

Words and phrases NOT to use in gospel presentations

The following is a small collection of words and phrases that I contend are not a good idea to use in gospel presentations:

"God loves you"
"Jesus loves you"
"God is love"

The word "love" universally refers to affection in today's common usage. In contrast, the word that is universally used in the bible for "love," in the intended context, is "agape." The concept and meaning of "agape" is today almost never associated with the usage of the word "love." When using the word "love," the modern audience instead draws from the commonly understood meaning, which refers to something that benefits the subject, not the object. It would be more accurate to say that "God/Jesus hates you," since God hates a person's unattractive, sinful state of being, and the modern man might then want to know what to do to change that.

"God has a wonderful plan for your life."

First, this is not true. God's plan for the sinner is to ultimately separate him from his holy presence forever by throwing him into hell. The sinner's life will then be used as an example of unrighteousness for all to behold. That is God's plan for the sinner's life.

Second, this sort of thing puts the sinner, and not Jesus, in the center of God's plan. The gospel message ("good news") is not about the sinner, but about Jesus, and God's wonderful plan for Jesus' life, past, present and future. Instead, a statement like the above one gets a person started on the wrong way of thinking, which is one of achieving self fulfillment and self gratification.

Third, it short-cuts the need for repentance from sin. Until the sinner recognizes his hopelessly sinful state, he cannot appreciate the wonderful thing that Jesus has done on his behalf, which is able to change his life.

Fourth, it mimics the sort of salesmanship that the world uses. All sorts of worldly products and institutions beckon the prospective customer to buy, buy, buy things that promise to wonderfully change their lives. This is not the sort of salesmanship that was used by Jesus or the apostles to reach people.

“God wants to have a relationship with you.”

First, this statement will be understood in the context of how worldly relationships work. Worldly relationships are almost always made for selfish reasons. The person hearing a statement like this will wonder what is in it for them, and will likely recall the mostly physical, sexual, self-serving relationships that they have had with multiple people, particularly of the opposite sex.

Second, in light of this commonly accepted meaning of the statement, it is not true. God does not want to have a “relationship” with an unrepentant sinner. God wants to separate the unrepentant sinner from his presence forever, which is exactly the opposite of having a relationship with them. Even regarding a believer, God does not want to have a “relationship” as “relationship” is commonly understood today.

Third, relationships, even those in a godly marriage, take time to develop, over a passage of time measured in months and years. For the sake of a gospel presentation, the immediate concern is that a person place their faith in God and what he has done. That is a (covenant) decision, not a “relationship,” and results in the gift of the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which must happen first. You cannot fan a fire that has not been ignited in the first place.

After conversion to faith in Christ, which is a covenant that is made based on faith, the developing of the relationship is ongoing.

“Christianity is not about a religion. It is about a relationship.”

First, this is not true. Christianity IS a religion. Look up the word in the dictionary and see.

Second, it is not wise to redefine words for the sake of an agenda or ideology. We need to communicate in the language that is commonly accepted and used by the people.

Third, in the context of sharing the gospel, Christianity is not fundamentally about a relationship either. It is about faith in what God has done and the person who did it, as discussed in the previous point. A developing relationship with God is important, but not the central point of the gospel message.

“Ask Jesus to come into your heart.”

First of all, if this is directed at the unrepentant sinner, then Jesus is not going to “come into” their heart. Even worse, if they create a false Jesus, then that false Jesus will come into their heart, and they will have the indwelling of a counterfeit Jesus.

While this is a profound truth for the believer in a very real, albeit abstract way (more properly, it is the Holy Spirit that comes into a person's heart), it is the wrong thing to tell an unrepentant sinner. The Holy Spirit will come into a person's heart, when they believe, as per the testimony of scripture.

“Sin is just missing the mark, like an archer missing a target”

First, this is usually a means to avoid offending the sinner by telling him that he is one. Sin is disobedience to God, plain and simple. It is always expressed that way in the bible. While it is true that committing even one sin causes one to “miss the mark,” it is not a good idea to gloss over the depraved state that man has gotten himself into, by being philosophically abstract about it. The unrepentant sinner hasn't just “missed the mark,” but has committed real wrongdoings that make him a criminal, offending a Holy God, to the point that he is bound to be thrown into hell.

Second, this conforms to modern philosophy/psychology that dictates that it is best to tell a person that he has not optimally achieved and can do better through improvement, and bad to tell a person that he has failed. In reality, the sinner has not just “missed the mark.” The sinner is a miserable failure.

“Hell is separation from God.”

First, while this may be ultimately true, usually the intent in this statement is to avoid offending the sinner by telling him the whole truth, which is that hell is a place of fire and eternal torment where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Second, this allows for the thought that eternity without God might not be such a bad thing, especially if one does not like God and does not want to have anything to do with him.

“Pray to receive Christ”

This is the mantra of Recitational Regeneration, which is a false, substitute gospel.

First, there is no such statement or expression, directly or indirectly, taught in the bible. Nor is there a conversion ritual, besides water baptism. The “Sinner's Prayer” is a substitute conversion ritual that is the invention of men. We are called to baptize the disciples that we make, which is commanded of the discipler, not the disciplee, and the only thing that a disciple can be baptized in (by man) is water (God baptizes in the Spirit).

Second, you cannot be saved by praying a prayer. The point of conversion is believing the gospel message. As a result of believing the gospel message, a person receives the Holy Spirit. Praying has nothing to do with it. Believing in faith has everything to do with it. There is no ritual or exercise that you can do that will save you, and leading a person through a recitational exercise will not help to reinforce that point.

Third, there is no guarantee that a person who “prayed to receive Christ” received anything at all. That is because there is a question of whether a person prayed in earnest (or under coercion by one trying to get a conversion on the spot), and whether the “Christ” prayed for is the true one or one concocted for the moment or under false pretenses.

Fourth, this is almost always someone else's prepared prayer, making it a liturgy and not something that comes spontaneously out of the true desire of a soul desiring to express his repentance and accept the gospel as true. This happens when the searching soul is ready, and not according to the evangelist's dictates and ambition to “seal the deal” according to his own time frame.

Fifth, this is many times a means by which the “evangelist” is looking for a way to chalk up bragging rights. We are called to be witnesses, not to convert people. Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit in response to a person's faith, apart from any works, including reciting prayers.