

Effective

Personal

Evangelism

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Publicly And From House To House

Jesus gave His disciples a very special charge in **Matthew 28:18-20**, saying, *“Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.”* His command is to bring the message of salvation to all people and to bring to the world a greater understanding of righteousness. But how we go about fulfilling this commission is a mystery to many Christians today. Sadly, the church is not growing as fast as it once did. Only a few generations ago, the church of Christ was one of the fastest growing churches in the country, with baptisms on a regular basis and sound teaching being done throughout the world. But now, we have receded into the religious background in many ways. We see our young people leave for “greener pastures” and our older members lament because of the dwindling number of members at faithful churches. The answer to this problem is found in the scriptures, for it is in the Bible that we find the most appropriate model for church growth: personal evangelism.

- These days, most people are not converted by Sunday morning sermons, or even Gospel meetings. Just bringing somebody to church is not enough to convict a person.
- “Living the Gospel” and trying to convert people by your example is also usually not effective. We need to be careful when we dismiss actual Bible teaching because we live clean, moral lives. While morality is commendable, people are not necessarily converted by your refusal to swear, drink, etc. Clean living and good Bible teaching must be complimentary.
- Even when we do manage to set up a Bible study with individuals, we need to be careful to avoid verbal pugilism. Many of our studies simply become arguments over topics hardly related to salvation.
- The real key to good personal evangelism is the home Bible study. This cannot be emphasized enough, friends, and this will be addressed in other lessons in this series.

Discussion: What is the most difficult thing you have encountered in personal evangelism?

What I would like to do is begin a series of lessons on effective personal evangelism. We will approach practical applications in depth later on, but for this particular study, let us focus on a dynamic section of scripture that touches on some evangelistic tools. Turn to **Acts 20:18-21**:

“And when they were come to him, he said unto them, ‘You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, after what manner I was with you all the time, serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and with tears, and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus.’”

Being An Example

From the text, it is clear that Paul wanted to live by example in order to make his preaching and teaching more effective. **“After what manner I was with you all the time”** literally means that he wanted the Ephesians to recall what kind of person he was while in their midst. *“Let no man despise your youthfulness, but be an example unto them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12)*. The righteous man’s life serves as an example of the doctrine that he preaches, and shows unbelievers that the godly path is one that is desirable.

Discussion: In what ways can your example be a tool for evangelism? Have you ever discovered that your example was a hindrance?

- Our happy marriages can show unbelievers that Christianity makes relationships stronger and more lasting;
- Our well-behaved children can go a long way toward showing the benefits of discipline and an upbringing in the presence of God;
- We need to show people that we are happy and have fun, even though we reject the sinful habits and activities that the world defines as “fun”;
- The example of Paul in **Acts 20:18** was daily, which means that we should not suppose one good deed or one day of righteousness will be enough to convict

others. We must live consistently, always. Otherwise, unbelievers will see your one day of sin and suppose you to be a hypocrite.

- Does your example lead others to Christ, or not? We should be wary of depending on our examples alone to teach the Gospel. One might say, “Well, I let my actions preach the Word for me,” but there are members of every denomination who are just as moral, well-mannered, and socially adjusted as any one of us. You might be pure morally, but that is not enough to separate you from the denominational world.

Humility

Paul continues in the text, “***Serving the Lord with all humility***”. Pride is not our friend when it comes to evangelizing the lost or exhorting wayward Christians. “*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*” (**James 4:6**). It is a destructive factor that can very quickly turn off a potential Bible student. While we must approach any evangelistic opportunity with confidence, we need to make sure that confidence is properly placed. Are we proud of ourselves for previous conversions? Are we proud because we know the scriptures better than a denominational opponent in a debate? Are we proud because we are going to heaven and others are not? “*If any man boasts, let him boast in the Lord*” (**2 Corinthians 10:17**). What is so interesting is that if any person had a right to boast, it would have been Paul (**Philippians 3:4-6**) – yet he considered all of his earthly accomplishments as rubbish compared to the work and wonder of God!

Discussion: Why did Paul refuse to boast about his accomplishments?

On a practical basis, our humility can be displayed in personal evangelism by how we talk and act around potential converts. Using language that puts us on the same level as others is important. Say things like:

- “I am a sinner just like you, but with the grace of God”;
- “I am certainly not perfect, but I try to be”;
- “We are all Bible students, trying to figure this out together.”
- Paul does this very beautifully in **1 Timothy 1:15-16**. “*It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in*

me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

- “If Jesus saved me before I was a Christian, He can save anybody.”

Do you actually care about sinners?

One of the biggest problems that we face in personal evangelism is our lack of care and concern about the lost world. If we really believed what we say all the time about loving sinners, then why do so few of us invite our neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family to attend a Bible study? This is not meant to criticize anybody in particular, or call into question those who do try their best – all I want is to see us love still more (**1 Thessalonians 4:9-12**). Paul states in **Acts 20** that he labored in Ephesus with *“all tears”* – certainly a deep love and devotion to people he would never see again. *“He realized that one soul was worth more than the Roman Empire, yea, the whole world! The loss of one soul would bring tears to his eyes. Because Paul understood the preciousness of souls, he considered the work of evangelism not as a mere duty to be discharged but also as a personal participation in the lives of others (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)”* (“The Challenge Of Personal Evangelism”, Grimes, ***The Church – Challenged By Current Issues***, ed. Jackson, p. 273).

