

LECTURE SUMMARY

THE RELATIONSHIP OF REFORMED THEOLOGY TO EVANGELISTIC METHODOLOGY

Albert N. Martin

A structured summary based directly on the original lecture

Theology · Evangelism · Church · Methodology

Prepared from the original audio lecture and transcript

The Relationship of Reformed Theology to Evangelistic Methodology

Albert N. Martin - Lecture Summary

Evangelistic methodology cannot be separated from theology. Scripture is not merely the source from which we derive the content of the gospel; it also provides the principles that govern the manner in which the gospel is to be communicated. The sufficiency of Scripture therefore extends to evangelistic practice as well as evangelistic doctrine.

The decisive question is not, "Does it work?" but, "Is it biblical?" A method cannot be justified simply because it produces visible results. Nor can it be justified merely because it has become an established evangelical tradition. Both innovation and tradition must be brought under the judgment of Scripture.

"Our methodology in evangelism is simply an extension into life and practice of our true theology."

1. The Glory of God Must Govern the Purpose of Evangelism

If the glory of God is the chief end of creation, providence, and redemption, it must also govern evangelism. God cannot be glorified where He is not known, so evangelism must make known the true God. In Acts 17 Paul begins with the Creator, Lord of heaven and earth, who gives life and breath to all. In John 4 Christ teaches the Samaritan woman about the nature of God and true worship. Doctrine concerning God therefore belongs within evangelism itself. Salvation also means more than escape from punishment: it includes deliverance from sin's dominion and progress in holiness and conformity to Christ. Evangelism should therefore seek more than a momentary decision.

2. Authoritative Proclamation of the Word Is God's Ordained Means

Passages such as 1 Corinthians 1:21 and Romans 10 place verbal proclamation at the center of evangelism. Dialogue is legitimate, but biblical dialogue asserts fixed truth. In Acts 17 Paul reasons from the Scriptures and declares Jesus to be the Christ. Music and testimony may be useful, but neither is identical with evangelism. Nor does worldly celebrity automatically confer spiritual authority on a new convert. Personal witness and public preaching can work together, but God's fixed message must actually be communicated in intelligible words.

3. Truth Must Have Free Access to the Understanding and Conscience

First Peter 1:23, James 1:18, and Acts 26:18 connect spiritual life with the application of truth. Evangelistic methods should therefore give biblical truth free access to the mind and conscience. The first question is whether the content is faithful to Scripture; the next is whether the method clarifies or obscures that truth. Man must be addressed as a thinking, responsible creature. The aim is not merely to produce movement or an outward response, but to confront the hearer with truth concerning God, sin, Christ, repentance, and faith.

4. Man's Spiritual Impotence Must Shape Evangelistic Practice

The natural man cannot perform saving good, cannot come to Christ unless the Father draws him, and cannot see the kingdom apart from the new birth. Belief in this inability should drive the church toward prayer and dependence on the supernatural work of the Spirit rather than confidence in techniques designed to produce decisions. The evangelist must command sinners to repent and believe without suggesting that an autonomous human will can create salvation. Scripture holds together the free invitation of Christ and man's inability. Saving faith looks away from self and depends upon Christ.

5. Divine Sovereignty Produces Patience, Thoroughness, and Humility

If the ultimate success of evangelism rests with sovereign God, the evangelist is freed from the necessity of manufacturing results. This produces patience: every encounter need not end in an immediate decision. It produces thoroughness: sin, judgment, God's holiness, the cross, repentance, and faith need not be reduced to secure a response. It also produces humility, since the evangelist is an instrument rather than the author of regeneration. Yet sovereignty never means inactivity. God ordains the means as well as the end, including prayer, preaching, persistent labor, tears, pleadings, and entreaties.

6. Evangelism, Gospel, and Church Belong Together

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, and God's wisdom is displayed through the church. In the New Testament, gospel, evangelism, and church are inseparable. The gospel is proclaimed, believers are brought into the life of the church, and the church continues to evangelize. The Great Commission includes making disciples, baptizing, and teaching. Evangelistic methodology must therefore care about the conservation of its fruits in biblical churches, not merely the counting of decisions.

7. Evangelism Must Preserve the Antithesis Between Truth and Error

Biblical theology recognizes a real antithesis between truth and error. That distinction must not be blurred merely to secure a wider evangelistic platform. Cooperation cannot be justified simply by its apparent effectiveness if it requires serious doctrinal differences to be treated as insignificant. Evangelistic zeal must remain governed by truth.

