

Unit 2:

A Few Preliminary Issues

1. Issues from the perspective of **communication**: Ten myths about the communication of the Gospel (adapted from Kraft, *Communication Theory*, Ibid., pp. 35-54; note the critique in Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, pp. 193-196 and the notations given there)

Ten Myths about Communicating the Gospel

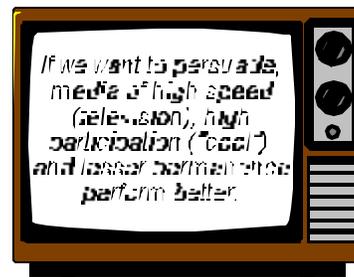
1. Hearing the Gospel with one's ears is equivalent to 'being reached' with the gospel.
2. The words of the Bible are so powerful that all people need to bring them to Christ is to be exposed to hearing/reading the Bible.
3. The Holy Spirit will make up for all mistakes if we are sincere, spiritual, and prayerful enough.
4. As Christians we should severely restrict our contacts with 'evil' people and refrain from going to 'evil' places lest we 'lose our testimony' and ruin our witness.
5. Preaching is God's only ordained means of communicating the gospel.
6. The sermon is the most effective vehicle for bringing about life change.
7. There is one best way to communicate the gospel.
8. The only key to effective communication is the precise formulation of the message.
9. Effective communication of the gospel is totally dependent on the communicator.
10. All people really need is more information.

2. Issues related to the **message that we bring**
 - a. We seek to present a unique message. Several presuppositional items should be noted:
 - i. Because people are made in God's image, they are able to understand the Gospel message. By this I do not mean that they can read Greek, or that they understand the NT categories of thought. Rather, I mean that the message of the Gospel, when couched in appropriate cultural form and idiom, is at its most basic level theoretically understandable to any person in any culture. Mayers, working within a similar framework, postulates the following as a communication principle, "*The truth of God must come to each man completely and effectively in keeping with what he is socioculturally*" (Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture*, rev. ed., p. 116)

- ii. At the same time, our sin has clouded our reasoning process, and Satan uses it to blind our minds to the Gospel message.
 - iii. However, the Spirit is the One who ultimately makes God's message understandable and generates a response within us. We must never lose sight of this!
- b. Is there a "core" message of salvation? We must be careful with this, and avoid the problems that come with proposing a "canon within the canon" of the full scope of biblical revelation. With that warning in mind, the following is a suggested content for the evangelistic message of good news (from Arthur Johnston, "Theology of Evangelism", pp. 8-9):
- i. The fact of sin (Rom. 3:23)
 - ii. The penalty of sin (Rom. 6:23)
 - iii. The penalty must be paid (Heb. 9:27)
 - iv. The penalty was paid by Christ (Rom. 5:8)
 - v. Salvation is a free gift (Eph. 2:8, 9)
 - vi. It must be received (John 1:12)
 - vii. Now is the time to receive it [or Him] (2 Cor. 6:2, Rev. 3:20).

3. Issues related to the **medium (or media) through which we communicate.**

- a. Different media are better at different functions (as determined by tests in Western culture):



- b. There is not a single best medium for all situations; a combination of media is often the best approach. In determining this, there is a need to match the media chosen with the target audience.

4. Issues related to the **communication event**
 - a. We need the appropriate level of basic social skills in the new cultural setting so as to not offend unnecessarily.
 - b. The levels of bonding and trust between messenger and audience are important factors to take into account
 - c. If we do not have the ability to "filter" cultural responses, then we may not ever know what the genuineness of the response (especially important in high context cultures).

5. Issues related to the possible **responses** to the Gospel. Hesselgrave (*Cross-Cultural Communication*, pp. 106-115) points out several possibilities of response to the Gospel in cross-cultural contexts:
 - a. **Sincere acceptance**
 - b. **Overt rejection**
 - c. **Situational reformulation** (involves interpreting the new message in terms of previous experience and then incorporating it within that framework--usually this is not thought of as a deliberate process, but an "innocent" one based on an incomplete message)
 - d. **Syncretistic incorporation** (often seen as a more deliberate attempt to retain the old and incorporate the new within it, keeping the old in the position of greater importance)
 - e. **Studied protraction** (waiting to make any decisions until all necessary information is gathered. It is not an outright rejection, but it is certainly not an acceptance)
 - f. **Symbiotic resignation** (decision on the part of the source that the new message is not for him, but that others within his framework are free to make it if they so choose. He lets those who make it live in symbiosis [two dissimilar organisms living together] with him. [A "You do what you want, I will do what I want" type of decision.])

We may also note:

- g. **Overt acceptance but covert rejection** (the relational "yes"; when a decision is indicated not because of genuine acceptance of Christ but because of the communication dynamics present when the message is given; often the "yes" will be because of either

- i. relational expectations *or*
- ii. lack of genuine understanding of what is being asked)