Evangelism When It Is Rough

Paul kept right on preaching the Gospel in Ephesus, in spite of the fact that trials befell him at the hands of the Jews (**Acts 20:19**). This means we need to be willing to say what is necessary, even at great personal cost. How much did Paul suffer for the cause of Christ? Just recall what he writes in **2 Corinthians 11:23-28**. Compared to such an example, how can any of us complain when our stand for truth results in:

- Losing friends;
- Getting made fun of;
- Having a door slammed shut in our faces;
- Hurt feet after a couple of hours going door-to-door;
- Losing a job because of something spoken on a moral matter.
- Even the thought of being alienated from family members cannot compare to being beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and sawed in half (**Hebrews 11:37**)!
- Will you complain much more from now on?

House To House

We should take Paul's teaching tactics to heart. He not only preached the Word publicly, but also from house to house. The disciples also did the same thing, as commanded by Jesus in **Luke 10:2-16**. This means there is a need and a pattern for regular, concerted evangelistic efforts in the community. Teaching the Gospel door to door is not a choice, friends, it is a command by example. We have an obligation to go out into our town and bring the Gospels to others. How can we expect the church to grow if we remain in a hole and never leave our protective shelter with the precious Word of God?

Discussion: How can we make door-to-door evangelism effective? Does it always work? What have been your negative and positive experiences?

The Whole Counsel Of God

Finally, there is a great need in our personal evangelism to cover the entire counsel of God, or the manifold wisdom of the revealed Word. Is there any part of the Bible that we are ashamed of? Is there any subject that is so taboo that we can neglect it? Is there any part of righteousness and morality that need not be followed? ***"...How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:20-21)***. In the same way, Paul states later on, ***"I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" or "entire counsel of God" (Acts 20:27)***. ***"As a minister of Christ Paul told the people what they needed to hear not what they wanted to hear. He charged Timothy to do likewise (2 Timothy 4:1-5). Paul took no pleasure in reproving and rebuking people but he did correct them in a spirit of love when the need arose" (Grimes, p. 273)***.

One of the greatest threats to personal evangelism today is that many of the Lord's servants will not declare what is needed in the world concerning ***"repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."*** We often ignore certain parts of the Gospel so that we can make others feel good (if only in a superficial way). But what actually feels better, teaching the lost the truth and leading their souls to salvation, or neglecting the truth and letting them go to Hell for the sake of temporary happiness?

“Come And See The Christ!”

In order to be good evangelizers today, we should look at examples of conversion in the Bible. Of all the scenarios that we read about, one of the most interesting series of events is in **John 1:35-50**, in which we meet several of Jesus’ followers in their earliest days of discipleship. Let us take note of what it took to convert each of them, and what methods Jesus uses to persuade them of His authority. In each of these examples, we will see lessons that can be applied to our evangelism today.

Andrew, a follower of John the Baptizer

“Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus” (John 1:35-37). It is admirable here that John has no qualms about leading others to Jesus, much to the reduction of his own following. It is, in fact, John’s entire purpose – what he strove for his entire ministry was preparing people for the coming of Jesus (**Luke 3:4-6**). So it should have come as no shock to him when Jesus did come and many of John’s disciples willingly followed Him. Also notice how clearly John explains the situation. It is not that he makes his disciples second-guess themselves, or make wild assumptions about who the Messiah is. With language that cannot be denied, he forces those around him to make a decision about Jesus. As for our evangelism, we have to be the same way. We must lead people to a choice: either Jesus is who He says He is, or He is an imposter.

- John did not let people make assumptions about Jesus. He clarified and explained in words unmistakably bold.
- He did not describe Jesus as “what you want to make of Him.” Rather, there is only one option.
- The two disciples responded to the message by obeying Jesus. Given more complete knowledge, there is nothing stopping them from following and proclaiming the Gospel. In the same way, the only appropriate (and saving) response to the Gospel message is obedience. When you hear about this man Jesus, and learn of His deity, what will you do? How will you respond?
- The two disciples did not maintain an unhealthy bond with John the Baptist, just as we should never choose discipleship under a human over discipleship with Christ. They respected John for what he was – a messenger, a temporary answer to sin in the world, a path-maker for the One who would complete all things. How often do people of the world place more importance on a figurehead (a preacher, televangelist, celebrity, cult leader, etc.) than actual obedience to God?

- John does not seem to be offended by those who left him for Jesus (**John 3:25-36**). And why would he? If anybody understood his place it was John. He did not have a big head about his role in the Gospel, nor did he feel that he was bigger than he actually was.

“And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and said to them, ‘What do you seek?’ And they said to Him, ‘Rabbi (which translated means Teacher). Where are You staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come and you will see.’ They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour” (**John 1:38-40**). It almost seems that the two disciples are testing out Jesus, curious to see what He has to say and how He lives His life. It may be an assumption, but it seems that this would have been an ideal time for the two disciples to ask Jesus questions, probe His ministry, and inquire about the costs of discipleship. Having only been acquainted with John up until now, it would make sense for them to have some questions for Jesus. This series of events is admirable because it shows that they were not half-hearted about their desire to do what was right. Today, it seems that we try so hard to keep things impersonal and distant that we would never even think of approaching Gospel matters in this way. We hand out a business card, “do lunch” sometime, send an e-mail or a phone call – but would we ever consider following a complete stranger home to talk to him about matters of salvation? In door to door evangelism, I would hardly be allowed to stay on a person’s porch for five minutes, let alone enter his home and spend the entire day with him teaching the Gospel. In the same way, how many unbelievers do you know who would willingly come to your home and listen to you teach? Give the two disciples credit for their wholehearted desire to learn. The question we have to ask ourselves is: how far would we follow Jesus to learn about salvation?

