

WEAPONS THE DEVIL IS USING – OUR SHORTAGE OF PERSONAL EVANGELISM**Acts 20:20****INTRODUCTION**

- A. 1 PE 3:15.
- B. Honesty would compel most congregations — and most individuals — to admit to being deficient in the matter of personal evangelism. In places, a shortage of personal evangelism is no critical that it threatens the very existence of the local church.
- C. To be sure, there are a number of congregations which have a handful of members who are genuinely motivated and quite active in trying to reach the lost.
 - 1. This is good as far as it goes, but it tends to make us feel, as a congregation, that “we” are doing better than we actually are.
 - 2. There is a certain euphoria that is produced by having an active nucleus of personal workers — and this euphoria sometimes makes it difficult to face the truth about our collective shortcomings.
- D. Our shortage of personal evangelism is not only an obvious problem in itself; it is also a means by which the devil seeks to hinder the work of the Lord in general.
- E. Our failure to be diligent in rescuing the lost is a failure that causes considerable difficulty for us in other areas. It is a problem that makes other problems worse than they would be otherwise.
- F. For very many of the Lord’s people today, negligence in teaching the gospel to those around us is one of the ways the devil is hurting us most.

DISCUSSION**I. PERSONAL EVANGELISM: THE GREAT NEED OF THE HOUR**

- A. There is a need for evangelism in general.
 - 1. Without Christ, the world is lost. Paul spoke of those – EP 2:12; IS 59:1-2; RO 6:12; 2 TH 1:8-9. The purpose for which Jesus came was – LK 19:10.
 - 2. The gospel of Christ is God’s power to save. RO 1:16.
 - 3. RO 10:17.
 - 4. Consequently, Jesus commanded His disciples to teach His word to others. MT 28:18-20; MK 16:15-16.
 - 5. Knowing the value of souls, and knowing the destiny of the lost, we ought to be possessed of a burning passion to reach others with the gospel. MT 16:26; Acts 17:16; 2 CO 5:10-11.
 - 6. We acknowledge our duty to the lost in many of the songs we sing.
 - a. Into Our Hands the Gospel Is Given.
 - b. Throw Out the Lifeline.
 - c. Rescue the Perishing.
 - d. You Never Mentioned Him to Me.
 - e. Will You Not Tell It Today?
 - 7. Truly the need for evangelism is great and urgent. MT 9:37-38; JN 4:35.
- B. But there is not only a need for evangelism; there is a need for personal evangelism.
 - 1. Personal evangelism has several distinguishing characteristics:
 - a. It is personal — as distinct from the teaching we may support someone else to do.
 - b. It is private — as distinct from public proclamation of the gospel.
 - c. It is one-on-one — as distinct from group teaching.
 - d. Strictly speaking, personal evangelism is also done as an individual — rather than as part of the collective, organized work of a congregation. Both public and private teaching has always been needed; neither takes the place of the other. But there is a special need now for us to become actively involved in personal evangelism.

2. The duty to “go...and preach” (MK 16:15) is an individual one which pertains to every member of Christ’s body. No one person can designate another to obey this command for him.
 - a. Other “laborers” besides full-time evangelists are badly needed. MT 9:37-38.
 - b. A “silent” Christian, or a Christian “undercover” agent, is a contradiction of terms. MT 5:13-16. JE 20:7-9; 1 PE 2:12. Our aim should be to - PH 2:15.
 - c. Sometimes we are not even as energetic as the Pharisees. MT 23:15.
 - d. But every Christian ought to be ready to give an explanation of his faith. 1 PE 3:15.
 - e. If we would imitate the Lord, we must attend to private as well as public teaching. Jesus taught multitudes publicly. Cf. MT 5:1, 2; 13:1, 2. He also taught individuals privately. Cf. LK 10:38-42; JN 3:1-12; 4:1-26. The Lord’s church needs man-to-man teaching, rather than a zone defense.
 - f. If we would be like the early church, we must get involved. Acts 2:46-47. Acts 5:42. Acts 8:4. Acts 11:19. Acts 20:20.
 - g. Deep and abiding joy is to be found in personal evangelism. 1 TH 2:19, 20.
 - h. How can we not speak out? Acts 4:20 1 CO 9:16.
3. The phenomenal growth of some of the cults attests to the effectiveness of one-on-one teaching as a method.
4. Christianity spreads as the gospel is taught from person to person. 2 TI 2:2. If our efforts are any indication, how many Christians will there be in the next generation?
5. Haggai asked the question “Is the seed still in the barn?” (Hag. 2:19).
 - a. The seed of the gospel will not do anyone any good if it is not sown.
 - b. The bounty of the harvest will be in proportion to the plentifulness of the seed sown. Cf. 2 CO 9:6; Cf. MT 13:1-9, 18-23.
6. We need to adopt the attitude of Isaiah: “Here am I! Send me” (Isa. 6:8).

