

TEN MODERN
EVANGELISM
MYTHS

TEN MODERN
EVANGELISM
MYTHS
A Biblical Corrective

RYAN DENTON



Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Ten Modern Evangelism Myths

© 2021 by Ryan Denton

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. Direct your requests to the publisher at the following addresses:

Reformation Heritage Books

3070 29th St. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

616-977-0889

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

Printed in the United States of America

21 22 23 24 25 26/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Denton, Ryan, author.

Title: Ten modern evangelism myths : a biblical corrective /
Ryan Denton.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Reformation Heritage
Books, [2021] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020058372 (print) | LCCN 2020058373
(ebook) | ISBN 9781601788443 (paperback) | ISBN
9781601788450 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Evangelistic work.

Classification: LCC BV3790 .D4762 2021 (print) | LCC
BV3790 (ebook) | DDC 269/.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020058372>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020058373>

*For additional Reformed literature, request a free book list from
Reformation Heritage Books at the above regular or email address.*

For James

Contents

Foreword	ix
Preface	xi
Myth 1: Theology Doesn't Matter When Evangelizing	1
Myth 2: The Gospel Isn't Enough When Evangelizing	8
Myth 3: Evangelism Is Unsuccessful If No One Is Converted	17
Myth 4: The Lost Should Never Be Offended by Our Evangelism	26
Myth 5: There's Only One Right Way to Evangelize	34
Myth 6: Evangelism and Apologetics Are Different	41
Myth 7: Reformed Christians Don't Evangelize . .	49
Myth 8: Hell Should Be Left Out of Evangelism . .	58
Myth 9: Only Church Leaders and Professionals Should Evangelize	66
Myth 10: The Church Is Unimportant for Evangelism	74
Conclusion	81

Foreword

The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines a *myth* as “an unfounded or false notion.”¹ Myths abound in our day, but perhaps they are most tragic when they inform our evangelism. Evangelism, or the preaching of the good news of Christ to the lost, should be the desire of everyone Jesus has saved. Sadly, this is not always the case. In fact, recent statistics tell us that many people in North American churches are apathetic toward evangelism.

Why is this? Countless answers could be given, but perhaps foundationally the reason is that the church is weighed down with many misconceptions concerning the message, meaning, motive, and manner of evangelism. Oftentimes congregations do not have a solid starting point in this regard and thus are slow to make Christ’s last Great Commission their first great concern (Matt. 28:18–20).

This is why I am thankful for this new work by Ryan Denton, *Ten Modern Evangelism Myths: A Biblical Corrective*. Contained in this helpful treatment

1. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “myth,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth>.

are powerful scriptural arguments that dismantle prevalent mistaken beliefs regarding evangelism and recover sound foundations for it. With ten great canons, Ryan blasts away many common rationalizations for not obeying the Lord's commission, leaving the Christian with no other godly choice than to follow the example of the early church in going "every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

Throughout the centuries God has used works like this to stir up His people to great gospel endeavors. Think, for example, of Andrew Fuller's *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, which greatly impacted the life of William Carey, "the father of modern missions," motivating him to go to India to proclaim Jesus to the masses.² With such writing, God shows the saints that "always and everywhere the servants of Christ are under order to evangelize."³

My prayer is that God will use this well-written, well-balanced primer to this glorious end. I hope it will be used to dispel the many unbiblical ideas that the contemporary church often holds toward evangelism, so that we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will confidently and collectively go and win souls for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19–23).

—Pastor Rob Ventura

2. A few years later, Carey published his monumental missionary manifesto titled *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*.

3. J. I. Packer, quoted in John Blanchard, comp., *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 180.

Preface

The following is a compilation of the most popular misconceptions about modern evangelism, followed by a palatable and easy-to-read response through the lens of Reformed theology. This book is meant to be a manual for pastors, seminarians, lay Christians, missionaries, and anyone else who desires to have better insight into biblical evangelism, especially in contrast to approaches that are more gimmick-based and anthropocentric.

We are living in a time when a small revival of Reformed theology is shaking many homes and churches throughout the world. Many good sermons are being preached. Many good conferences are being held. Many good books are being written and read. But one area still lagging in Reformed theology is evangelism. Material on Reformed evangelism pales in comparison to the synergistic writings still popular today. This book is an attempt to help fill that void.

I have intentionally selected only ten evangelism myths to address since many more myths and problems are tackled under each heading. These ten myths seem to be the most pressing and foundational given

our current context. Commenting on the relationship between the historic Reformed faith and evangelism, Joel Beeke notes, “The heroes of Reformed piety were often imbued with a missionary spirit, praying, sending, going—and suffering.”¹ It is my prayer that this short book will help better equip us to bring the gospel to the lost and to understand the importance of doing so in the right way. Some of the content in this book was developed from *Even if None: Reclaiming Biblical Evangelism*.² The permission to reprint these sections is acknowledged with appreciation.