Discussion: Can this type of devotion even be found today? How can we pursue evangelistic opportunities with the same zeal?

“One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ)” (**John 1:40-41**). Here we have the beginning of Peter’s walk with God. It is unclear what kind of religious life he may have had before this day, but it is certain that his first encounter with Jesus changed his life

forever. A man who was once an uneducated fisherman would become one of Christ's most devoted disciples and an apostle, as well as an elder for first church in Jerusalem and the writer of two New Testament epistles. Who knows what would have happened if not for the simple message of his brother Andrew. *"Andrew was a man of action. He was able to make a decision and then act on it! When something needed to be done, he was ready to do it. When someone needed to do something, Andrew realized that he was someone, so he acted. It seems that a bit of the characteristic of Simon Peter's impetuosity was also in Andrew. He did not take all day to act when something needed to be done"* (**Great Lessons From New Testament Characters**, Cates, ed., 31).

Discussion: What can we learn about Andrew's decision to share the news with his brother?

A notably admirable quality of Andrew is his familial devotion. Notice that the very first person he talks to about Jesus is his brother. Obviously, he loves his brother and wants him to know about salvation through the Christ, but he might also see characteristics in Simon that would be valuable to the spreading of the Gospel. Do we ever approach our family members in the same way? There is nothing wrong with converting our families, and yet it seems like they are the last people we talk to about the Gospel. We are either too uncomfortable with the idea of convicting family members, or we do not want to alienate ourselves from them. After all, if I talk about the Bible to a stranger on the street and he rejects me, I will likely never see him again – I will have no ramifications to live with. But if I, by speaking the truth, drive a wedge between myself and a family member, nothing can change the permanency of the relationship and I will have to face him or her for long time. Family reunions will be awkward, a division in the family might occur, or, if it is a spouse who does not believe, a marriage will become increasingly difficult. We must always remember, though, that love of the family is second only to love of God, and *"he who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me"* (**Matthew 10:37**). What we have to do is learn to balance our love of family members with their need to be saved. If we never speak to them about spiritual matters for fear of awkwardness, then do we really love them that much? How much love do you show by knowing the way of salvation and never sharing it with those who you claim to love most?

Simon Peter, also called Cephas

After hearing the message about Jesus Christ, Peter goes with Andrew to meet Him in person. *“He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas’ (which translated means Peter)”* (**John 1:42**). What is it exactly that converts Peter? One thing that we can consider about this verse is the fact that Jesus had a purpose for Peter in the work of the Gospel, and knew that purpose ahead of time. The moment the Lord meets Peter, He instantly makes a change in his life and declares that he is to be known by a new name, a word very closely related to “rock” or “stone.” It is this new name that foreshadows Peter’s role in the church and his own declaration of faith. When we come into contact with Jesus through studying His word, we too have a purpose. Each one of us comes to God with unique talents and gifts, and only God knows just how vast our potential is. It is up to us, though, to devote ourselves to realizing that potential and turning possibility into reality. Simon was called “rock” by Jesus because of the great spiritual potential he had for leadership and steadiness of faith. He was not always perfect, especially at first. It is the same man named “rock” who denies the Lord three times and is easily swayed by those around him (**Galatians 2**) who also becomes a steadfast presence in the church in Jerusalem and writes two beautiful epistles. The name Peter would have meant nothing, though, if the man had not lived up to his potential. And how sad it is to see promise in the eyes of young Christian converts, only to witness them fail spiritually.

Philip finds Nathanael

“The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, ‘Follow Me” (**John 1:43**). We all, at some point, have heard the call of Christ. He has said “Follow me” to everyone in every walk of life in every language. Just as it says in **Romans 10:18**, *“But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”* The question we have to ask ourselves, though is: When Christ says “Follow me” am I willing to drop everything and do so? When you overhear a conversation between two non-Christians about a Bible matter, do you jump in? When you are confronted by atheists, do you make the time to answer their questions appropriately? When the Mormons come knocking on your door, do you give up an hour of your day to study with them? Every one of us today is in one of two conditions. Either you are a baptized Christian with the obligation to follow Christ wherever He may lead you and to be ready to spread the Gospel under any circumstance (**2 Timothy 4:2** says, *“Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season.”*) or you are not baptized and you have the obligation to follow the call of Christ and obey the commandments in the Bible to believe, confess, and be baptized. What I like about Philip is that he obeys without question. When asked

to follow Jesus, he basically drops everything and does so because he seems to know what is being proposed. The Son of God has asked Philip, personally, to join in Him spreading the Gospel. I suppose if that does not motivate a person to follow, then nothing else will. Philip realizes in this scripture what is at stake – His salvation!

“Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see’” (John 1:44-46). A couple of considerations for this section of text:

- Like Andrew, Philip was eager to tell others about the message of Jesus Christ. How eager are you? Even in the face of some reluctance on Nathanael’s part, Philip is not deterred.
- Philip did not consider the Messiah a legend, but viewed the Old Testament as an authoritative, historical document. Moses was a real person, as were the prophets, and their texts had meaning for their day.
- Many religions of today have little to do with finding anything concrete. They focus on the journey, not the destination. The seeking and not the finding. Some people spend their entire lives searching for truth, God, meaning, inner peace, etc., but here is Philip boldly proclaiming that everything the Jews had been anticipating was fully realized in Jesus. What other religion so completely fulfills us and leaves us with questions answered, mysteries unfolded (**Ephesians 3:1-7**), and fulfillment freely offered?
- I like that “Come and see.” In spite of Nathanael’s hesitance, Philip just nudges him along and encourages him to “see it for himself.” This is a powerful evangelistic tool because Christianity is not supposed to be a religion based on blind faith, with no hint of proof and validity. In our own evangelism, it is good for us to offer firsthand evidence of the veracity of Christianity. Let unbelievers read the Bible for themselves, come to their own conclusions, and let the power of the Word do what God intended it to do.

“Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said to him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!’ Nathanael said to Him, ‘How do you know me?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Nathanael answered Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these’” (John 1:47-50). The superhuman power of Jesus is recognized instantly by Nathanael, who is assessed by the Lord as an Israelite indeed. This is quite a compliment, for it shows that Nathanael was not only one who

had pure heritage, but also lived his life in light of His calling as a member of God's people. He was not a Jew in name only, but in nature, in character, in action. He set himself apart as an honest, upright, and moral man – probably the exact reason why Philip comes to him first. “*No guile*” means no deceit or dishonesty. His spirit is not bitter or unwholesome, but pure and gentle. A lack of guile would lead Nathanael to openly accept the things of the Gospel – unlike the Pharisees, he had no unhealthy attachment to Judaism which would lead him to be bitter in the face of the Messiah's message.

Astonished, Nathanael quickly asks Jesus how He knows him, clearly having never been acquainted before. In response, Jesus informs Nathanael that He had witnessed his righteousness under a fig tree at some point before Philip approached him about Jesus. “*The Jews were much in the habit of selecting such places for private devotion and prayer, and in such scenes of stillness and retirement there is something peculiarly favorable for meditation and prayer*” (***Barnes On The New Testament – John***, Barnes, 189). While conjecture, it seems likely that Nathanael would pray under a fig tree on a regular basis, and that those prayers came to ears of Jesus. It is not that He was physically with Nathanael during this time, but that His presence was with the guileless Israelite. How comforting it is to know that every one of our prayers spoken in righteousness is also witnessed by God. Every moment spent in silent meditation is like a sweet aroma wafting to the King's throne.

Discussion: How much proof did Nathanael need to be convinced? Is this always the case in our evangelism? How far should we be willing to go in *proving* the truth about the Christ?

Nathanael's faith is astounding, and admirable. With only the smallest bit of evidence, he is convinced of Jesus' deity and confesses his faith in Him. If only all people could believe in the Christ with such little convincing! We have here faith as a mustard seed in its most practical sense. Starting out so small and seemingly insignificant, Nathanael's faith is sure to grow by leaps and bounds upon the revelation of even greater signs, wonders, and words than those witnessed on this day. Most assuredly, Jesus promises that even more amazing things would happen, but what a unique and splendid display of faith Nathanael shows in light of such a small display of God's power!

Every Joint Supplies Something

*“The challenge today for the church to evangelize the world is indeed awesome. But it is no greater a challenge than Jesus gave to the first century disciples. Of a certainty, the world population today is many times that of the first century. But we possess means of communication and transportation which enable us to do more work in less time. Also of a certainty, many people in the world today are not receptive to the gospel. So was the case in the first century (**Acts 13-14**). The great challenge today is this: will each one of us personally be the Lord’s faithful servant?”* (“The Challenge of Personal Evangelism”, Grimes, ***The Church – Challenged by Current Issues***, ed. Jackson, p. 269).

Discussion: What do we have “going for us” in evangelism today?

- We have the truth, never forget that. What the world offers in place of true religion is a mockery. It is slavery to sin (**2 Timothy 2:26**). We have the Bible, the Word of God, and that will never let us down.
- We have God on our side. *“If God is for us, who is against us?”* (**Romans 8:31**)
- We have each other.
- We need to remember that when a person refuses to listen to the Gospel, he is rejecting God not us. It is not our fault if we have done what we can in offering the message.
- There are many people who actually want the Gospel. We must never let those who reject God get us down.
- The job is really not that difficult. We are not expected to know everything, all the time, but to do our best. God asks only that from us.

It Takes A Church

There is an old adage about raising children that says it takes a village to be successful. The same can be said of personal evangelism – it takes a church! We all have a part to play in the activity of personal evangelism. *“When I speak of ‘saving a soul’, I am referring to a process that begins with the initial contact with an unbeliever, and does not stop until years after the baptism into Christ. Many Christians only see the baptism. They are unaware of the time and effort spent patiently instructing, discussing, encouraging, and persuading. Further, Christians who are not involved in this process do not realize*

*how difficult it is for a new convert to exchange their old carnal friends for new spiritual relationships. Most have forgotten the tough changes that must be made and the help needed for a new Christian to go from sin to righteousness” (Focus Magazine, Kercheville, November 2000, p. 12). When we begin to take a deeper look at “saving souls” we realize how important every one of us is. Not all should be teachers (**James 3:1**), so let us never think that that is all there is to it:*

- Saving people takes the cooperation of the entire church (**1 Thessalonians 5:14, Acts 2:43-47, Hebrews 3:13**).
- Not only does a successful conversion require a teacher, but it also needs a social network of warm, kind church members to make the new person feel at home. Too many new converts feel isolated because they are not a part of a preexisting social structure.
- We need hosts for Bible studies. You may not teach a class, but you can certainly open up your home to a neighbor and have somebody else teach the class.
- There is a need for class assistants – people who can go to a class just for support, or as a witness when a woman wants a study with the preacher.
- If you have the ability to teach, then why are you not doing that? Can a church really grow from the work of only the preacher? The problem with relying solely on the evangelist for personal evangelism is that he does not have the social opportunities that other church members do. He may never meet your neighbor or your coworkers, so who will evangelize them?
- Even Paul did not do all of the personal evangelism. In fact, most of his work was strengthening churches that were already doing their own personal work without him (**1 Corinthians 1:14-17, Acts 14:22, 16:5**).
- The reason why many churches do not grow is because members are not getting on board with personal evangelism.

