

Promoting the gospel with 'gospel bites'

Answering the unbelieving enquirer

1. Introduction: Our role in God's mission

- Rationale for seminar: that God wants us to be involved in his great mission to draw people into relationship with himself.
- Amazing that God chooses to make us partners in that mission. Consequently we all have a part to play.
- NT describes a number of different activities – what we might call 'gospel promoting activities' – which we are all to be involved in.
 - living godly lives so as to adorn the gospel,
 - mixing with unbelievers
 - praying for the salvation of unbelievers,
 - supporting full-time gospel workers (prayerfully & financially),
 - speaking

It's this last activity, speaking, that this seminar is about.

2. 'Speaking' as gospel promotion

- NT clearly teaches that we all have a speaking role to play in God's great mission. But what kind of speaking?

i) Proclamation

- NT identifies particular group of people it calls 'evangelists' (Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 4:5) – gifted / set apart as heralds or preachers of the gospel. Their role is to proclaim and explain the gospel. Paul is the best example.
- NT makes clear that we are not all evangelists (in the NT sense of the word), that is we are not all expected to be proclaimers of the gospel.
- So, if we all have a speaking role, but only some are evangelists, what kind of speaking is expected of us?

ii) Answering questions

See Colossians 4:6 and 1 Peter 3:15.

- What speaking role is identified in these two passages? *Answering unbelievers' questions.*

We learn **3 things** from these two passages:

- a. We all have a duty to answer unbelievers' questions
 - Unlike proclamation, which is the job of evangelists, we all have a duty to be ready to respond to those who enquire about the faith.
 - b. There are 2 types of questions & answers:
 - Although the English word 'answer' is used in both passages, Paul and Peter used different Greek words to convey what they meant.
 - These two words indicate two slightly different types of answers we might be called upon to give:
 - 'apokrinomai' (Col 4:6): answers a simple query ('Why are you a Christian?');
 - 'apologia' (1 Pet 3:15): answers a criticism ('Christians are such hypocrites!').
 - c. *How* you answer is as important as *what* you answer
 - Notice that both apostles are concerned with *how* the answer is given.
 - Paul insists that our response be "full of grace, seasoned with salt" (the meaning is probably, 'seasoned with the salt of graciousness').
 - Peter insists that our answers be given "with gentleness and respect."
- NB.** A response that lacks 'cleverness' but is strikingly gracious, gentle and respectful will often prove more valuable (to the enquirer) than one which is 'clever' but lacks these qualities.

Groups of 3 or 4.

Take 5 minutes to think about the most common 'religious' questions and criticisms raised by your unbelieving family, friends and colleagues.

Hand out.

3. The 'gospel bites' method

- So what do you do when your unbelieving friend or work colleague asks you a question about your faith? What do you do when someone you meet at a dinner party makes a critical comment about Christianity?
- *Ask for responses...*
- It's important to remember that Christianity is all about Jesus Christ. The most obvious starting point for responding to unbelievers' questions, comments or criticisms **is Jesus**.
- If we want to respond to people with the 'gospel' then we can't do better than telling them about Jesus' life and teaching, his death and resurrection, and the salvation he thereby secured (Matt 26:6-13; Mark 1:1; Acts 10:34-43; Rom 1:2-4; 1 Cor 15:3-5; 1 Tim 2:8).
- That's what the 'gospel bites' method is all about; it's **a brief retelling of an episode from Jesus' life (a conversation, a miracle, etc.) that bears directly upon a question, comment or criticism raised by an unbeliever.**
- Sadly, because the stories of Jesus are sometimes viewed as Sunday school material only, we can miss their great usefulness for talking with other adults about the faith. The reality is, many issues raised by those who don't yet believe relate quite naturally to events in Jesus' life.
- Some examples (offered by the Leader):
 - ◆ "I've done too many bad things to be a Christian." → the 'sinful woman' (Lk 7:36-50) or thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43).
 - ◆ "I can't stand the way some religious people appear so self-righteous" → (Lk 18:9-14) the Pharisee and the tax collector.

NB. What follows is printed in the participant hand-out.

There are three parts to the 'gospel bites' method¹:

- i) **A topic of conversation:** A gospel bite begins in response to a question or comment that *relates to Christianity*. Trying to move from a question about tax reform to a story about Jesus meeting a tax collector might be pushing the model too far. If you are on the look out, however, (which is really the first step) you might be surprised how often comments and queries at work, home, university, etc., 'flirt' with spiritual ideas.

¹ The following section is taken from *The Great Giveaway*

- ii) **A story about Jesus:** The second part of a 'gospel-bite' involves retelling an episode from the Gospels. In doing this, you are not attempting an exposition of the text or a full theological commentary. You are simply recounting one of the events or conversations from Jesus' life. You need do so only in the same way you might relate to a friend a conversation you had with someone, or a joke you heard, or a TV show you watched or a life-experience from the past. Thus, in retelling the Jesus-episode you need not include every element of the story, just those points which are pertinent to the situation. The rule is simple: *know the stories well; tell them freely.*

- iii) **A life application:** Each 'gospel-bite' ends with a brief attempt to apply the story of Jesus to your hearer's particular situation. This should not be a 'pressuring' comment, but something that throws the ball back into their court. It may be as simple as: "Have you ever looked into the life of Christ?"; "What's your impression of Jesus?"; "Do you have your own kind of faith?"

NB: The 'gospel bite' method is not appropriate for every situation. Not every spiritual question relates naturally to the life of Jesus. For instance, the issue of whether science discredits religion will need to be answered in its own right without forcing the conversation around to Jesus.

4. 'Exercise'.