II. GETTING READY TO GROW

- A. Often there are some foundational issues that must be addressed before lasting growth can be a real possibility for a congregation.
 1. The description in RE 3:15-19 of the church in Laodicea is disheartening.
 2. Suppose a vibrant evangelist who was an effective “personal worker” had moved to Laodicea and soon numerous people were being baptized. In the environment of the congregation at Laodicea, how long would most of those new converts have remained faithful?
 3. Sometimes the way the Lord’s own people think and act makes it difficult, first, to interest unbelievers in the Lord and, second, to establish in the faith those who do obey the gospel. All too few of the lost are rescued anywhere — but perhaps a greater tragedy is the mortality rate of those who are rescued.
 4. What, then, are some of the matters that must be tended to if a congregation is to expect solid, enduring growth through its efforts in personal evangelism?
- B. Individually, our daily walks with God must be intimate.
 1. We must live as those who genuinely know the Lord and who enjoy an obvious closeness to Him. Cf. DT 4:6-72.
 2. People need to be able to make of us the kind of request the Greeks made of Philip: JN 12:20-21. Others must see in us the blessings of walking with the Lord,

- not simply the pride of knowing about the Lord.
3. It is hard to share what we do not have. We need to be able to wish for others the close personal relationship with the Lord that we ourselves enjoy.
 4. Acts 26:29.
- C. Congregationally, we must be involved in one another's lives.
1. In studying with prospects, many of whom are lonely and without any substantial relationships, we portray the Lord's church as a loving family who support one another in the living of life together.
 - a. This is as it should be. Jesus said – JN 13:34-35. The members of the church in Jerusalem were obviously involved with one another Paul wrote, RO 12:15.
 - b. But does the reality of our congregational life fulfill the claims we make about the closeness of the Lord's family?
 2. In this busy age, the same thing is happening to our spiritual family that is happening in all too many cases to our physical families: we are merely coexisting under the same roof without any real sharing of life together.
 3. If we would truly "restore" New Testament Christianity, we must do more than see one another at the church building and show an occasional act of hospitality in our homes. We must become "involved" (which means, literally, "rolled together, intertwined") with one another.
- D. The assemblies of the church must be edifying to the outsider and to the young in the faith.
1. To our shame, the services of the Lord's people are not always such as would move an unbeliever or a new convert in God's direction.
 - a. To the Christians in Corinth, Paul wrote, 1 CO 11:17.
Cf. 1 CO 14:15-17, 23-26.
 - b. It is a sad commentary when we feel a bit reluctant to bring to services our best prospects for study — or when we have to apologize to new convert's for what they see and hear when the church meets.
 - c. Something is wrong anytime we impart anything other than spiritual refreshment and strength to our visitors and new converts.
 2. In our assemblies, unbelievers ought to experience courtesy, warmth, and genuine interest in spiritual things: real love for God and man.
 3. If we are serious about church growth, we are going to have to be more "visitor conscious" when we assemble, i.e. more mindful of the presence of visitors and more deliberate in our efforts to make the assembly what it needs to be for their sake.
- E. We must be prepared to nurture babes in Christ.
1. In the spiritual family as in our physical families, the reality of having "babies" is often strikingly different from our idealized visions beforehand. New converts often bring with them a host of "problems." Have we "counted the cost" of making and establishing new converts to the Lord in the real world?
 2. In addition to the hard work of really grounding any babe in Christ, there is an additional consideration: those who are most receptive to the gospel often are not from our own socio-economic group and bring with them problems we may be uncomfortable dealing with. Cf. MT 9:9-13.
 3. One reason we have not grown more than we have is that we have limited our evangelism to well-scrubbed individuals who we think would "fit right in" with little work on our part.

4. Until we are prepared to have Paul's attitude it is unlikely that we would enjoy what it would be like if new converts did fill our pews: 1 TH 2:7,8).
- F. We must learn to work in the strength of the Lord and to His glory.
 1. If we leave the Lord out of His own work, we do not deserve to grow. We must learn truly to speak and act as "stewards." PH 2:13; 1 PE 4:11.
 2. Before becoming useful and effective in reaching the lost, we may have to cleanse ourselves of certain things that hinder us. 2 TI 2:21.
 3. We, like the apostles, need to be made into fishers of men. MT 4:19.
 4. There is work to be done setting our house in order for the work of personal evangelism. 1 TI 4:15-16.

