

## **What Will It Take To Rekindle Evangelistic Fervor Among Churches of Christ?**

By Bob Young

The first article in this series ([www.bobyoungrsources.com/articles/getting-evangelism-right-1.pdf](http://www.bobyoungrsources.com/articles/getting-evangelism-right-1.pdf)) introduced nine possible reasons for the decline in evangelism.

A second article ([www.bobyoungrsources.com/articles/getting-evangelism-right-2.pdf](http://www.bobyoungrsources.com/articles/getting-evangelism-right-2.pdf)) addressed ten primary reasons for the recent decline in the number of Christians and the number of congregations as reflected in national directories. That article suggested that the decline in evangelism and conversions was likely a factor in the numeric declines.

The purpose of this third article is to expand and further define the nine areas mentioned in the first article. In each item, some possible initial steps toward solutions are also suggested.

### **We are less certain that people without Christ are lost. Therefore, we must be constantly reminded of this truth.**

Only Christ saves. The Bible holds no hope for those outside of Christ. The Bible has no word of hope for those involved in non-Christian religions. The Bible holds no hope for those outside of covenant relationship with God—strangers from the covenant, the promises, God, Christ, and hope. God can do what he wishes (and that may be beyond what we can know through his revealed word), but what we can know with certainty is what he has revealed to us. He has revealed his will in Scripture and the only revealed way of salvation is through Jesus.

The solution in this area is to emphasize this truth. Coming face to face with this truth is uncomfortable—for others, and for us. The church must restore a fervency that will come only with a clear and constant awareness that people without Christ are lost. The application of significant resources to mission and evangelism efforts will not occur until this fact is kept at the forefront of our minds. The increase in benevolent ministry and missions in recent years must be coupled with focused efforts to convince people to come to Christ for the greatest need of life—eternal salvation. Sermons and classes must not ignore basic gospels truths such as this.

### **We are afraid to say who is lost and who is saved. We must be willing to identify the lost and the saved based on Scripture. We must not hesitate to teach the Bible and affirm who is outside of Christ and who is in Christ.**

If we ignore or gloss over the question of who is lost and who is saved, we cannot know who needs to be saved. We may have already lost this awareness in a young adult generation, and we are in danger of losing this awareness and distinction in another generation of today's adolescents. The Bible makes clear that not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom. The Bible makes clear that God accepts those who keep his commandments and do his will. A person who does not keep God's commandments cannot claim supreme loyalty to Christ.

We must affirm that those outside of Christ are lost. We must be firm and clear in teaching that those who have not "put on" Christ are lost. This does not require that we be mean-spirited about the subject of salvation, but we are considering life and death matters, and we must face the fact that those outside of Christ are lost. Therefore, we must be willing to

talk to those who are unchurched and uninvolved in the Christian life and Christian family. We must be willing to talk to church people who are misinformed and mistaken in their service to God. We must be willing to talk to church people who are among us every Sunday but have never obeyed the gospel to be added to Christ and to have forgiveness of their past sins. We must be willing to talk to anyone and everyone about the beauty of life in Christ and God's great desire that none perish but that all might be saved.

**We must be bold. The emphasis in our culture on tolerance has made us timid.**

We have become timid in our outreach, especially with regard to those closest to us and most likely to respond to the gospel. Throughout most of my ministry, the members of the local church have brought me more Bible studies than I could handle. I have studied with spouses of members, children of members (including adult children), family members, neighbors, friends, co-workers....

Let us restore our boldness. The members who helped me identify those in need of salvation were those who were bold enough to say that God's Word is right, that we can know the will of God through that Word, and that we must obey God. It is not a sign of love to hold back and delay such confrontation. It is a sign of genuine love to say boldly that all of us must do everything God requires of us in his Word. "Tough love" is always bold.

**We must be unashamed. We have become ashamed of the simplicity of our worldview and the simple message of Scripture.**

I believe we have become ashamed of the gospel. To adopt a worldview that centers in Jesus as the only way is intolerant of other "ways". Tolerance is a culturally-desirable characteristic in our nation, and we are afraid and ashamed to go against the culture. We are unwilling to risk being labeled as intolerant. We are unwilling to risk the loss of relationship. We are ashamed of the truth.

We say, "Well, at least they're coming." Yes, they are coming to church, but they are lost. If they come to church until the day they die, they will still be lost insofar as we can know based on Bible teaching. People are not saved by coming to church; people are saved by the blood of Jesus applied in their lives continually. We are being dishonest with others and with ourselves. We must not be ashamed of the gospel.

**We must restore our sense of obligation and responsibility.**

To our great loss, the loss of the kingdom, and the loss of the lost, we have made evangelism optional. We have forgotten why the church exists and have turned inward. We have made evangelism optional in the local church; we have made it optional for the average church member. Evangelism has become a "take it or leave it" matter.

Jesus commissioned his followers to go forth making disciples. Evangelism is not optional. If the word of God communicating the commandment of Jesus to his followers immediately before his ascension into heaven is not sufficient to move us, I have a hard time figuring out what will motivate us to accept our responsibility to share the good news of Jesus. The results are in God's hands, but the responsibility to share the good news with as many as will listen belongs to every Christian.