Every Joint Supplies Something

“From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16). Notice that every joint has something to offer – when it is working “properly”. When church members are using their God-given talents, then everybody stays busy and the congregation operates like a well-oiled machine. When members are not doing any work at all, or are not working properly, then the church becomes like an athlete with tendonitis. A church is hobbled when its joints do not work they ought to.

Discussion: Ask yourself: “Am I a member that is slowing the group down, or helping it along?” In the ideal congregation, nobody is idle.

- If you are able to teach, then do it.
- If you are weakened by trials and temptations, then pray about it.
- If you are having trouble with attendance, then come no matter what.
- If you are not spiritually mature, then grow.
- If you are growing, then grow some more.
- If you are not evangelizing, then get up and do it.
- Everybody needs to be doing something, and if you find yourself idle in the work of the church, you may find yourself left behind when the congregation moves on and does great things in spite of you.

What can I do?

To help the church grow, we need to stop and consider all of the things we can do. We are not worthless unless we make ourselves that way. Every person has the potential to do something, as is made clear by the story of the talents (**Matthew 25:14-30**). Even the man with one talent *had one talent!* So when we each consider what we can do, we need to remember to try things. You never know if you will be good at something until then – and you will never know how easy personal evangelism is until you just start doing it.

I can love the lost...

It is very clear to most people whether or not a church is a loving one. If we do not have a genuine concern for a soul’s welfare, then he will see right through us and reject the Gospel. Are just putting in our time when we evangelize the lost? Are we just trying to get “the preacher” off our backs? If we truly love lost people, then why do so few of us ever do anything about? Truly loving somebody involves telling them what they need to hear, regardless of the response (**Acts 24:24-27**). We also need to remember that it involves preaching the Gospel to people we may not like at all. Recall how awful Saul was to the Christians when we first meet him in **Acts 7:58**, **8:1**, and **9:1**. Even he was given the Gospel by Jesus Christ, who was obviously hurt by Saul’s hatred and sin (**Acts 9:4**).

But how do we love people we do not even like? And, more importantly, why should we want unlikable people at church at all?

- Do not forget that Christianity is for everybody, regardless of a person's sinful background (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Acts 17:30**).
- It is not up to you to decide how a person will act after being converted. We sometimes dismiss somebody because of their past misdeeds without realizing it is the worst of sinners who often come to God with the deepest humility (**1 Timothy 1:15-16**). We should give everybody a chance, and stop being a respecter of people.
- Just because you do not "like" somebody, does not mean God does not love him.
- Try to keep in mind that even the worst sinners of this world were once innocent little children. It should be our goal to get that person back on track and help them return to the innocence they once knew.
- When faced with unlikable people and conversion, also bear in mind that you may have been pretty unfriendly, obnoxious, or uncouth before you were a Christian – yet there were people who loved you enough to help you realize your spiritual potential!

I can be patient...

People will not be converted right away, nor will they be changed by one or two Bible classes, a sermon here and there, and a single invitation to lunch on Sunday. It may take decades for people to change and get better. After all, if a person lived so long in sin, should we be so unreasonable to expect them to completely change right away? The work of personal evangelism must be seen as drawn-out and long-term. It cannot be done a little bit every now and then, but must be a daily part of our lives. *"So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present"* (**Acts 17:17**). Just because we do not convert somebody right away, or change a new convert's bad habits in the first few weeks, does not mean we have failed. We just need to keep plugging away at it. Notice also the way Paul handles his studies with Felix in **Acts 24:27**. He studied with him for two straight years, yet was never discouraged enough to stop trying – and it was not even Paul who walked away from the situation!

Discussion: What are the practical ways that I can show my patience in evangelism?

I can have a positive attitude about the success of the Gospel...

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Many people give up on personal evangelism because they do not think it works. They have become bitter from failure after failure. While it is true that rejection can hurt, we need to pick ourselves up after getting bucked off and just try again. Instead of always anticipating a “no” from everybody we try to convert, we need to approach the situation from a more positive perspective.

- Believe wholeheartedly that the Gospel has the power to change people.
- Believe that the Bible has enough evidence on its own to convict sinners.
- Believe that God has the ability to see into the heart.
- Believe that the church will grow if you work hard and depend on God.
- Believe that people want the Gospel, but might not know it yet.
- Believe that the very next person you talk to about the Gospel will respond positively.
- Believe that you are not a failure, but an honest, bold ambassador of Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:20**).

Discussion: How has a positive attitude helped in your evangelism? What about in your own conversion? Reflect on the approach of those who taught *you* the Gospel.

