

Why I Cannot Convert My Neighbor

Introduction. A question that has always plagued Christians is why can we not be more effective in teaching the gospel of Christ? We hear sermons impressing us with our duty and a lot go out and make a good effort to convert the lost. Why do we have little success? Religious interest is difficult to generate as a result of humanism in many forms, but there are still a a lot of people that may be reached if we can find a solution. Over half the people in the United States do not attend any sort of religious service (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 is the case we may have to learn ways to break these barriers in order to teach the truth, or go on to others who are more receptive. The Lord and the apostles serve as great examples of this approach. However, the fault may be with me. I am often my own worst enemy in the most important work on earth. We will 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.

I. ***Because I Am Not Truly Converted Myself***

- A. When my prospect sees that I let less important matters take precedent over my loyalty to Christ, how can I expect to have the proper influence? He sees that I let something material interfere with my relationship to God and he decides that it is not important (Romans 6:4; cf. Matthew 6:33). "Newness of life" reflects a different quality or state in life. When we are in Christ, we are new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- B. If he sees that I do not think enough of the gospel to apply it, it would be senseless to try to convince him that it would solve the problems he faces.
 1. 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)?
 2. Can he see in me that following the Bible is the solution to the problems among men (Romans 12:21; Ephesians 4:31-32)?
 3. Does he see that Christ strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)? Can he see my willingness to deny myself for the benefit of others (Philippians 2:3)?

II. ***Because I Find No Real Joy In Serving Christ***

- A. 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 (1 John 5:3; cf. Matthew 23:4; Acts 20:29), then he would be reluctant to see any joy that may be in it for him (Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16).
- B. 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 a Christian to be effective (Romans 14:17).

III. ***Because My Neighbor May Excel In Morality***

- A. 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).
- B. Before becoming useful and effective in reaching the lost, we may have to cleanse ourselves of what hinders us (2 Timothy 2:21). We may very well have to set our house in order for the work of evangelism (1 Timothy 4:15-16).

IV. ***Because I Do Not Really Believe There Is A Hell***

- A. If I really believe my neighbor would go to hell for being outside of Christ, and I love him as I claim to, then I would work hard to find some way to reach him with the truth.
- B. 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 try and teach him. 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 truly desire to keep our friends out of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 14:10; 20:10; 21:8)?

V. ***Because I Do Not Really Care If He Is Converted***

- A. If I really did care about him I would get as close to him as I could so as to understand him and teach him (Mark 10:17-21).
 - 1. I would look for opportunities to acquaint him with the good news.
 - 2. I would not get discouraged, and I would look for ways to break down his prejudices.
 - 3. I would live the very best life possible and show the joy that is found in Christ.

4. I would manifest the peace and strength that only comes from being a Christian.
- B. 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 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, and they have to be important to us too.

Conclusion. In Luke 10:29, the lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" He learned that his neighbor was the one who had fallen among thieves and left for dead. In Leviticus 19:17-18, 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 those who are made in the image of God should make each of us spend more time in trying to reach the lost (Matthew 22:37-40). 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).