**We do not have strong social bridges in our daily lives.**

Sharing the gospel requires connections and contacts. We do not know and interact with as many people outside of Christ as in times past. Our impersonal and mobile society has destroyed many social networks—families, neighbors, friends, and co-workers. We have become satisfied in our individual homes, spending most of our personal time in personal activities rather than interpersonal relationships.

We must purposefully build social bridges across with the gospel can travel. We must go out of our way to meet people, to make new friends, and to establish connections with the spread of the gospel in mind. We must be hospitable. We must help one another. In my observation, through the years when a church member has invited a friend to church, that friend has almost always been surprised to learn that there are several other friends who also attend that church. We are not using the shared social bridges which already exist. We are not praying for our friends by name and thus finding out that many other people have the same friends. There are dozens of ways we could build more social networks. There are also dozens of ways we could use more effectively the social bridges which already exist.

**We do not know the Bible as in previous times and this lack of knowledge contributes to our fear of engaging others in Bible study.**

We are afraid to share the gospel because we ourselves do not know the Bible and fear discussions where we may be asked a question we cannot answer. While knowing as much about the Bible as possible is desirable, the fear that has been generated concerning lack of Bible knowledge is a lie of Satan. There is no person alive who can absolutely answer every Bible question. All of us have gaps in our Bible knowledge. In our society, thousands and perhaps millions of people who claim to be followers of Christ are talking about the Bible every day. Often, they are talking about the Bible without having read or studied it. I talked to a man last week who began many of the sentences in our discussion with the phrase, “I have always thought...” He was mostly depending on what he had been taught as a child or what he had heard through the years.

The solution to a lack of Bible knowledge is two-fold. One, we can become better Bible students. The New Testament can be read in 24 hours. (I just picked up the Bible laying beside the chair where I am writing to check this fact that I pulled out of my memory. This Bible has 233 pages in the New Testament. One would have to read about 10 pages per hour, a page every six minutes. That certainly can be done.) For several years, I read the New Testament through every month. I believe that can be done in 30 minutes to an hour per day. We are not Bible students because we are not serious about knowing the word of God. We think we already know it. We are not ready and eager to learn more. We are even less ready and eager to change anything we already know. The second solution to our lack of Bible knowledge is to engage in Bible study that studies only the Bible. It is amazing how little one has to “know” about the Bible when the Bible study only involves reading and understanding the Bible. Many times our lack of Bible knowledge is mostly about a lack of knowledge of the various human understandings that might come up in a discussion.

### **Christians in general (and many preachers) lack confidence to share the good news.**

As an expansion of the previous point, I point out that we are less confident in what we know, what we have been taught, and in the answers we have heard in the past. Some of our lack of confidence comes from the fact that we have not ever been involved in evangelism. A Bible major at Ohio Valley College enrolled in my class in personal evangelism. On the first day of class, the class members asked what we were going to do in the class. My answer was that we are going to learn how to share the good news and we are going to do it. The Bible major admitted that he had never taught anyone the gospel, but to his credit, he was anxious to learn how to do it. The members of that class taught several people during the semester, and nine were baptized into Christ. A young minister with whom I worked told the story of how he met his fiancée, now his wife. He was enrolled in a college evangelism class and had the assignment of sharing the gospel with someone. He chose an acquaintance, shared the gospel, began to date the young lady, eventually proposed to her, and now they are married. To young people who say, “There just aren’t any Christian youth for me to date,” I hold out this example as one possibility.

These examples say that one of the best ways to rebuild our confidence is to begin. Begin by sharing prayer lists of those we would like to see brought to Christ. Focus our attention on certain people. Look for opportunities. Build relationships. Learn all you can about how to share the gospel, or ask someone with experience to take you along as a “silent partner” to witness the gospel at work. Let us begin to do what God has called us to do, and the confidence will come as we see his power exhibited again and again.

### **As evangelism has declined, the lack of opportunity to see and experience people becoming Christians has caused a decreased emphasis and expectation.**

The church has become accustomed to the lack of evangelism so that it is in emphasized or expected. Hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of local congregations and Christians have not personally seen a baptism for a long time. No wonder we are convinced that the gospel has lost its power!

We must restore confidence in the gospel. The gospel is powerful and effective. Gospel meetings are effective for congregations that work and prepare for them. Door-knocking and home Bible studies are effective. Local congregations should expect the gospel to be preached and that the preaching of the gospel will have its desired effect. Mission efforts must return to an expectation of evangelism. It is not enough to do good works, the gospel must be preached to the salvation of souls. Jesus condemned those who only did good works in his name (Matt. 7:21). We may have been so busy applying that to those around us that we have failed to apply it to ourselves. Doing the will of the Father includes seeking and saving the lost. Let us come to worship with expectation, wondering what God will do among us that day. One thing is certain—there will not be evangelistic results unless there are present those who need to be saved. Let us renew our efforts to invite others. When they do not come, invite them again, and again, and again. Let us love with the love of God, who is not willing that any perish, but that all come to repentance and salvation.