

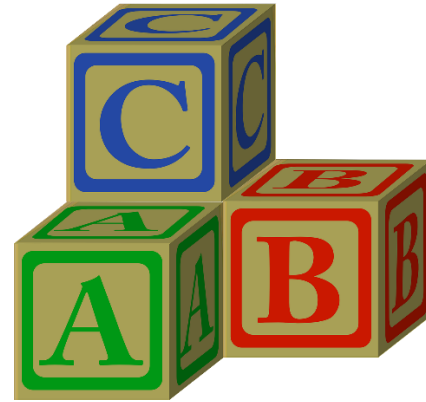
# Have You Studied the ABCs?

May 16, 2018 | Pastor Dan

## PART 2

Before discussing the B and C of the ABCs of salvation, I want to add a couple more comments related to the A, Admit.

One thing that baffles me is why the majority of evangelistic training begins with sin. I have heard the saying, "You can't get them saved until you convince them they are lost." Yet I can't find any Scripture to support that idea.



The message of John the Baptist was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:2) <sup>1</sup> This is the exact message that Jesus preached in the first of His sermons recorded by Matthew. (Matt. 4:17) This is also the message Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach on their first missionary journey. (Matt. 10:7)

This message called for repentance, but only as a response to the presence of the kingdom. Since there was no physical kingdom per se to present to the people, I submit that when Jesus referred to the kingdom's presence, He was referring to himself as the King. "Here I stand, the very kingdom of God in the flesh." Therefore, the first step in repentance is not admitting one is a sinner, but having a personal encounter with the living Christ.

The kingdom of God did not originate on earth, but in Heaven. It did not originate in time, but in eternity. Jesus was the incarnation of the kingdom, which was, and is, and always will be. His resurrection proved that no matter what the world might desire or attempt, the kingdom of God cannot be destroyed or prevented from fulfilling its purpose in God's eternal plan.

Later (Luke 17:20-21), Jesus would explain that the kingdom of God would not come with outward demonstrations of pomp and circumstance, but that it existed in the hearts of men. In fact, the kingdom was already at work in the world. Since the Pharisees to whom Jesus addressed this answer were not saved and thus not part of the kingdom, the phrase in verse 21, "the kingdom of God is within you," (KJV) is better translated "the kingdom of God is among you," (CEB) or "in your midst," (ESV, NIV).

This interpretation is supported by Matt. 12:28, where Jesus once again addressed the Pharisees concerning the kingdom saying, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." The word "come" in this verse means "to come suddenly or unexpectedly." <sup>2</sup> For that reason, the Amplified Version adds "before you expected it."

The point is that in Matthew 4:17, Jesus was calling people to repent, because they were now standing face-to-face with the living kingdom of God. Thus repentance follows a personal encounter with the living Christ.

Paul declared the substance of his primary message to lost people in his first letter to the church at Corinth was not so much about sin as it was about the Savior.

**1 Cor. 1:23** *...we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,*

**1 Cor. 2:2** *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

The question this raises is, Why don't we begin our evangelistic presentation with Christ? He is the ultimate objective.

When the banking system trains people to spot counterfeit money, they don't begin with counterfeit money, but real money. When the person handling the money becomes fully familiar with the real thing, they won't have much problem spotting that which is fake.

If evangelicalism were to adopt a "Jesus-first" plan of evangelism, the world may very likely reject such a plan as readily as they reject the "sin-first" plan.

However, we may find that when we present the perfect Son of God before there is any mention of sin, trusting in the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, those who listen may see themselves and judge themselves "in the light of the righteousness and love of God."<sup>3</sup> Then there would be no need for us to convince the world of its sinfulness.

I do not know of any evangelistic training that teaches those who would witness to the lost how to start with Jesus instead of sin. If such a Jesus-first program were to prove successful and become popular, it would certainly mean a financial loss to the sin-first evangelism training industry of today dominated almost exclusively by the ABCs of Salvation.

I know you have heard teachers and preachers speak of the personal nature of salvation by asking, "What is in the middle of sin?"

The answer they are looking for, of course, is the reference to the letter "I," signifying that humankind has an "I" problem. We are more concerned with ourselves than with the things of God. "All have sinned..."

While I confess that there is truth in this, I also submit that to begin an evangelistic presentation with the sinfulness of the individual simply reinforces the misconception that humankind is the center of the Universe.

By our dependence on the "sin-first" approach to evangelism, our efforts to redeem people from the bondage of their own sin may have led them into a different kind of bondage of egocentric religion where they believe that they are the center of everything including the kingdom of God.

The “sin-first” approach makes man the focus of the plan of redemption when the focus should be the glory of God. That is the message of Romans 3:23: All are sinners and can never, by their own will or efforts, give glory to God.

If we believe that the only reason God created man was so that God could have fellowship with us...

If we believe that the primary reason for the plan of redemption was primarily to rescue us from hell and provide a blissful eternity free from pain and suffering and filled with beautiful music and streets of gold...

If we believe that the focus of salvation and the kingdom God is all about us...

Then it is no wonder that we as a church exhibit so little power to make a positive impact on the world around us with such a distorted view of the gospel.

The answer to sin and death and hell is not repentance, belief, or confession, but Christ. The main message of the gospel is not forgiveness, but Christ. And the primary call of Christ is not to salvation, but to obedience and worship.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all Scriptural quotes are from the English Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup> Complete Word Study Bible, Olive Tree Bible Software

<sup>3</sup> [MacLaren's Expositions](#).