

Ché Ahn: Why Evangelism Shouldn't Be Your First Priority

For years I used a simple illustration to emphasize the importance of getting our priorities right in life. I told how, in my rush to get dressed first thing in the morning, I usually put the second button in the first buttonhole. Then, after buttoning the rest of the buttons, I could see that my shirt was out of alignment and that I looked like a nerd because of the first mistake.

The lesson is clear: If we miss the top priority, all other priorities will fail to fall into place. I feel as though I can speak from authority on this subject since I have missed the top button in life at least as many times as I have missed the number one priority. My appeal to you is to avoid making the same mistake by checking with the “owner’s manual”—the Bible—on how evangelism is to be approached.

Now no Christian would doubt the biblical importance of evangelism. Yet it may startle you to remember that evangelism is not the *first* priority given us in Scripture. The Great Commission was not the “first button.” Jesus made it easy for us to get this right by giving us clear direction in His Word. He said to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, NKJV). Along with that, He said to “‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (verse 31, NKJV).

I begin this book on evangelism with a chapter on this “Great Commandment” because love is the first button most often overlooked. I am still learning after years and years of serving the Lord that *all* ministry springs from an intimate,

ongoing love relationship with God. God created us to have fellowship with Him and enjoy the privilege of being His sons and daughters before He gave us any assignments. Before He gave Adam and Eve the mandate to “have dominion” (Genesis 1:26, NKJV), He created them to have relationship with Him. He wanted to love them and be loved by them. This awesome God of love desires that all of His sons and daughters be part of His family of affection.

To know the importance of love—that God values our “being” above our “doing”—has been a hard lesson for me to learn. I am definitely a “doer.” The moment I wake up, my greatest temptation is to review my mental “to-do” list and get busy accomplishing things “for the Lord.”

For years I related better to Martha’s busyness than to Mary’s sitting at Jesus’ feet. I would read that account in Luke 10 and sympathize completely with Martha. More accurately, I was aggravated that Mary did not help. After all, many preparations needed to be made for Jesus’ visit, and Mary just sat there. I totally missed what Jesus was saying in that text. I may have understood it intellectually, but my heart missed the point. As I saw it, there was a world going to hell and no one could justify taking time to sit around worshipping and waiting on the Lord.

Now I understand. That is what Jesus wants first. He wanted intimacy and relationship with His daughters Mary and Martha. He wants that same intimacy and love with you and me. He wants us in the place where we continually choose “one thing”: the “good part” (verse 42, NKJV). That one thing is the most important. All else is secondary. Everything meaningful stems from that intimate, personal love relationship with the Lord. That is buttoning the first button first.

The amazing thing is that if we get this right, all of our other priorities fall into place. We will end up attaining what we desire—including great fruitfulness in ministry. Jesus

said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). This is especially true when it comes to evangelism. So many times we move in what I call "unsanctified zeal." We sincerely want to share the Lord's goodness, but we end up burned out or discouraged because we have not learned the secret of abiding in Him.

People lose their first love (see Revelation 2:4) and give up. They run out of self-generated energy, so they quit. Understandable, but not necessary.

Yes, Jesus did command us to go and take the Good News to others, but He never intended for us to do so in our own strength, our own way or out of our own souls. For too long we have emphasized manmade programs and style. The Lord intended for us to go and witness out of our oneness with Him.

Even of His own ministry Jesus said this: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (John 5:19). He did only what He saw the Father doing. That is what made Jesus' life and ministry successful: He stayed in close communion with His Father. He moved in the Father's love and in the Father's power.

I have learned that lovers indeed make the best servants. The motivation of lovers' hearts sustains them when times get rough. Lovers do not seek the approval of men. They do not have to trump up energy to please the beloved. The fire of love continually propels them. As lovers of the Lord, our fresh fires are enough to carry us forward.

That is why the Great Commandment must precede the Great Commission if we truly want to flourish in evangelism—or anything else in God.

*This excerpt is from Spirit-Led Evangelism. **Ché Ahn** (MDiv and*

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