Excuses

Personal evangelism is one of the greatest challenges to face the Lord's church today. It is a subject that we all need to improve on, and one that will never go away. Will we ever reach a day when this church does not need to grow anymore? Will we ever evangelize every lost soul within our sphere of influence? Will we ever feel no compulsion by the Bible to keep striving for church growth? *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few"* (**Matthew 9:37**). That is a sad condition that Christ says will always exist as long we fail to heed His call to personal evangelism. The really tough question to face is how much evangelism we each have done in the last year, five years, or ten years. How often have any of us actually actively pursued a soul for conversion? Do we love the people of this world enough to even try anymore?

Discussion: Will this problem ever go away? Do we ever get to take a break from evangelism?

Unfortunately, there is a "give up" attitude that exists in many congregations. Having tried personal evangelism and failed, many Christians feel like it is time to consolidate what we have and go in to hiding. We seem content to just hold our own in a world of very fast-growing false religions. At one point in the first half of the twentieth century, the church of Christ was the fastest growing religion in the United States. At one point, according to the statistician Gerald Paden, the church grew 171%, as opposed to the 33% growth in the 1960's, and the .5% growth of today ("The Challenge of Evangelism", McCray, ***Back to the Bible Evangelism Workshop*** CD-ROM, 1990). On average, in a church of around 100 members, only 2-3 Christians are actively seeking converts to the faith of Christ. But does this line up with the Bible's take on church growth?

- **Acts 2:41** – 3,000 added in one day
- **Acts 2:47** – People saved daily
- **Acts 4:4** – 5,000 new believers
- **Acts 5:14** – Multitudes were added
- **Acts 6:7** – Numbers multiplied greatly

Admittedly, the religious environment of today is much different than it was in the city of Jerusalem during those early days of the Way, but that does not mean cannot try to change the religious environment. Most people in this country do not even know what

the church of Christ is, let alone “Restoration Principles.” We must work very hard to change that, realizing that if we allow ourselves to fade away into the background too much more, we may not have any ground left in the work of personal evangelism. What I would like to do in this lesson is examine some of the excuses people make for not practicing personal evangelism. Even though you may not be able to preach, teach, or knock on doors, there are ways that you can lead others to Christ. God does not care how much success you have as long as you are trying (**Matthew 25:14-30**). But if you are not even trying, then you have a problem!

“I’m just too afraid”

In some ways, this is a legitimate concern – approaching people with the Gospel is a very stressful activity for some, especially those who are younger in the faith and might not have easy access to quick answers. But fear should not stop us, no matter how paralyzing we might think it is. Just ignore the possibility that somebody might say “no” because they are not rejecting you. You are not the one who needs to feel frustrated when nobody listens to the Gospel. You are not the one being offended. It is God. People reject the Bible, not the people offering it, unless you give them a reason to reject you (rudeness, haughtiness, impatience, etc.).

Discussion: Reflect on your own fears and anxieties about evangelism. Be creative and consider whether there are ways to evangelize that make it easier for you.

We need to consider some of the examples of rejection in the Bible and realize that we are in good company when unbelievers turn us away.

- Paul was rejected to the point of being stoned in **Acts 14:19**. Surely none of us has ever been stoned in somebody front yard!
- Jesus Christ Himself was rejected by his own friends in Nazareth (**Luke 4:28-31**).
- It must have been terribly discouraging for Paul to work with Felix for two years and make little progress (**Acts 24:24-27**).
- The disciples were warned of rejection (**Matthew 10:14, 22-23**), as if that is just a part of being a believer.
- We are not failures when we teach the Gospel – rather, it is a victory against Satan every time we speak a word on God’s behalf, regardless of what the outcome is.

- You do not know if somebody will accept the Gospel or not, so do not decide for them. What a shame that so many Christians let their fragile egos be the reason they refuse to go out and get their hands dirty with the work of the Gospel!
- *“But the fearful... shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8)*. Are you too afraid? We should be more afraid of Hell than being turned down by a neighbor.

“Sorry, too busy”

If we feel like we have too much going on in our lives to preach the Gospel, then perhaps it should be secular activities that are sacrificed, not God. Missing church, skipping Bible class, never attending house singings, and being too busy for personal work every now and then are all shameful. There are only a few good excuses for going AWOL on God (sickness is one of them), and we need to be careful about where we are placing God in our list of priorities. After all, He puts you first in His work, so why can you not do the same? *“But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33)*.

“I don’t know anybody who is interested”

Maybe that is only because many of us do not even try to offer the Gospel to those we know. Do not forget what Christ states, *“Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest” (John 4:35)*. All we need to do is lift up our eyes and see a world that is lost. The opportunities for evangelism are abundant, if we just show a willingness to lift up rocks every now and then and look.

Discussion: Are some evangelistic opportunities less obvious than others? Discuss examples.

“We pay preachers to do that”

While it is true that preachers are paid to evangelize the lost, there is also a great need for all church members to reach out to the world and offer the Gospel. There are some valuable practical lessons on this point:

- While preachers are paid to do evangelism as a job, they do not have the social interaction that many members do. They do not have jobs in which they are surrounded by unbelievers, for example. Preachers need church members to bring them unbelievers!
- There are many more church members than preachers, so the sheer number of untapped contacts is immense in the congregation.
- Church members may also seem more credible with unbelievers because they are not paid to teach certain doctrines. Unbelievers may relate to non-preachers easier.
- A church will only grow so much if the preacher is the only one evangelizing. But if everybody is working hard, the sky is the limit. *“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4).*

“I have poor health that distracts me from evangelizing”

This is an important concern for members of the church: We need to make sure that we who are healthy are working hard enough at evangelism that we do not depend on the infirmed members for all of our church growth! Why would we burden a physically afflicted member with a large workload when younger, healthier members have the physical capability to do much more. It is very sad to see congregation in which the only people working are the oldest members. However, if there are church members with health concerns who believe they are exempt from service, they are mistaken. While a great degree of compassion must go into our brethren who are stricken with infirmities, those members also need to be careful about wallowing in self pity, or becoming busybodies (**1 Timothy 5:13**). Even Paul had to deal with physical distractions, yet this did not cause him to feel sorry for himself and become idle (**2 Corinthians 12:7**).

