

Should People Feel Badly Before Responding to the Good News?

Jim Elliff

It seemed as if a wet wool coat of conviction was covering me before I came to Christ. I was weighted down with guilt. It seemed unbearable. Something had to change.



My mother faithfully shared good news with me. I had heard it all before, but I needed to listen carefully. I felt my situation demanded a solution. I could not shake my sin off any more. I could neither neglect dealing with it, or bring myself to think God didn't care about it. But up to this point, I had loved my sin more than a relationship with Christ. That night, as a burdened boy, I was forgiven of those sins. Because of what Jesus did for me through his death and resurrection, my sins were separated from me as far as the east is from the west (see Ps 103:12). And he remembered them against me no more (see Heb 10:17).

Awareness of Guilt Required?

Should you attempt to make people feel badly about their sin when you wish for them to believe in Christ? Do they need this bad news before they can respond to the good news?

Paul the Apostle certainly wasn't afraid to tell the bad news. Note this experience with a man named Felix, the governor:

After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and **heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."**

At the same time **he hoped that money would be given him by Paul.** So he sent for him often and conversed with him.

When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison." (Acts 24:22-27 ESV, *emphasis mine*)

Felix did not like what he was hearing. He loved his sin and even wished to receive money from Paul, so he sent for him often. But hearing Paul wasn't comfortable. The more Paul talked about "righteousness and self-control and coming judgment," the more he was "alarmed." But he was not alarmed enough to give up his life of rebellion to Christ.

In several of the letters Paul wrote to the New Testament churches, he spelled out the condition of sin in unbelievers as part of his clarification of the gospel. Consider Romans, in which the first three chapters were devoted to the subject. He reported that "there is none

righteous." In fact, he quoted the Old Testament further to say that there was "none that does good; there is not even one." He spoke to religious moralists these troubling words: "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God . . ." (Rom 2:5).

How Much Sorrow?

But can we ever feel as badly as we should about our sin? I cannot imagine that it would be possible. Our sin is all the worse because it is against the holy, infinite God, and we have continued to sin day after day for as long as we have lived. Surely no amount of conviction or sorrow is enough to ever earn God's mercy.

But sorrow for our sin does reveal the status of our hearts without Christ. And that is so important. By being aware of the awfulness of sin in our lives, we may long for Christ as our only hope. Hatred of sin is not saving in itself, nor is fear of hell. But we must have a change of heart about sin and a new love for Christ — by believing in him. By believing in Christ we mean that we have come to a place of submission to Christ in our hearts, and full rest in him as our only Savior and Master, the one who died and rose again to solve our sin problem. We are taught repeatedly in the Bible that we are saved from the penalty of our sin when we turn from sin (i.e. repent) and believe in him.

This message of Christ's loving act on the cross and his victorious resurrection over sin and death is called the gospel, or the "good news." It is certainly that! God has provided an open door to eternal life through Christ for all who hate their sin and turn to him.

How much is required? The answer is: enough to turn from our self-confidence and sinful life to Christ.

The life of self-dependence rather than Christ-dependence is quicksand. The harder you try to prove that you are worthy to be saved on your own supposed goodness, the lower you go into the mire. But when you have had enough, however deep you have to go to realize it, you may call out to God for deliverance. Conviction of your sin and comprehension of the wrong philosophy about your adequacy is a necessary step to change your mind.

There is a good reason that God calls this new status "salvation." It is being delivered from sin and its consequences. Perhaps the best synonym is "rescued." But until you understand your sin, you may never seek it.

So, yes, I will tell you about your sin as much as it is necessary, as Paul did and Jesus did and all who love Jesus should, because it is a loving way to help you cry out to Christ for his mercy and eternal salvation.