

Beloved

The Pastoral Letter of Dr. T.J. Gentry – October 1, A.D. 2008

Evangelism 14: Practical Hindrances to Evangelism

Grace to you and peace, beloved. May the Lord be with you in all His fullness!

Having considered personal hindrances to evangelism, we now turn our attention to practical hindrances. Though there are many we could consider, I want to focus on two types of practical hindrances – those at the church-level, and those at the individual-level.

At the church-level, the number one practical hindrance to evangelism is a lack of focused and sustained prayer for evangelism. In fairness, most churches probably do actually pray for the conversion of sinners unto Christ and, occasionally, they will even pray for specific souls by name. However, without a focused and sustained approach to such prayer it will become haphazard and inconsistent, making it very hard, humanly speaking, to regularly assess what God is or is not doing in the way of evangelism through a particular church. When this occurs, many church leaders and members may be tempted to falsely conclude that the Lord just isn't bringing anyone to Christ in their particular area, or that He must be pleased to use other churches to that end. (Which, I believe, is why many in the Reformed world in particular erroneously and arrogantly conclude that their church is more a place for teaching those the other churches lead to Christ; there is sort of a proud "you catch 'em and we'll train 'em" type of mentality. *This is wrong on so many levels that I don't know where to begin to critique it. It would actually be funny if it weren't true!*) The fix for this is quite simple. The leaders of a particular congregation should begin to give a regular amount of time and resources to evangelistic prayer and to keep track of those being prayed for and any progress made in sharing the gospel with them. For example, if your church has a midweek service or a Sunday evening service, take a portion of the service time every week to share evangelistic prayer concerns (keep a list), to discuss evangelistic efforts toward those on the list, and to actually pray for those concerns as well as to pray for more of an evangelistic fervor to take root among the congregation and within other local churches. When this begins in earnest, I suspect that we will actually begin to see that Jesus was serious when He commanded that we "ask" in prayer, and then promised that "everyone who asks receives" (Matthew 7:7-8, NKJV). ☺

Another church-level practical hindrance to evangelism is a lack of regular preaching on the subject, as well as a lack of quality evangelistic training and literature. This usually happens not for want of evangelistic concern by the pastor or other teachers in the church (most church leaders actually do want to see people come to Jesus) but for want of prioritization.

Responding to the pressure of the many legitimate, timely needs that preaching and training and literature must help meet, they simply let evangelism sink to somewhere near the bottom of their list. And, sadly, when evangelism is not a priority in the pulpit and the classroom or on the bookshelf, it won't be a priority in the minds of most church members. This, too, is something that is easily corrected. (Now I realize that I am spending a good deal of time making specific recommendations, but my experience teaches me that specificity is the need of the hour regarding evangelism.) Here is what I suggest. First, in terms of preaching, every minister of the Word should regularly seek to make evangelistic application in their messages. As the text of Scripture is applied to the local congregation, week in and week out, apply it with a view to evangelism. I don't mean you should necessarily give an invitation at the conclusion of each message (although that might be appropriate in some instances). Rather, I mean you should seek to make concrete connections between the text and the congregation regarding their calling to share the gospel. Join this type of sustained evangelistic application in the pulpit to an ongoing, oft-repeated evangelistic training regimen and simple, short books and tracts on evangelism and you have a powerful antidote to this particular hindrance. (Taking it a step further, when this type of preaching, training, and literature exist in an evangelistically praying church, look out! Someone is likely to come to Christ! What an exciting prospect to consider and hope for. May God make it so!)

Before I conclude, let's briefly consider one individual-level practical hindrance to evangelism, that of the failure to prepare and share a personal testimony. I'll have more on this in future installments, but to begin with, you may not be sure what exactly a personal testimony is or is not. This should help – a personal testimony is your story about your relationship with Christ as Savior and Lord. Whether or not you recall the moment of your conversion is not as important as the fact that you are converted. Even if you can't remember a time when you didn't know and love Jesus (which is great, by the way), you were still born dead in trespasses and sins in the first Adam, and you were still brought to new life in Christ. If you came to know Him later in life, then this will be a bit easier for you, but every Christian has a testimony. Learning to share yours in a conversational, personal manner is a great help in personal evangelism. You don't need to be preachy or overly precise, just tell your story; it's the one you know best! Remember, salvation is all about a personal relationship with Jesus. As you begin to share with others your own experience with Him, you will be used of God to change lives. I guarantee it! Amen.