

Dealing with Personal Contacts

M.W. Bassford
9-23-07

Introduction.

- A. In our discussions on evangelism, many of the previous lessons have dealt with various ways in which we need to be a light to the world. The importance of that cannot be overstated, both for the sake of our own souls and for the sake of the souls of others. We can't make disciples for Jesus unless we are disciples first, and the damage that even one hypocritical Christian can do to the cause of Christ is incalculable.
- B. As important as a godly lifestyle is, though, being an example is not all we should do to reach the lost. Many Christians are convinced otherwise. They claim they're too shy, or not good at talking to people, or equipped to serve the Lord better in other ways, and so they never say anything to anyone. They live righteous lives, but that's it. They say that they'll be happy to talk about the Bible with anyone who brings it up with them first, but the reality is different. No one ever responds to their so-called "evangelism," and these Christians get what they really want, which is never to be placed in the uncomfortable position of being able to save a soul.
- C. The problem with that attitude is that it directly contradicts the words of Jesus expressed in Matthew 28:19-20. This is the way the kingdom of God spreads. Disciples make disciples of all nations, and then the new disciples go out and make even more disciples in obedience to the original command from Jesus. Friends, there aren't any loopholes in these two verses. There aren't any escape clauses for Christians who don't feel like evangelism. All of us need to be actively looking for ways to reach the lost, or we are guilty of disobedience.
- D. There's a hymn in our hymnals that we sing sometimes called, "You Never Mentioned Him to Me." It's a nice enough hymn, I guess, but I have to tell you, brethren: on the day of judgment, I'm not that concerned about some poor wretch saying, "You never mentioned Him to me." I'm concerned about the God of heaven saying, "You never mentioned Me to him." Either we work to save the souls of others, or we imperil our own.
- E. Once we understand that, we understand how important it is to move beyond unwillingness to discuss the Bible with unbelievers. We need to grasp not just the necessity of saving the lost, but how we can win souls as effectively as possible. With that in mind, let's turn this evening to dealing with personal contacts.

I. Before We Speak.

- A. Let's begin this discussion by looking at ways we should prepare ourselves to evangelize even before we speak. The first of these is to **START WITH THE WORD**. Look at what Paul says about the word and us in Colossians 3:16. In this specific context, Paul is discussing song worship, but his message applies with equal force to evangelism. For many Christians, the reason why they don't discuss the Bible with others is because the word does not interest them. There is no rich indwelling of the Scripture in their hearts that moves them to discuss it with others. They feel guilty about not speaking to the lost, the same way any of us feel guilty when we procrastinate about doing some odious, unpleasant task, but they never actually do anything.
- B. Conversely, when we do learn to delight in God's word, we will find less and less difficulty discussing it with others, even with those who are not Christians. It's just generally true of humankind that we love to talk about the things we love. For instance, I suspect that by now, every last person in this auditorium, with the exception of our visitors, is aware that I am a huge Mizzou fan. This is true, even though I am quite certain that I'm the only person here who feels that way about the Tigers. And yet, despite the fact that I am alone, I keep talking about it, and talking about it, because I care too much to be quiet. That's exactly the way we should be about the word. God's message should be so important to us that we care too much to be quiet.
- C. Second, we need to **PRAY** about our evangelistic efforts. The first century is the period of the greatest growth that the church has ever known, and it's hardly coincidence that the Christians of that time understood the power of prayer. We see just one example of this in what Paul says in Ephesians 6:18-19. He urges the Ephesians to pray about everything, but in particular, to pray for him and his work in spreading the gospel. There are so many things in this area, friends, that we need to think about constantly and pray about constantly. We need to pray that doors for the word will open before each one of us. We need to pray that we will take advantage of those opportunities in a way that will reach the lost and please God. We need to pray for the efforts that others in the church are making on behalf of the work. We need to pray. A lot.
- D. Next, we need to **BE OPEN-MINDED** about those whom we try to bring to the Lord. All of us tend to have in our minds a select class of people, typically close friends or family members, whom we are interested in converting. We need to get past that. Everyone we encounter, from the waiter at lunch to the lady who takes our package at the post office, has a soul, and that means that everyone is a potential convert. Look at Jesus' thoughts on this subject in John 4:35. In context, he's talking about the Samaritans who were coming to hear him because of what the Samaritan woman said. These were not people whom Jesus' Jewish disciples would have considered A-list prospects. Remember, the Jews despised and shunned the Samaritans. Jesus' point, though, is that even people we might shun or ignore are people who need to hear the gospel.