III. SOWING THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

- A. Our work in the Lord is the work of sowing the seed of the kingdom.
 1. Problems arise in any endeavor when we forget what our work is.
 2. In the Lord, our work is presenting the gospel to as many people as possible.
 3. Even more accurately, our work is attempting to present the gospel to as many as possible.
 4. All the Lord has ever asked us to do is "plant" and "water." It is His part of the work to "give the increase." 1 CO 3:6-7. The Lord can be counted on to do His work! When we assume responsibility for the Lord's part of the work — a thing that we have no control over — we are bound to become discouraged.
- B. Our work would remain the same even if God told us before we started that no one would listen to us.
 1. In fact, there have been times when God did send His servants to preach and told them in advance that the message would be rejected.
 - a. To Moses, God said, EX 3:19.
 - b. To Jeremiah, God said, JE 7:27. Cf. EK 2:1-7; 3:4-9; 33:30-33.
 2. Our work is like that of the "watchman." Cf. EK 33:1-9.
 3. We are expected to keep on telling others of the Lord until there is no one left to tell. Cf. IS 6:11-12.
 4. We are to be those who cannot do otherwise than tell others about Christ. JE 20:9. Acts 4:20.
 5. Our work is to present the gospel to as many people as possible — regardless of the response — and to keep on doing it until the Lord comes back.
- C. The effectiveness of our work is to be measured not in terms of positive response to the gospel, but in terms of how much seed has been sown.
 1. If we care to set goals in our personal evangelism, we need to be sure these goals relate to the work that is ours to do and are worded in terms of the amount of seed sown.
 2. For example, an appropriate goal might be to ask, before the year is over, at least ten persons if they will study the Bible. We would not measure the effectiveness of the Post Office by how many people respond favorably to their mail. The mailman is merely a messenger!
 3. It would be good for a congregation to determine that every person in the community is going to hear from it in some way at least once every year or two.
 - a. Of the church in Thessalonica Paul could say: 1 TH 1:8.
 - b. We can at least confront those around us with the gospel often enough that they know we are in the neighborhood!
- D. God will bless our efforts.
 1. If we keep focused on what it is the Lord wants us to do, He will bless what we do.

- a. After all, our “sufficiency” is from God: 2 CO 4-5.
- b. If we are willing to sow “bountifully,” God is able to make us have an “abundance” for every good work. Cf. 2 CO 9:6-11.
- 2. We need to be conscious that we are participating in the Lord’s work. 1 CO 15:58. PH 2:13.
- 3. We need to be praying that God will open doors of opportunity for us to do His work. 1 CO 16:9. CO 4:2-4. 2 TH 3:1-2.
- E. Much of our discouragement in evangelism is simply unnecessary.
 - 1. Admittedly, it is hard not to be discouraged by our own seeming inability to teach the gospel effectively. It is hard not to be defeated by the apparent rejection of the gospel by almost everyone we meet.
 - 2. But some, if not most, of this discouragement is unnecessary.
 - 3. Once we recognize the work the Lord has given us to do, we will see that He has never asked us to do anything that we cannot do. We cannot determine what others will do with the gospel, but we can see that they are presented with the choice.
 - 4. God would say to us the same kind of thing He said to Jeremiah: JE 1:17.

IV. WHAT CAN WE DO?

- A. When it comes to personal evangelism, “What can we do?” is a question that has many good answers.
 - 1. It is a much-debated mystery why the average Christian is not more active in personal evangelism.
 - a. Is it because we lack desire (motivation) or is it because we lack know-how (training)?
 - b. This may be like asking “Which comes first: the chicken or the egg?”
 - c. A lack of motivation inhibits our training and a lack of training inhibits our motivation.
 - d. At least this much is clear: many of us are not confident that we can do very much.
 - 2. We are honestly willing to help, but our question is: “What can I do?”
 - 3. This is a question that can be answered.
 - a. If an unawareness of what we can do is the thing that is really holding us back, that is a problem that can easily be fixed.
 - b. The fact is, there is a considerable variety of things that relate to personal evangelism, most of which can be done by almost all of us right now.
 - 4. The things that we can do fall into three basic areas.
- B. Praying about personal evangelism.
 - 1. If we neglect prayer we risk rendering our work a complete failure. LK 6:13. Acts 13:1-3.
 - 2. It may be that we have so few opportunities to teach others because we spend so little time in prayer about it. Cf. Col. 4:2-6.
 - 3. Praying is something everybody can do right now, without any further training.
 - 4. If a person were to commit two or three hours a week to “merely” praying about the subject of personal evangelism — and not quit doing it — great things would result. MT 9:37, 38.
 - 5. JA 5:16.
 - 6. Praying about the spread of the gospel is not just something for people who “can’t do anything else”; it ought to occupy a significant amount of the time of even the most seasoned personal evangelist.