8. The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart Requires Caution About Assurance

The heart is deceitful and false professions are possible. Evangelistic practice should therefore avoid immediately pronouncing a person saved merely because he came forward, raised a hand, or repeated a prayer. Otherwise a person may base his assurance on a past decision even when later life shows no spiritual fruit. The apostles continued to warn professing believers against self-deception. The evangelist should direct confidence toward Christ and His righteousness, not toward the memory of an evangelistic procedure.

9. Biblical Evangelism Allows for “Sanctified Flexibility”

Biblical control of methodology does not require rigid uniformity. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul possesses a fixed message and definite principles while accommodating himself to different people and circumstances. This is “sanctified flexibility”: not altering the gospel, but adapting what may legitimately be adapted so that unnecessary obstacles do not prevent people from hearing it.

10. Unnecessary Cultural Barriers Should Be Removed

Acts 21 and the circumcision of Timothy show Paul's willingness to remove unnecessary Jewish prejudice where no gospel principle was compromised. Titus, however, was not circumcised in Galatians 2 because circumcision in that context had become bound up with the truth of the gospel. It is therefore not enough to ask whether something is indifferent in itself; one must ask whether it is indifferent in the immediate context. This applies to appearance, clothing, and other cultural forms. Biblical holiness must be distinguished from inherited cultural preference.

11. Contact With Unbelievers Should Be Distinguished From Evangelism Itself

Creative means may be used to establish natural contact with unbelievers. Martin gives the example of family evenings involving shared food and a nature film, designed to remove prejudice and allow unbelievers to encounter Christians in an ordinary setting. Such activity may prepare for an unprejudiced hearing of the gospel, but it is not itself evangelism. Relationship-building can open the door; at some point the gospel must actually be communicated.

12. The Gospel Should Not Be Reduced to a Canned Approach

Christ's dealings with Nicodemus in John 3 and the Samaritan woman in John 4 differ strikingly. Nicodemus is confronted directly with the necessity of the new birth; the Samaritan woman is led from a request for water to living water, personal sin, worship, and the Messiah. Both approaches are right because the two hearers stand in different providential circumstances and possess different degrees of understanding of divine revelation. The gospel is not changed to suit the sinner; biblical truth begins where that particular hearer needs to be addressed.

13. The Emphasis and Starting Point May Vary With the Audience

In Acts 17 Paul begins with Scripture and messianic expectation among Jews, but among Athenian philosophers he begins with the Creator, divine sovereignty, human dependence, and accountability. The gospel has not changed; the starting point has. The objective is not to complete a memorized outline but to bring biblical truth meaningfully to the person actually present.

14. The Forms and Structures of Evangelism May Vary

The New Testament displays public teaching, house-to-house instruction, reasoning, dialogue, public proclamation, and personal testimony. There is no single external structure prescribed for every evangelistic encounter. Public preaching, personal conversation, question and answer, home instruction, and testimony may all serve the message. But the form must remain the servant of the gospel, and personal experience must never become the gospel itself.

15. Biblical Truth Must Be Communicated in Language People Actually Understand

Faithfulness to Scripture does not require preserving religious language that no longer communicates. The task is not to preserve jargon for its own sake but to communicate the biblical reality to which the language points. Clearer language does not weaken doctrine when sound exegesis, true theology, biblical balance, and proportion are preserved. The aim is for truth to reach the hearer's understanding and conscience.

16. Biblical Principle Must Be Distinguished From Evangelical Tradition

A method does not become biblical because it worked in the past or has long been used in evangelical churches. Where Scripture establishes a principle, the church has no liberty to abandon it. Where Scripture has not fixed the circumstances or form, there is room for prudence, creativity, and adaptation. Refusing this freedom can turn tradition into rigidity; judging methods only by results becomes pragmatism. Theology remains fixed, while legitimate forms for bringing that theology to real people may vary.

Sources

This document is a thematic, structured summary based directly on Albert N. Martin's original lecture and the published transcript.

Original lecture

Albert N. Martin, The Relationship of Reformed Theology to Evangelistic Methodology, SG Audio Treasures.

https://sg-audiotreasures.org/singular/am_evangelisticmethodology.htm

Transcript

Albert N. Martin, Theology and Methodology in Evangelism, Christian Library Australia.

<https://www.christianlibrary.org.au/index.php/all-sermons/sermon/213-theology-and-methodology-in-evangelism-by-albert-n-martin>

The sixteen numbered headings in this summary are an editorial organization of the lecture for readability; Martin did not formally divide the lecture into sixteen numbered points.