Perhaps infirmed members have a different kind of responsibility in the matter of personal evangelism, but they have work to do nonetheless. I have often heard of members who keep on preaching the Gospel while in the hospital to nurses, doctors, and other patients.

Age

In the same way, some Christians believe their age gives them exemption from service. This could be no further from the truth, dear friends! If you believe you are too old to be of service to God, consider **Titus 2:2-3**, *“Older men are to be sober, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior... teaching what is good.”* Does it seem like older members are

supposed to be idle? Maybe they do not have the physical ability to go door to door on a regular basis, but they can teach younger members what to say when *they* go to door to door!

If you believe you are too young to preach the Gospel, think again. *“Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe... Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching...”* (**1 Timothy 4:12,16**). The power that young people have when it comes to personal evangelism is vast. They have energy, enthusiasm, and quick minds. Though not always tempered by wisdom from years of experience, young evangelizers can achieve great things.

Discussion: How does personal evangelism change at different ages? Are there certain advantages to being old? Young?

“People these days just don’t want the Gospel”

This argument is assuming that the needs of mankind have changed somehow since the first century when Christ commanded His followers to *“Go into all the world”* with the Gospel (**Matthew 28:18-20**). It does not matter if our society rejects the Gospel, because an unbeliever’s response does not change the fact that we must preach. Why does it matter if our postmodern world, in general, has failed to live by the Bible? We are commanded to teach, and let God do the rest. If we fail to teach, then the souls of every person we ignore will be held to our account (**Ezekiel 3:18**).

Notice the parable of the soil in **Luke 8:5-15**. The one who sows does not judge the soil upon which he throws the seed. He offers the seed to everybody, without deciding for them what they will do. In the same way, have you just unilaterally made the decision over salvation for everybody in the world?

Confronting Critics

We will always have critics to deal with, as Paul notes in several places in the New Testament. *“For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions” (1 Timothy 1:6-7)*. There are more people than we can count who wish only to stir up strife and cause trouble. Refusing all reason, these people fight and argue against the Bible, the church, and the very existence or nature of God. Others, to be sure, criticize the Bible out of an honest distrust for hypocritical “Christians” or glaring inconsistencies in denominational theology. No matter what the motivation, critics of the truth only need to be taught to be silenced – either the pure gospel will convict them to change or it will send them elsewhere for a less capable sparring partner.

When talking to critics, remember another verse that is helpful. *“Solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness” (2 Timothy 2:14-16)*. We need to keep in mind that we have the truth, and when that is handled properly, it can dispel any myths, supposed inconsistencies, or clever arguments. *“Most skeptics have only heard the questions and believe that there are no answers. But we have some great answers... Christianity is true. That means reality will always be on our side” (When Skeptics Ask, Geisler and Brooks, 11)*. Most of the criticisms that people offer, in any case, fall into the category of “word wrangling”:

- People believe that a discrepancy in the Bible is cause enough to lose faith in God (or disprove Him to others). Yet problems with dates, numbers, and census figures proves nothing. Many of the most noted inconsistencies in the Old Testament are due to the fact that Hebrew numerical notations are very difficult to decipher. Some figures have almost no differentiation between them, so that the difference between 1,000 and 10,000 is only a stroke or line. Human error in translation of something so inconsequential should not be cause for a loss of faith.
- Word meaning also is a constant source of argument. However, many of the common criticisms have to do with words that have no bearing on the meaning of a text.
- Even in cases where words play an important role in textual meaning, it is only modern day thinkers who put their spin on original Greek definitions that affect a text’s interpretation.

- Critics will receive punishment from God for their wickedness. Remember what Enoch prophesied, saying that God will punish for *“the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him”* (**Jude 14-15**).
- There are also no new arguments that can be made, because the criticisms of unbelievers today are the same ones offered by critics hundreds of years ago. Each new generation of unbelievers will champion the same old arguments. We need to be prepared for it (**1 Peter 3:15, Colossians 4:5-6**).

Answering a “Fool”

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (**Proverbs 26:4-5**). It is always difficult to reason with an unreasonable person. If one is inclined to speak words that are illogical, and wants to live by them, it is hard to convince him to think logically – error is like that, friends! We need to be careful, therefore, not to get sucked into the critic’s methods of argumentation because that means we are playing on his turf. As evangelists, we cannot try to play a game in terrain that favors our opponents, by his rules, and with his constraints. Otherwise, we simply join the fool in his foolishness.

Discussion: How does a fool draw others into his folly? What can you do to avoid lowering yourself to his level?

