Christ?

Our text for today comes from something Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. They were arguing over which preacher they should follow. They were putting all the emphasis on the men who preached the gospel to them when they believed. For some it was Paul, for others it was Apollos, and they were forming divisions in the church based on that. Paul saw major problems with that and when he addressed it in his letter, he made it very clear what happened when they believed and who should get the credit.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

Paul and Apollos preached in Corinth, and when they preached there were people who believed. They were persuaded to follow Christ while one of those men was preaching. Who should get the credit? Paul says neither. Credit doesn't belong to Paul or Apollos, it belongs to God.

And he uses a helpful metaphor to help them see. It's the metaphor of a field being planted. (Picture) Each of the believers in Corinth was a field. Their hearts were the soil and into that soil Paul planted the seeds of the gospel when he first came to them. He spent a year and a half in the city of Corinth teaching them about Jesus. Sometime after that, Apollos arrived. He too had a role in his preaching and Paul compared it to watering the seeds. Paul planted, Apollos came later and watered – which one gets the credit for persuading them to turn to Jesus?

Neither. It wasn't what they did that persuaded them to believe; it's what God did. (Picture) God gave the growth. He brought the life. God germinated the seeds of truth that Paul planted and Apollos watered. He brought forth spiritual life that resulted in faith in Christ. Paul and Apollos were servants, doing what God called them to do, but neither had the power to bring life, only God did.

So in Paul's understanding of what happens when a person turns to Christ, it involves 3 key actors. The unbeliever who is hearing the good news is the field – they are soil that was previously fallow. The believer who is sharing the truths about Jesus is the servant who is planting or watering in the field. And God the Holy Spirit is the one who does the miracle of regeneration – bringing life to that which was previously dead. He makes the fallow ground fertile.

When it comes to the burden of persuasion, who does that burden rest on?... God. In describing his own conversion in 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul writes this: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." God turned the lights on in Paul's heart.

The change of heart that has to happen in order for someone to turn to Christ doesn't depend on us. When it comes to bringing the dead to life, "*neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.*" It depends on God. That's what Paul taught and believed, and it had a major effect on the way he shared the gospel. He writes about that earlier on in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5: "*And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in*

plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” Paul planted the seeds, but God would make them grow. He brings it up again in 2 Corinthians 4:2: *“But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.”* Paul shared the truth and let God do the persuading.

We can take the burden of persuasion off our shoulders. It doesn't belong to us. We can't bring the dead to life. We can't make the deaf hear or the blind see. Only God can. And if we think we have to do that, there are going to be problems.

- You might clam up when an opportunity is in front of you because you think you have to do it perfectly and don't want to screw it up. So you don't say anything, and that person doesn't hear anything, and then you feel like a failure. That's what typically happens to me when I forget my role.
- Or you might be too pushy and try to force conversations or decisions for Christ in situations where it's completely out of place and unwelcome. It leaves a bad taste in people's mouths when they think of Christians and makes them want to run and hide – kind of like when the Jehovah's Witnesses come to the door.
- Or you might become manipulative and use fear, emotions, or even logic & reasoning to pressure someone to make a decision for Christ that could very well be void of any real spiritual change, and they'll think they're saved even though they're not. (Christian parents do this all the time with their children.) Paul refused to preach that way.

Go ahead and take the burden of persuasion off your shoulders. You're not in the Shark Tank. It's not your role. Only God can do it.

But then, what is our role? Does it even matter? Some would say that if only God can change people's hearts, then it really doesn't matter what we do. But it's very obvious in what Paul writes that he doesn't think that way. Paul didn't go through decades of beatings, imprisonments, loneliness and death because his role didn't matter. No, his role was very important and ours it too. We have been called by Christ and compelled by his love to let our light shine and talk about what we believe when God gives us opportunities.

We are the planters and the waterers. Sometimes when we share our faith it's the first time someone has heard those things about Jesus – that's planting seeds – that's what Paul did in Corinth. You have people that planted seeds in your life and you can plant seeds in other people's lives. Sometimes people have already heard the truths of gospel from someone else and when we share, we're confirming those things – we're watering the seeds – and that's what Apollos did. And again there were people in your life who watered the seeds and that's what we need to do in the lives of others. Paul planted, Apollos watered, and at some point, God gave the growth.

You don't have to give a perfect gospel presentation to someone and bring them to the place where they pray to receive Christ. Even if you give the best sales pitch, if the Holy Spirit isn't working, it's going to fall on deaf ears. And you can stumble over your words and feel like you did a terrible job and if the Holy Spirit is working, God can use your words to bring about new life. Most stories I hear of people turning to Jesus are a series of experiences that eventually leads to new life being born. Seeds were planted, seeds were watered, and God gave the growth. People planted and watered seeds for 14 years in my life before the lights turned on.

So take the burden of responsibility off your shoulders and go out and plant seeds. Go out and water. Christ has called us to let our light shine and we need to do that. Share what you believe when God gives you the opportunity. Let your light shine for Christ so he can use you to bring others into the light.