

Why I Cannot Convert My Neighbor

A question that has always plagued me is, "Why cant we be more effective in teaching our friends and neighbors in the gospel of Christ?" We hear sermons impressing us with our duty and some go out and make an honest effort to convert the lost. Why are we no more successful than we are? It is true that religious interest is at a very low ebb in society as a result of humanism in all its forms, but there are still a number of people that may be reached if we effectively analyze the situation. In fact, over half the people in the United States do not attend any sort of religious service on any day of the week. Truly the fields are white unto harvest (John 4:35)!

The fault might be with the one we are trying to reach. Man is the product of his environment, which will determine his religious attitudes. This may cause him to be indifferent toward religion in general. It may be because of the hypocrisy seen in those who claim to be religious. It may be because he is too deeply seated in error that his religious prejudices have closed his mind to truth so that he will not listen. Of course, the Lord had to deal with his kind. If this be the case we may have to learn ways to break these barriers in order to teach the truth, or go on to others which are more receptive. The Lord and the apostles serve as great examples of this approach. However, the fault may be with us. We often are our own worst enemies in the most important work on earth. Let's examine some of the faults that we may have and, if guilty, cast the beam out of our own eye before we begin with the mote in another's eye.

First, it may be that I cannot convert my neighbor because I am not truly converted myself. When my prospect sees that I let less important matters take precedent over my loyalty to Christ, how can I expect to have proper influence over him? He sees that I let material things interfere with my religion and he decides that it just is not that important after all. Romans 6:4 says, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." This newness of life is one that reflects a new quality or state in life. When we are in Christ, we are new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). Spiritual concerns must take precedent over earthly matters.

Second, it may be that I cannot convert my neighbor because I find no real joy in serving Christ. If my prospect continually hears me complain about every little sacrifice I am called on to make for Christ, that my religion has become a burden in my life, then he would be reluctant to see any joy that may be in it for him (1 John 5:3; cp. Matthew 23:4; Acts 20:29). Philippians 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:16). The new life in Christ must be one of joy because the burden of sin has been lifted from the heart. An unhappy, bitter, dour Christian is a contradiction in terms. A prospect must see the joy and beauty of Christ in every Christian to be effective (Romans 14:17).

Third, it may be that I cannot convert my neighbor because they may be a better moral person in the world than I am in Christ. A Christian should be the best and finest spouse, parent, citizen, employee, and neighbor that may be found in any community. If

my relationship to Christ has not made me better than my counterpart in the world, I cannot have much influence on him for the gospel. Colossians 3:5-10 says, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him."

Fourth, it may be that I cannot convert my neighbor because I am not as convicted by the Scriptures as I should be. If he sees that I do not think enough of the gospel to apply it to everyday life, it would be futile to try to convince him that it would solve the everyday problems that he faces. Does he see in me the strength that comes by prayer (Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2) and Bible study (Deuteronomy 17:19; John 5:39)? Can he see in me that love is the solution to all breaches of relationships and communication (Romans 12:21; Ephesians 4:31-32)? Does he see that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)? Is he aware that I am willing to sacrifice self for the benefit of others (Philippians 2:3)?

Fifth, it may be that I cannot convert my neighbor because I do not really believe there is a Hell. If I do not really believe my neighbor would go to Hell for being outside of Christ, and I love him as I claim, then I would work diligently to find some way to reach him with the truth. I would never want him to go to Hell any more than I would want to go to Hell for not loving him enough to be concerned about his soul. Do we find and apply truth in the reality of Hell? Do we believe that it is a place of torment and outer darkness (Matthew 8:12; Luke 16:23-24; Revelation 14:11)? Do we really desire to keep our friends out of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 14:10; 20:10; 21:8)?

Sixth, it may be that I cannot convert my neighbor because I do not really care if he is converted. If I really did care about his soul I would get as close to him as I possibly could so as to understand him and teach him. I would look for opportunities to acquaint him with the good news. I would not get discouraged, I would look for ways to break down his prejudices. I would live the very best life possible before him and show him the joy that can be found only in Christ. I would strive to manifest the peace and strength that only comes from being a Christian. Jesus always took the time to work with individuals. From a human perspective, we would expect Jesus to only address multitudes, since He only had a short time span on the earth. However, we see the Lord devoting time to Nathanael, Nicodemus, the woman at the well, Peter, Philip, Thomas and others. Every individual was important to Jesus!

In Luke 10:29, the lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" In the subsequent story of the Good Samaritan, the lawyer learned that his neighbor was the one who had fallen among spiritual thieves and left for dead. In Leviticus 19:8, the word "neighbor" has been described as a person who, like yourself, has been created in the image of God.

Our sense of love in the tender beings which are made in the image of God should compel each of us to expend just a little more time in trying to reach the lost! Matthew 22:37-40 says, "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" Four out of every five conversions are likely to come from those we already know. Sow the seed in good and honest hearts (Psalm 126:6; Luke 8:11, 15), and work for the night is coming (John 9:4). God wants laborers for His harvest (Matthew 9:37-38).

Kyle Campbell