

All Can Be Saved

It is easy for Christians to overlook many opportunities to teach the lost the saving message of Jesus Christ. Some of the ones who may be overlooked can be individuals who are male or female, black or white, Mexican or Indian, etc. It is easy to overlook those who are handicapped in some way. This may be because they are different and hard to communicate with. The deaf community is an example of this. People can be overlooked because of their social standing. We could be intimidated or dismiss as possible converts, either the rich or poor or because of some position in life.

It is also very easy to overlook the individual in life who is burdened down with sin, the ruthless individual or alcoholic, or the immoral person such as a harlot, pimp, child abuser, child molester or homosexual. It is also easy to overlook the person that is divorced whether currently married or not. We must keep in mind that our job is to do the teaching and let the hearer make the decision of whether they would like to go to heaven or not.

As we ask ourselves the question (whether subconscious or not) of whether a person is teachable or not, (based on our bias of who they are or where they have been) we must first remember the words of the Apostle Paul when he gave us that long list of the vilest of sinners. He reminded them that "such were some of you" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Some of these Christians in Corinth were the vilest of sinners.

In addition to the need to see all as savable people it is imperative that we understand that all do not start as willing listeners. Looking at examples in the Bible we can look to the Jailer in Acts chapter 16 and the people on the day of Pentecost. Considering the events that surrounded them it is very likely that they did not start the day willing, but with the events and hearing of the message they became willing.

When considering whether a person is willing or not, it is important to understand that many people have no idea that they need the Gospel in the first place. We must consider this as we try to win them. We must exercise great wisdom in getting them to a point where they will study what God expects of them (Colossians 4:5,6; Matthew 10:16). Be very careful to not push a person faster than they can go, making sure that we consider their current state of maturity. We must first show them that the Word of God has something very beneficial to offer them. Once we show that to them then we can build on that. Remember our goal should be to bring them to

Christ, that is a path and starts at a different place with each individual. With many people we must first help them to be willing to study. The passage in 2 Timothy 2:24-26 admonishes us in numerous ways that necessitate great care as we approach people with the Gospel.

As we teach people the Gospel we must remember that it is the Word of God that convicts a person's heart (Romans 1:16). With that in mind we must teach that Word so that a faith will be developed (Romans 10:17). This may mean that we have to leave many subjects alone until a person's knowledge of God's Word grows. As the knowledge increases, the ability to understand grows and as the understanding grows the strength to make changes will grow as well. But if we hurry the process and introduce them to hard subjects for them to understand we will accomplish nothing more than to simply drive them away. We must work at developing an interest on the part of the hearer. This will lay the groundwork for their obedience in the future.

When we consider the hesitancy to obey the Gospel on the part of many people we should ask the question, "What brought them to this point?" Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden." Why are people heavy laden?

At the beginning of Jesus earthly ministry he went to Nazareth and when he had the opportunity to speak he read from the prophet Isaiah. In that passage it referred to his being sent to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to preach to the captives, etc (Luke 4:16-21). Considering that passage we may ask what brings people to a point like this? What causes people to be poor? What is it that breaks their hearts and what takes them captive? Of course we need to recognize that many things can bring people to such a point in their lives, but the overwhelming factor that brings people to this state of despair is sin. God stated plainly in Deuteronomy 28 that there are certain principles in place that have to do with how well life goes. These principles go back to obeying God. The promise is that if we will follow what God has to say that our life will be blessed. If on the other hand we do not follow God, many problems will come. David said that he had never seen the "righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). The principle is clear, follow God and life will be blessed. To put it in everyday terms, a very likely reason that people are poor, broken hearted or captive is because of the sin in their life.

Have you ever wondered what it is that brings a

person to a point where they want something better? No doubt the ravages of sin is a powerful tool of God to bring people to their knees where they will be more likely to want what God has to offer. There has to be something better than the wages of sin in this life.

We must be very careful to not overlook those who are overburdened with sin. Jesus certainly was spending enough time with the lowest of sinners that he had a reputation of being a friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19). Even though we may feel very uncomfortable with people who have lived a life in sin it is very likely that they are actually the most receptive prospects for the Gospel. Is it possible that they are also the most overlooked (or possibly avoided) prospects on our list?

A problem is that many who have been Christians for most of their lives cannot relate with those who are suffering the ravages of sin. They feel very uncomfortable when around them and consequently avoid making contact with them. So, often when we target a neighborhood for knocking doors it is easy to avoid the poor neighborhoods, possibly because of a fear for safety or many other reasons.

