

Right or Wrong? Worldview change

June 8, 2012

The late missiologist Paul Heibert said Christian evangelism typically advocates changes in behavior and belief, but most of all, it should demand a change in worldview. Surely this is not what Jesus intended for his disciples, is it?

The Christian believer must have a meaningful impact on the world

Heibert accurately described how most evangelism works. Many evangelicals, particularly Baptists, often have been accused of caring only about whether a person's soul gets to heaven. Salvation, in those terms, focuses primarily on avoiding eternal hell and damnation. Evangelism based on this theological perspective emphasizes a change in belief, centering on the effect salvation has on individuals as they place their faith in Christ as Savior.

The presentation of the gospel centers on the individual's separation from God, the fact God loves the individual anyway and has provided a way that such separation can be mended—the atonement of Christ. This emphasis reflects the Apostle Paul's response to the Philippian jailer's question about being saved: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

Many times, such evangelism does not advocate any change in behavior, at least not initially. The emphasis is on belief, followed by hope that changes in behavior will follow belief. If a change in behavior is described, it usually reflects the need for repentance—to stop doing things that separate us from God. We have all heard the admonition to "turn or burn."

Heibert advocates that evangelism should reach more deeply than  that. Evangelism should include not only a means of getting to heaven and the cessation of wickedness in our lives. Evangelism should include the Apostle John's admonition that whoever claims to be "in Jesus" must walk as he walked.

Thus salvation, in these terms, focuses also on the life of the believer as a follower of Jesus. In following the model of Jesus, there is a change in worldview. A believer now also has a concern for other lost people, compassion for the poor and hungry, and a passion for love, justice and mercy. This attitude reflects Jesus' call for his followers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The believer must have a meaningful impact on the world.

Typically, these concepts have been separated into evangelism and then discipleship, as if one were possible without the other. Heibert's plea is that the concepts stop being separated and be presented as the whole of the gospel. This emphasis expands the idea of salvation from centering on what effect it has on the individual, to what effect salvation also has through the individual.

Jesus' call is to follow him—not simply to heaven, but in all areas of how he lived and devoted himself to the kingdom of God. That's why his followers are disciples instead of merely converts.

Van Christian, pastor

First Baptist Church

Comanche

Right or Wrong? is co-sponsored by the Texas Baptist theological education office and Christian Life Commission. Send your questions about how to apply your faith to bill.tillman@texasbaptists.org.