- E. Finally, before we get to the moment where we are actually talking with someone about Jesus, we have to **BE PREPARED**. Peter makes this point in 1 Peter 3:15. This is just common sense, friends. If we want to do well at something, we prepare it beforehand. I preach just about every sermon I write three times to no one at all before I preach it to a congregation. Sports teams spend hours practicing for every hour they spend in an actual game. Preparation is the only way that when we're on the spot, we can know what to say instead of figuring it out as we go along. We need to know, friends, what we're going to say when someone asks us what church we go to. We need to know what we're going to say when someone asks us if we watch some filthy TV show. There is no one right answer to these things, friends. The point is not that we should get together and memorize little commercials that we can all parrot at the appropriate time. The point is that we should think about it so that the moment catches us prepared instead of unaware.

II. As We Speak.

- A. Once we move on to the moment itself, though, the first thing we must do is to **BE OPPORTUNISTIC**. Since I've already made a bunch of football analogies tonight, I'll make another one. The mark of a great quarterback is not that he throws a touchdown pass on every play. The mark of a great quarterback is that when the opportunity arises to throw that pass, he sees it and takes advantage of it. We need to do the same.
- B. That's what Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:15-16. That word "circumspectly" literally means "looking around." In the evangelistic context, this means that we need to always be looking for a chance to insert Christ in the conversation. Even just a minimum of personal contact is enough for us to invite someone to services or a Bible study. What we really need to watch for, though, are the moments when the conversation turns to something spiritual, anything from raising children to the latest antics of Britney Spears. Those are the times when we have the chance to make an impression. If we take advantage of those opportunities, we can answer them in a way that points them to the Bible, to Christ, and to His church. We might only have to say something as simple as, "The Bible has a lot to say about having a strong family, and I'd be happy to sit down and study that with you." Or, alternatively, another's comment could lead to a discussion about what the Bible teaches about morality and how we need to live. The very nature of opportunities makes it impossible to predict where they will lead, but we need to seize them in a way that will bring others to Jesus.
- C. We will struggle with being opportunistic, though, unless we also strive to **BE BOLD**. The single biggest problem Christians struggle with about evangelism is fear. We're afraid of not knowing what to say, we're afraid of offending others, but mainly, we're afraid of the unknown, and it's fear that the devil uses to paralyze us. The best answer to this fear, though, lies in the simple thought that we don't ever have to do God's work alone. Look at the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:29-31. The Christians of the first century did have something concrete to fear: they could be persecuted and even killed for the cause of Christ. However, Jesus promised them that God would watch over them and take care of them. In much less trying times, God will do the same for us today. If we seek His help, He will give it. If we want Him to protect us from some sort of harm or loss, He will do it. There's no reason for us to be afraid because God's always got our back.
- D. Even as we strive to be opportunistic and bold, though, we need to remember to **BE GRACIOUS**. It reminds me of what a preacher friend of mine tells me about the evangelistic efforts of a couple in his congregation. They're something of a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they're very dedicated to talking about Jesus to everyone who comes into their store, but on the other hand, they're so militant and fire-and-brimstone in what they say that of the hundreds of people they've invited to worship, not one has ever come. As the saying goes, friends, we catch a lot more flies with honey than with vinegar. Consider Paul's thoughts on the subject in Colossians 4:6. It is absolutely true that there are some unpleasant truths in the Bible that people need to hear, but we need to talk about them in a time and in a manner that draws people to Christ rather than repelling them. The object of evangelism is not to blurt out Scripture in a rigid and unfeeling manner so that we can cross "evangelism" off our to-do list for the day. It is to persuade others to follow after Jesus. Let's consider our prospects so that we may know how to answer them in a gracious way.
- E. Finally, though, after we have done all of these other things, we need to **BE STEADFAST** in doing what we can to win souls. If you look at the New Testament, steadfastness is actually one of the four main virtues that is urged upon the Lord's people, and it is particularly important with evangelism. I'll be up front with you, friends. Of all the people we talk to about Jesus, most of them will not listen. If we invite 10 people to services, nine will never show up. If we succeed in getting 10 people through the church building doors, nine of them will never obey the gospel. But friends, that one person who does makes all the effort we put into it worthwhile, because that is one person who is now saved from the eternal torments of hell. We are going to face failures; we're going to face frustrations, but through all of those, we need to persevere. If we give up, we will never see the fruit that God has promised. Look at Paul's take on this in Galatians 6:9. The only way we can reap is if we don't lose heart and don't become weary. Just because we try to teach the truth to one person and they never obey doesn't mean we're a failure. Their heart is what has failed, not our actions. We need to keep doing what is right, even when it doesn't seem to be working, because sooner or later, it will.

Conclusion. If you're one who needs to obey the gospel yourself, God wants you to do it this evening.