An important point to consider when we think of our apprehensiveness is that the Apostle Paul became all things to all men that he might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22). The list that he gave included those who were without law (1 Corinthians 9:21). There is no doubt that those who were without law would include those who are suffering the ravages of sin. He got in there with them and worked with them even though it went against his comfort zone. Are we doing the same?

A salesman who is successful in business will go where the most promising contacts are. They do their homework to find out who would be the most likely to buy their product and who needed it the most, they would then get out of their comfort zone and call on that clientele. If they insisted on going only to those they felt most comfortable with they would most likely fail in business. In the Lord's kingdom if we find certain prospects are not receptive, let's figure out which ones are and do as Paul and Barnabus did in Acts 13:46, when the Jews rejected God's Word. They turned to the Gentiles and many people obeyed the Gospel because of that decision.

We must be looking for people who will learn. Learning is the most basic principle of faith in God. Romans 10:17 clearly teaches this. When people study God's Word they will gain a faith in what it says. It is no doubt that we see such a lack of faith in society because people simply have not studied

God's Word. There is a famine in the land. Our goal should be to get the Gospel to all those who can obey it. We should understand that learners come in many shapes and forms. Some people are slow learners. These are those who may have questionable intelligence. But remember that "all can be Christians." Our job is to teach and allow each individual the opportunity to respond to what it says. Some of these may take considerable time and patience to show what God says. But they are a soul that will spend eternity somewhere and they are valuable enough that Jesus died on the cross for them. Our time is God's and we must use it for him.

Many learners may be reluctant. Paul spent much time "persuading" men to obey the Gospel. They were reluctant to hear what he had to say, but he kept working on it. Many of the hearers today are not interested in what we have to tell them. I believe they are not interested because they do not realize just how important it is. Do not expect them to be excited about what we know. They have not learned the very basic principles that are found in the precious Word of God. They simply do not realize the value of that great pearl. Our job then is to help them understand that it is really something that they really need.

It would be best to start by teaching them that the Gospel is something that is good for them. When people find out that something that they did not know about is actually good for them they will then acquire a desire to have whatever that is. We must show them that the Gospel is profitable for this life as well as the next (1 Timothy 4:8). Jesus got the interest of the woman at the well (John 4) by showing her that he had something that was good for her. When she began to get interested in what he had to offer then Jesus began to show her that things in her life were not what they should be. If Jesus would have started with the fact that she was an adulterous woman she would likely have stopped listening to what he had to say. We must not attack people with their sins until we can show them that we have something to offer that is of great value to them.

It is essential that we bring them along slowly. People that have been in the world all of their life are not going to change instantly. It is going to take them time to change a life time of evil deeds. There are no doubt many things that must be changed, it will take time to get some of these deeds out of their life and they could be discouraged by being overwhelmed with the many things that must be changed. This could cause them give up. Often the learning process requires that it may take awhile for some things to sink in. We must exercise patience.

This principle will apply before they become Christians as well as after they become Christians. It is not reasonable for us who have been Christians for many years to expect those who recently obeyed the Gospel to be where we are at. God refers to new Christians as "babes" in Christ. We do not expect a new born baby to drive a car. It takes years until they reach that maturity level.

Jesus used this same principle when he taught his disciples. Before he went to the cross he told them that he had many things to say to them but they were not able to bear it yet (John 16:12). Jesus did not push them farther than they were able to progress at the time. As people mature they will be able to process and accept more and more about the Christian life. The same principle applies to those who we want to obey the Gospel as well as those who have already obeyed. Those who are mature must make wise decisions as to how much is too much. God said that if we pray for wisdom that it will be given. Wisdom is the ability to use the knowledge that we have gained, to put it into everyday use.

As we consider the topic of "All Can Be Saved," let's remember that "ALL CAN BE SAVED." We must not write someone off just because they do not fit into our box of what we think a prospect for the Gospel is. It does not matter what their background is, or their nationality. It does not matter what sin is in their life or how deeply ingrained it seems to be. It does not matter how much they will need to change or the depth of the sacrifices they will have to make to get their life in line with what God requires. What matters is that they have a soul, and that soul will spend eternity either in heaven or hell.

As we teach them we must use great wisdom and patience at all stages to help them to grow into useful citizens of the kingdom of Christ. But even before that we need to look to ourselves to see if we really believe that "All Can Be Saved."

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the 27th Annual Mid-West Lectures, "God's Precious Promises." To hear or view the complete lesson go to www.kc-cofc.org/2009Lectures.htm or contact the 39th Street Church of Christ 15331 East 39th Street Independence, MO 64055-4240 USA

God's Precious Promises... **All Can Be Saved**

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