

## Hindrances to Effective Evangelism

~ Virgil Heisey

Satan with all the powers of darkness is opposing the people of God through the evil world around us. But he is also working more subtly within and among us to hinder our evangelistic effectiveness. We do well to stop and analyze from time to time what we are doing and how we could improve. If we study the story of Achan, we soon learn that the problem was not the Israelite army's lack of ability. Neither was there a deficiency in Joshua's capability in leadership, but rather it was sin among the people—and more precisely with one man and his family—that caused the defeat at Ai. Sin in the church can seriously hinder the evangelistic efforts of our congregations. God knows where it is and what it is, and He through His Holy Spirit will make it known in due time, but often many can suffer as a result.

The Bible in Second Corinthians 4:1-5 teaches us that we who have the blessed ministry of the New Covenant ought not to be discouraged or faint. "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." These verses show us there is a possibility that we need to renounce hidden and dishonest practices to avoid altering God's Word. The devil has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, but if the testimony of the church is not what God wants it to be, it can hide the Gospel light. In this condition the lost have a more difficult time finding new life in Christ. Then verse five says there is also a possibility that we would preach ourselves instead of Jesus Christ, which also can be detrimental to a clear testimony. But when we preach Christ in truth and sincerity, out of hearts that are pure before God, we can rest assured of His blessing.

One serious hindrance to the work of evangelism is lack of unity. We do not have to study long in the New Testament to discover that unity is part of the heart of God for His people. Unity is a strong factor even in the political realm. Most of us have seen the slogan with the backdrop of stars and stripes, "UNITED WE STAND," but the opposite is also true, "DIVIDED WE FALL." Jesus Himself said a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. This might be true for a nation or kingdom, but how much more for the body of Christ as they move against the forces of darkness. When there is unity in the brotherhood, it is a powerful witness for the cause of Christ in the world. Jesus in His prayer in John 17:20-23 makes this very clear. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." If we condense the thought in verses 21 and 23, we see, "That they may be one—that the world may know." These words show clearly that our unity can help to prove to the world that God sent Christ into the world, so that they would believe. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

Another aspect of life that can hinder evangelism is a lack of financial integrity. Finances are a tool by which we make many contacts and relationships almost every day. As we move around in this world and buy and sell, our businesses and financial transactions touch many lives. Most every person uses finances in one way or another. It is very important that our yea be yea and our nay, nay, and if for some legitimate reason we cannot keep our end of an obligation, that we seek some type of reconciliation. Reputation can be built or destroyed by how we handle financial matters. Psalm 15, an Old Testament summary of an upright and godly person, specifically mentions money and personal integrity. Jesus gave much teaching on finances, and the apostles mention this subject, too. Luke 16:9 says, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye [it] fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." The contacts we make as we use money have potential to leave a testimony that draws people's attention heavenward. I recall the words of an elderly bishop, "The world judges what kind of Christian we are more by our attitude toward money than by the clothing that we wear." When we fail in financial integrity, we are not far from losing our testimony in other areas of life, too. But because of the witness that is left or lost by our financial dealings, it is of great importance that honesty and integrity characterize what we do. Since congregations are made up of individuals, if a member fails in this area, the congregational testimony can fall into jeopardy. So let's be cautious about this part of our daily lives.

Here is another point to ponder: There is a direct correlation between our effectiveness in outreach and our support of our local congregational position. Almost every Biblical congregation has written guidelines for conduct, and if we are members we commit ourselves to live by them and support them. But within us is this subtle temptation to be careless in supporting the standards we have committed to. In this we must be careful because the liberty we grant ourselves is very possibly being observed by someone, and sometimes worldly folks around us know our position, too. This type of thing can be a stumbling block to a young person we associate with in the youth group, a brother or sister who is young in the faith, one of our own children, or any ungodly person who knows us. Multiple illustrations could be given, but let us remember that somebody follows us. Even if no one else were to see us, God does, and He would have us change our ways. Sometimes this type of thing is a sin of the flesh or of the spirit that we permit in our own lives, and little by little our testimony deteriorates, and people can lose out. Many young people have lost their way because their parents were one thing in church and to the public eye, but in the home and in private life permitted unscriptural things and violated the position of the congregation they attended. Sometimes this type of sin can hide for years behind a plain appearance, but eventually it hides no more. At times, to save the situation temporarily, the family changes to a congregation with a more "relaxed" position so they all can fit in and be in full support, but this seldom lasts long because most churches draw a line somewhere. However, a wonderful testimony can be left if families avoid this pitfall and support wholeheartedly their leaders and congregational positions.

The last area we want to look at is simply not getting involved in God's work. In the song of Barak and Deborah in Judges 5, we read of certain tribes who really invested themselves in the combat with the enemy, doing all they could to gain the victory. But in verses 15-17 we read of several tribes who had "great thoughts of heart" and "great searchings of heart." We could say that they had high and noble intentions, yet never got out of their comfort zone. They stayed with their flocks and herds, with their ships and trading, while God's people were in great danger and other tribes were struggling to win on the front lines of conflict. It is true that sometimes age, family obligations, or schedules can interfere with certain aspects of kingdom work, but we can at least pray for those who are directly involved. "He who cannot go to the mission field on his feet can go on his knees." This

applies whether the mission field is local or foreign. If we cannot go ourselves, we can support the work with our words, deeds, and finances.

Closely connected with this thought is the idea of waiting for a more convenient season. What if we feel God's leading to speak for Him to a store clerk, a person we meet in our work, or a salesperson who comes to our door? Are we responsible? Do we have an obligation? Sometimes we find out that the person we felt led to speak to suddenly died shortly after we last saw them. If we at least spoke a word of the Lord when we felt God's Spirit prompting us, it can be a great consolation. However, if we were quiet and waited, it only brings regrets.

There is a true account of a man who trained a capable young man for a certain skill as they worked together day after day, year after year. The man who did the training was a Christian, whereas his trainee was not. Often the Christian felt the call of God to speak to the young man about his need of a Savior, but he put it off again and again. One day while the Christian man was watching his trainee perform an activity, the young man suddenly collapsed and died. The older Christian felt condemned and convicted for not sharing the Gospel message when he could have and should have. He went home and wrote a few words as he imagined his good friend standing before God unprepared. I want to leave this as a closing challenge to each one of us.

#### MY FRIEND

My friend, I stand in judgment now And feel that you're to blame somehow.  
On earth I walked with you day by day, And never did you point the way.

You knew the Lord in truth and glory, But never did you tell the story.  
My knowledge then was very dim; You could have led me safe to Him.

Though we lived together on the earth, You never told me of the second birth.  
And now I stand this day condemned, Because you failed to mention Him.

You taught me many things, that's true; I called you "friend" and trusted you;  
But now I learned, now it's too late, You could have kept me from this fate.

We walked and talked by dawn and night, And yet you showed me not His light.  
You let me live and love and die; You knew I'd never live on high.

Yes, I called you "friend" in life, And trusted you through joy and strife.  
And yet on coming to the end, I cannot call you now "my friend."

The battle for souls is real; the work is not easy. Sometimes results are few and growth seems oh, so slow, but let us be faithful. Let us do day by day the work God has for us and invest whatever we can in His work. Let us beware of the things which could hinder our effectiveness, and deal with the inconsistencies in our lives so that God can use us. May the testimony of our lives be such that would draw people's attention God-ward and heavenward in the twilight of time.

~ Lebanon, PA  
July 2013