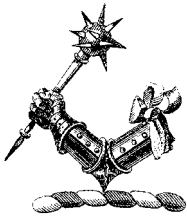




CHAPTER TEN

How Christians Have Lost Confidence in the Gospel



All genuine Christians strive to love God. After all, to do so is to obey the greatest commandment. Jesus told us what “loving God” is really all about. “If you love Me,” He told His disciples, “you’ll obey My commands” (John 14:21). Yet when it comes to the gospel, and the command of Jesus to go into the world and preach it, there is, in the West at least, almost a universal guilty silence. Most of us are just not loving God in this area of our Christian lives, and many have not done so for a long time. In our search for reasons, let’s, for a moment, put aside the devices of the devil. Which of the four scenarios below do you believe is the most likely reason for the virtual collapse of personal evangelism in the West?

1. Was the gospel we preached in the past not the gospel at all...?

Could it be that the gospel proclaimed by many Christians over the past few decades was not *the* gospel at all, but “another gospel”? (Galatians 1:9). Could it have been a soft message, stripped of all the hard sayings of Jesus, stripped of the law, of hell and of the cost of discipleship? If it was not the powerful gospel Paul speaks of in Romans 1:16, then no wonder few people were saved by it. And seeing so little fruit for their efforts, Christians lost confidence in proclaiming

anything. In short, *the* gospel was given a bad name by false gospels.

2. Or could it be that we had the message right but the delivery wrong...?

Could it be that many Christians tried to give *the* gospel to non-Christians, but they were rejected or ridiculed. The content of the message was right but their methods and approaches were not. These bad experiences convinced them proclaiming the gospel simply did not work. “Non-Christians are just not interested,” was their conclusion. “They are as hard as granite. Post-modern people are just not into the gospel.” And so they went on to try other approaches such as building relationships, little knowing that the problem lay not in the message itself but simply in its delivery.



What ‘delivery issues’ can hinder evangelism?

- ***Our dress.***

If we don’t dress like the people we are reaching, or if we dress in an odd way, we reinforce their suspicions that Christians are an odd lot. Yet when they reject us we think it’s the gospel they are rejecting.

- ***Our manner of speaking.***

We may stumble, fumble and bumble because we have had no training in how to proclaim the gospel. Yet when they reject us we think it’s the gospel they are rejecting.

- ***Our personal hygiene.***

Dandruff, bad breath and body odour don’t help our efforts to proclaim the gospel. Yet when they reject us we think it’s the gospel they are rejecting.

- ***Out timing.***

We need to be discerning when seeking people to talk to. If we choose people who are busy they may brush us off – not because they don’t want to hear our message but because it just wasn’t the right time. Yet when they reject us we think it’s the gospel they are rejecting.

- ***Our lack of respect for privacy.***



We may embarrass non-Christians by approaching them when others are within earshot or when others are looking at them. Yet when they reject us we think it's the gospel they are rejecting.

- ***Our tools.***

We present the message using shoddy, photocopied pieces of paper or visual aids which look cheap and nasty. Yet when they reject us we think it's the gospel they are rejecting.

- ***Our lack of clarity.***

The content may be all there but it may be disorganised and confusing. The listener gives up trying to understand. Yet when they reject us we think it's the gospel they are rejecting.

- ***Our daily demeanour.***

Our behaviour around the office, home, classroom, campus or sports field might not befit a Christian. They don't want to listen to someone they don't respect. Yet when they reject us we think it's the gospel they are rejecting.

- ***Our overestimation of how much non-Christians know about Christianity.***

We often use Christian phrases, terms and ideas which have unique meaning to Christians (i.e. righteousness, the blood of the lamb, sin, saved, repent, redeemed, sanctified, etc). When we use these terms in our gospel presentations, without defining them carefully, those listening become lost and confused. Yet when they reject us we think it's the gospel they are rejecting.





When Christians have made these mistakes and didn't "connect" with the non-Christians they approached, the evangelism experience was negative for both parties. For the non-Christian the presentation was disorganised, uninteresting, or incomprehensible. For the Christian there was no sense of God's power working as the message was proclaimed. Not wanting to continue having negative experiences, many stopped doing evangelism altogether.¹

3. Or was it our presumption which caused a loss of confidence in the gospel...?



It is possible that over the past few decades most Christians assumed most other Christians were going into the world and proclaiming the gospel. The reality is that most Christians were *not* out there doing it. If everyone thought everyone else was out there doing it, and these same people observed that the Church in the West was not growing, we could not blame them for concluding the gospel was not powerful after all.

4. Or did we react badly to the charge that we were "all talk and no action...?"

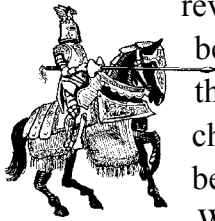
Could it be that at a certain point in the recent history of the Western Church, we were all out in the world sharing our faith (not *the* gospel) but were not doing much practically for non-Christians? It was perceived that we did so much talking that social justice and action hardly featured. We feared we had become a Church which was "all talk and no walk." To address the issue, the Church swung wildly to the other extreme. But instead of restoring social action and justice, we just dropped evangelism. This took us out of balance the other way, and now we're all walk and no talk.²

¹ That said, even if we are careful to avoid these hindrances, sometimes the gospel message *will* offend - and people will reject us for it. However, I can think of no more than a dozen instances when it was purely the gospel message which offended someone I was reaching with the gospel. With other instances of rejection, I can be sure it was one of the above hindrances which caused offence, not the gospel.

² Many would argue that we are still very weak with social action/justice, and proclamation, and we ought to up the tempo with all three!

To be honest, I'm not certain which of the above reasons is *most* to blame for our loss of confidence in the gospel. I know there is an element of truth in each of them, and that the devil's devices have already done colossal damage. Right now in the Western world, confidence in proclaiming the gospel via one-on-one evangelism is at an all time low. Such a state of affairs would have been inconceivable to the Christians of the early Church.

In the next chapter I will show how we can regain that confidence. I will share with you what Jesus



revealed to me through the Scriptures about how souls can be saved through proclaiming *the* whole gospel. With the battle strategies you are about to read in the next chapter, great victory in the war for souls is possible. I believe they are a revelation from heaven.

When Jesus revealed these truths to me, my passion for evangelism soared. That was nearly seven years ago. What is more, by God's grace I am still going up. I believe the truths you are about to read will do the same for you.



III

“Right now in the Western world, confidence in proclaiming the gospel via one-on-one evangelism is at an all time low. Such a state of affairs would have been inconceivable to the Christians of the early Church.”