It is absolutely essential for us to bring the critic into our realm, answering him the way his error deserves. If we get into petty arguments with people it accomplishes nothing, and simply gives them what they want: one more frustrated, confused, stupid Christian who bites the dust. Instead of always lowering ourselves to someone else’s level, bring the conversation up to the Christian level, reasoning with him or her from the scriptures. Depend on logic, reason, good sense, and self-control, because the antithesis of this method of argumentation is not productive. *“Garrett notes, ‘To answer a fool according to his folly is to engage in the same emotional invective (abuse) that the fool uses. On the one hand, one should not deal with a fool on his own terms lest the imitation of folly become habitual. On the other hand, one must sometimes answer fools in the words they understand in order to reprimand them effectively’* (p. 212). *That is, force them to face the logical conclusions of their arguments. When you answer a fool, give him the answer he deserves (a good rebuke, sound reasoning, Scripture), and do not*

get caught up in his foolish assumptions, that is, do not give him any ground” (“When Critics Ask”, Mark Dunagan, www.beavertonchurchofchrist.net).

Unmasking the Critic

Many critics of the Bible claim that they are only interested in the facts and that they are completely objective in their arguments. Digging a little deeper, however, may reveal something entirely different. Often, they are jaded and bitter because they have grievances against God, the church, or Christians who have mistreated them in the past. Essentially, they have an axe to grind:

- They may feel that a professed Christian mistreated them.
- They may believe that God abandoned them in a time of crisis.
- Inconsistent or convoluted dogma in organized religion (usually a denomination) left them with a bad taste in their mouths.
- The Bible did not have the answers they wanted.
- They rejected the Bible because it convicted them of sin.

Discussion: What are some other excuses you have encountered when a critic has dismissed the Gospel? How did you handle it?

Norman Geisler reminds us, *“The Bible is without mistake (**John 17:17, 2 Timothy 3:16**), but critics are not. All their allegations of error in the Bible are based on some error of their own” (**When Critics Ask**, Geisler, 15).* What we need to do is look hard at what the real problem is: any critic who is dead set against the infallibility of the Bible is actually claiming infallibility for his own beliefs and positions.

Confronting Contradictions

We need to force our detractors to confront their own contradictions, helping them see that it is not the Bible that is in error, but their own hearts. Why is it that those who do not like the Bible because of its claim to the truth have no problem with other fields of learning that claim the same thing. Math, for example, is a discipline that is

inherently truth-oriented. There is no variation or room for error in calculus, so why is it so surprising when something as important and significant as religion claims the same. The world is filled with issues, questions, and subjects that only have one right answer. It is simply inconsistent to complain about the exclusivity of the Bible while taking more obscure answers from science, math, and history as valid. Some will go so far as to criticize the Bible's exclusivity while applauding Jesus' charge to teach the world. "Well, while I don't believe that Christianity is the only true religion, I do think Jesus was a great man who taught a lot of beneficial concepts." But wait a minute!

- Jesus' teaching is very exclusive (**Mark 16:16, John 3:16, 14:6, Matthew 7:13-14**).
- It is inconsistent to love Jesus but hate what He taught (**John 12:48**).
- The same goes for His apostles, who only wrote and spoke what was commanded (**John 13:20**).

Still others will claim that everybody in the world has the right to exercise their freedom in choosing a religion (or not), but will criticize a Christian for believing in the inspired Bible and verses like **John 14:6**. *"The critic might try to argue that just as people have different tastes in respect to different foods, each person can also have their own taste in reference to spiritual food as well. The problem with this is that there is a huge difference between food that perishes and truth. Jesus said that He is the bread of life (**John 6:48**). He might claim that the spiritual needs of one man are not the same as another man, but this argument completely ignores the fact that one God created us and is able to provide a revelation that meets the needs of all men. If we are all created in the image of God (**Genesis 1:26**), then why do spiritual needs have to be different?"* (Dunagan).

"My way or the highway!"

Critics often complain about people telling them what to do or believe. They resent that others out there are trying to pull them into a mindset, but fail to realize that they are guilty of the "My way or the highway" mentality. Critics need to be reminded, though, that when they are confronted by the Bible, they are not being persuaded by the opinions or dogmas of men, but the supreme truth of God. The Father has every right to tell somebody what to do! Even worse, some will try to assert that the exclusivity of Christianity has led to all of society's ills (the Crusades, Salem witch hunts, intolerance in the middle east, etc.). They say that abortion happens because of unloving, uncompromising Christian parents. They say that marriage is ruined because of violent fundamentalists. But this is a skewed view of Christianity, and there is no place in the Bible that ever advocates violence for the cause of Christ (**2 Corinthians 10:4**).

Discussion: How do we break down incorrect assumptions and misconceptions about Christianity?

Exaggerations

Some critics will overstate their case by claiming that certain alleged discrepancies have never been countered by Christian historians or theologians. But the claim is false, because the same supposed contradictions in the Bible have been around for ages, just as the answers have been. It is only out of ignorance that critics say things like, “The Bible is the most flawed book in history”, “Christians are always stumped by this or that”, “Christians are ignorant, uneducated people.”

Discussion: What resources have you found helpful in dealing with supposed Bible discrepancies or challenging hypotheticals?

“It’s all just propaganda”

A very common complaint by unbelievers is that the gospels are written in a distinctively propagandistic manner, meant to brainwash people and trick them into believing a deceptive, exclusive cult. However, this attitude reveals a complete lack of objectivity on the part of some critics. How can the Bible be a piece of propaganda when its writers are very straightforward about its message and intent? There is never any deception or trickery, but plain and simple language that is openly meant to prove that Jesus is the Son of God (**John 20:30-31** clearly states that the Gospels were written “*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ...*”). Where is the deception in any of the Bible? Where is the fake promise, the feigned love, or the hidden messages?