

# Beloved

The Weekly Pastoral Letter of Dr. T.J. Gentry – September 24, A.D. 2008

## Evangelism 13: Personal Hindrances to Evangelism

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

In this and the next installment we will consider hindrances to evangelism. By hindrances I mean those things that are, humanly speaking, essentially within our control both personally and practically in evangelism. Personal hindrances are mainly poor habits or attitudes, whereas practical hindrances are undeveloped or underutilized evangelistic tools, etc.

Personally, hindrances to evangelism begin with our relationship to the local church. When we are not accountable to the oversight and authority of the leadership of a local congregation of the Body of Christ we will ultimately find our evangelism hindered. Our integrity will be undermined as we call others to submit to Christ and join a church but we ourselves refuse to do so. At its core, this issue is one of the serious weaknesses with parachurch evangelistic organizations whose leaders often become a law unto themselves apart from any commitment to the local church. Even though they may and probably do receive financial support from the local church and have a board of directors of some sort that is made up of members of various local congregations, they still officially function outside the sphere of any particular congregation and without direct connection to the ongoing ministry of the local church. Further, much of the literature they produce for evangelistic purposes reveals a glaring lack of appropriate emphasis on the type of commitment to the local church that a convert must have as a follower of Christ, often leaving a convert without a congregation. When we turn to Scripture, however, we see no such idea of either individuals or groups evangelizing in a parachurch manner. Evangelism in the Scripture is carried out by those rightly related to the local congregation, sent out to share the gospel and sustained as they do so by local or regional church leaders. And so we, too, must be rightly related to the local church if we would evangelize unhindered.

Another personal hindrance to evangelism is a poor devotional life. Without regular prayer and Scripture study the evangelist will lose both power and zeal in sharing the gospel. Usually those who fall in this area do so not because of intentional neglect but because of busyness. Worse, many times the busyness is actually related to other legitimate church concerns: there's a committee meeting to attend or a meal to deliver or a lesson to prepare. All these are, of course, good in themselves, but they must not crowd out that which is ultimately better. When they do, joy is sapped and even the simplest duty becomes burdensome drudgery rather than a joyful privilege. Don't miss the significance of this one – personal devotion must be maintained as an ongoing priority in the life of every one of Christ's

disciples, especially those who would share the gospel effectively (which should be every Christian's goal).

Lack of regular prayer for the lost will also become a hindrance in personal evangelism. While this should be rather obvious, I frequently encounter Christians who have neither a set pattern for praying for the lost nor a list of ongoing and immediate evangelistic prayer concerns. Thus, evangelism is effectively taken out of sight and mind and they wind up being out of practice and dull to the evangelistic needs and opportunities surrounding them. Contrary to Jesus' command to, "pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:38, NKJV), those who do not regularly pray for the lost not only neglect their personal duty but also the duty to pray for others involved in the work of evangelism.

Evangelism is also hindered personally when Christians cloister themselves off from the world and the only activities they have time for are church related or only involve other Christians. Sadly, many Christians do not have any meaningful relationships with non-Christians wherein they might share the gospel. Thus, they don't witness because they lack opportunity, and, unless they are going to go door to door or preach on the street corner, they will likely never know the joy of leading someone to the Savior. As Christians we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (see Matthew 5:13-14). As salt we are to preserve and flavor, but we have to come into contact with the world around us to do so. Living exclusively in the salt shaker is not an option! As light we are to expel the darkness around us by shining out. Rather than staying in the box with the other bulbs we must get plugged in and shine! Think of it in terms of this question. How will I ever share the gospel if I don't ever encounter those who don't already believe it? I'll answer that for you. You won't, and eventually you will become one of those who believe evangelism is someone else's job. You'll learn to love your little Christian subculture more than anything else and fall into the neo-Amish error of retreat from the world around you. And you will lose your saltiness. And you will hide your light. And Jesus will not be pleased.

Although there are more personal hindrances to evangelism, these are the most pressing. Work on these and you will make great strides in the proper direction; in the direction of actually following Christ's example and winning souls. Don't sit back, however, and continue in these errors. You must avoid them. If you are caught-up in them, repent and do the right thing. Submit to the local church. Commit to private devotions. Begin praying for the lost. Get out in the world and build relationships with non-Christians. These potential hindrances *are* in your control and you are accountable before God to remove them. Amen.