1. Joel Beeke, *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God’s Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2018), 74.

2. Ryan Denton, *Even if None: Reclaiming Biblical Evangelism* (San Francisco, Calif.: First Love Publications, 2019).



MYTH 1

Theology Doesn't Matter When Evangelizing

Is theology important when it comes to evangelizing the lost? Can't we just tell people about Jesus and not worry about stuff like doctrine? Many people in our day look at theology as impractical or superfluous when it comes to sharing the gospel. As we will see, such a perspective is woefully naive and has done much damage to the church. Like all other areas of Christian living, theology is critical when it comes to how we go about evangelism.

When Christians think or speak about God, man, the gospel, the purpose of the cross, the goal of evangelism, or how to live a Christian life, they are “doing” theology. Theology simply means the study of God. But not everyone's theology is correct, of course. One person thinks humans are unable to seek God because of the depravity of their faculties, including the mind. Another person believes humans, though sinful, are capable of seeking God through the use of a will that is neutral or indifferent to choose either

good or evil. Such persons have entirely different views of God and man. Hence, their approach to evangelism and the message they communicate to unbelievers will be utterly different.

I am discussing the difference between Reformed and synergistic soteriology as it relates to evangelism. *Synergism* means both the divine and human wills must cooperate with each other if a person is to be saved, as opposed to *monergism*, which is the stance held by Reformed theology and means that God saves an individual according to His will alone, although God uses means to accomplish that end. The Bible is unapologetically monergistic, not synergistic. It teaches the doctrine of total or pervasive depravity. Every part of man has been tainted by sin, including his mind, will, emotions, and body (Gen. 6:5–6; Pss. 51:5; 58:3; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9–18; Eph. 2:1–3). The Bible also teaches the total inability of man to act in a way distinct from his nature, and in the case of fallen man, his corruption. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23). Fallen man will always act in accordance with his fallen nature, which has no desire for God or the things of God.

This is why the Bible teaches “salvation belongeth unto the LORD” (Ps. 3:8; see also Jonah 2:9); salvation is the result of divine election from before the foundation of the world, without any foreseen

merit in the one elected. Apart from God's saving grace, founded on His unconditional election, men will never choose to follow Christ. Jesus told us "a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (John 3:27), which includes faith. God's grace is the only hope man has to be saved and, consequently, regarding evangelism, is the only hope we have when sharing the gospel. God must "rend the heavens" and "come down" (Isa. 64:1).

The person who holds to Reformed soteriology will be protected from two mindsets that the synergistic Christian often falls prey to. This is not to say the Reformed Christian will always be free from such dangers, but it is to say that, if consistent, it won't be as big of a threat. The first danger is discouragement, and with discouragement comes the tendency to use pragmatism and gimmicks in evangelism. The person who holds to Reformed soteriology believes God alone grants regeneration to the unbeliever and that the method God has given us for this purpose is the gospel. If people aren't being saved, the Reformed Christian won't resort to trickery or a watered-down message since it wouldn't help anyway. Nor will the Reformed Christian be discouraged, since conversion is God's work, not ours.

But the synergist, not seeing anyone saved through simple gospel proclamation, will still feel pressure to get the person converted. He must now resort to something else. At the very least he is going

to become discouraged and put the blame on himself for not seeing others saved. Eventually he may become reluctant to evangelize at all, seeing how hard it is to get someone converted. This isn't to say the Christian should be unconcerned about the souls of men or how to best communicate the gospel, but the temptation to water down the message or become discouraged in the work of evangelism won't be nearly as strong.

Perhaps more dangerous, however, is the second difference that results from contrasting views of soteriology. If the Reformed Christian sees someone saved through his gospel efforts, he knows it was God alone who did it, not the one being witnessed to or the one witnessing. It wasn't his speech, his holy life, his wisdom, or anything else—it was God who had mercy (Rom. 9:16). On the contrary, the synergist must to some extent believe it was the person's decision or belief that saved him, not God's unconditional election. God made the person savable, but the person took the initiative to do the rest upon hearing the gospel. Such a mindset leads to pride in the one converted, since he's the one who believed, and pride in the one sharing the gospel, since he did so in such a way that the unbeliever accepted it.

God's unconditional election should be a great comfort to the Christian since it is not up to him to save sinners. The Christian does not need to rely on props or tricks when it comes to evangelism since