

Local Gospel Promotion By Ethan R. Longhenry

“I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word” (2Tim. 4:1-2a).

Few will deny the importance of promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ among those who do not believe. If we truly believe what Jesus has revealed to us, we must recognize that all the people whom we know who die without having come to obedient faith in Jesus Christ will be condemned (2Thes. 1:6-9). Since we are to love all men (1John 4:11), especially those whom we know, why would we want to disobey God's command to tell them about Jesus?

Many reasons could be listed. Many times fear keeps us back: we are afraid of being rejected, or losing a friend, or perhaps afraid that we will not know what to say. We might think that if the unbelievers are interested enough in salvation, they will come to us. Yet Jesus tells us to not be afraid (Matt. 10:28), and Jesus also specifically told us to "go" and preach to people, and not expect them to come to us (Matt. 28:19).

One of the larger reasons why we do not share the Gospel, perhaps, is that we believe that most unbelievers are either hostile toward the Gospel or do not care about it at all. After all, we are constantly being told that society is turning its back on God and people do not care about the Gospel like they used to. When this is the message you hear constantly, why should it be surprising when so little is done to share the Gospel with others? You are just asking for rejection and pain!

But is it true that most people do not care? In a recent survey of people who rarely, if ever, attend church in America, roughly 5% of the responders were highly hostile toward the Gospel. Another 21% were not hostile but were still rather prejudiced against Christianity. 36% either did not care or were rather neutral toward Christianity. Yet that leaves 38% who are rather interested in Christianity and wished that they somehow could learn more (Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door*, 261-267).

We could focus on that 62% who are neutral or against Christianity and despair, or we could recognize that 38% of our fellow Americans are interested in learning more about Jesus. Even if the numbers are a bit inflated, it is likely true that about 1 in 4 people who do not identify themselves with a church would be interested in learning more about Christianity in some way!

So why are they not coming to church if they are interested? Like everyone else, they are busy, and it is not easy for them to get up on Sunday morning. Yet 97% of those interested in Christianity indicated that if someone they knew would be willing to invite them to church or to a Bible study, they would be at least somewhat likely to go (*ibid.*). They are just waiting for the invitation!

But who is to invite them? While a majority of such persons have a favorable view of preachers, they are still viewed with a bit of skepticism: after all, it is their "job" to talk about Jesus. They also do not know the preacher very well. But if they know you, and they trust you, they are far more willing to listen to you and to accept your invitation. In many instances, all you need to do is ask!

So what can we all do in order to promote the Gospel locally? We first need to pray. Paul indicates that we are to pray without ceasing (1Thes. 5:17), and often sought for brethren to pray for his opportunities to promote the Gospel (Colossians 4:2-4). We

must petition God so that we may assist in His work of leading souls to Him: we just plant the seed, and He gives the increase (1Cor. 3:5-7). We should pray specifically for those with whom we will speak about the Gospel. We also would do well to pray for other opportunities to be able to present the Gospel message to others.

We must also live a life consistent with the message of the Gospel (Matt. 5:13-16). People are very well attuned to hypocrisy, and if the way you live your life does not match up with your profession of Jesus Christ, they will want nothing of it. When we do not faithfully represent Christ in word and deed, we provide more opportunities for unbelievers to revile the faith as representing "a bunch of hypocrites" (1Peter 2:11-12). Yet if they see that you really believe all those things you say you believe, and you act on them, they will be much more interested in learning about it from you. They can see the difference!

We must be at least willing to invite them to church. Perhaps you do not feel very competent at telling someone the message of salvation. While it would be best for you to study it and practice it (Romans 1:16), you can at least invite your friends, family, neighbors, or associates to one of the assemblies. People are often uncomfortable going to a new place with unfamiliar people-- but if you invite them and let them know that you will be there with them; that might just be the invitation they have been looking for! Even if they decline, do not despair. You may have to invite them many times over a long period of time. Many times they are declining not because they do not like you but because of some internal fear or concern of their own.

Ideally, we would be willing to host a Bible study in our homes or in a convenient public location (Acts 17:10-11, 2Tim. 2:15). A preacher or elder could be involved, but it is best if the host is the one leading the study-- it will lead to greater comfort among the participants. Some people who may not be willing to visit a church might be willing to come to a private Bible study. Many people-- even the "neutral" people-- are aware of how little they know of the Bible, and are at least interested in learning more about its message. Who knows where such studies could lead?

All of these methods require some effort, study, and courage. But did it not take effort, study, and courage for us to learn of Jesus Christ and come to obedient faith? Did we ever reject an invitation to learn more about Jesus? Were there times in our own lives when we wished that someone would tell us more about spiritual things?

As Jesus indicates, the fields are white for harvest (John 4:35). There are likely hundreds, if not thousands, of people in the local area who would love to learn more about Jesus Christ. A good number of them are under the age of 35 and have never had much opportunity to learn. They are not as interested in cold calls or some canned evangelistic message: a preacher might be able to personally and directly reach a few in his work, but he will never be able to accomplish as much as a friend, family member, neighbor, or associate whose life reflects Jesus and who is willing to extend the invitation. Will we recognize our responsibility to our fellow man and be willing to tell him or her about Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19, Rom. 1:16)? If we will not, who will? Let us do all that we can to show people the truth of the Gospel!