- C. Preparing to do personal evangelism.
1. In our fast-paced culture, we often underestimate the need for preparation, but preparation is essential in any important work.
 2. Of the thirty-three years that Jesus lived, the work He came to do took only about three years. The remaining ninety-one percent of His life was taken up in preparation. "Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age" (LK 3:23). Preparation to teach, including prayer and study, is not wasteful "downtime." It is a vital part of teaching.
 3. Jesus said that He would make His apostles into "fishers of men" (MT. 4:19). See
 4. When we ask "What can I do?" we may be overlooking the fact that time spent equipping ourselves for the work is a vital part of what it takes to win souls to the Lord. 1 TI 4:15-16. 2 TI 2:15. 2 TI 2:21.
- D. Doing personal evangelism.
1. Eventually, we must get down to the business of actually communicating the gospel to those who are lost — and this is where most of us balk.
 2. But even here, there are more things to be considered than we might think. The work of personal evangelism encompasses numerous activities, directly or indirectly, all of which are important in their own way.
 3. Having prayed and prepared, we simply need to adopt attitude of Isaiah: IS 6:8). This advice contains more than a little wisdom: Have your tools ready. The Lord will find you work.
 4. We need to be able say what Paul could say: RO 1:15.
- E. The key to being active is committing the time.
1. If we will commit a definite amount of time each week to personal evangelism, all that remains is to fill up that amount of time with activities relating to personal evangelism.
 - a. In selecting activities, we can — and should — take some from each of the three areas of praying, preparing, and doing.
 - b. At first, more of our time will be spent on praying and preparing, but as we mature in the work, the proportions will change. We will find ourselves spending more time actually teaching others about the gospel, although we will never outgrow the need for prayer and preparation.
 2. The key is committing a definite amount of time each week to the work.
 3. When we have done that, the question of what to do with that time can be answered in numerous ways.
 4. There are very many things nearly all of us can do to help out in the great work of rescuing souls for the Lord.

There Is Much To Do

There is much to do, there's work on ev'ry hand,
Hark! the cry for help comes ringing through the land;
Jesus calls for reapers, I must active be,
What wilt Thou, O Master? Here am I, send me.

— M. W. Spencer

V. **A PLAN FOR GETTING INVOLVED IN PERSONAL EVANGELISM**

- A. A commitment of time.
1. There is a great deal to be said for purposing to do things that need to be done. Cf. 2 CO 9:5-8.

2. If you really wish to get serious about becoming active in personal evangelism, the first thing to do is make an honest commitment of time each week to that work.
 - a. We all have 168 hours every week, most of which we spend eating and sleeping. Is two hours a week (1.2% of our time) too much to devote to rescuing souls from being lost?
 - b. If all else fails, we can sacrifice some other activity to make time for this work.
 - c. On one occasion, recorded in Jn. 4:31-34, Jesus did without lunch while He talked to a woman about her soul.
 3. Whether you prefer to make the commitment in terms of hours a week, evenings a week, or whatever, the critical thing is to promise the Lord that you will spend that amount of time doing something related to personal evangelism and then move heaven and earth to keep that promise. Unforeseen things can come up. But if it is not something that would keep you from going to work, it is likely nothing more than an excuse if it keeps you from the commitment you have made to personal evangelism.
- B. A notebook is needed to keep track of every “prospect” that is within your realm of influence.
 - C. A worksheet is needed each week to write down (in ink!) how much time you have committed to personal evangelism and, at the end of the week, how much time you actually spent. On most weeks you will run out of time before you run out of things you have listed that you can do!
 - D. A person who will agree to hold you to your commitment.
 - E. Some Bible lessons you can teach.
- VI. **THREE MISTAKES IN TRYING TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE FOR GOOD**
- A. One thing that helps in any endeavor is the willingness to learn from our mistakes. MT 5:13-16. CO 1:28. Influence comes down to a matter of communication, whether verbal or non-verbal. Sometimes we are guilty of neglecting the commonsense principles of influence that people in the world use effectively. LK 16:8.
 - B. We attempt to build/rebuild relationships without changing our own attitude and conduct.
 1. Most significant change starts with self. An “inside out” approach to influencing others is best.
 2. Yet we neglect to take seriously the Lord’s warning about removing the beam in our own eye before we work on the speck in someone else’s. Cf. Mt. 7:3-5. We are often too busy confessing the other person’s sins to do anything about our own.
 3. If our own character is not what it ought to be, our words will have little positive effect on others. As Emerson put it, “What you are shouts so loudly in my ears I cannot hear what you say.”
 4. We must model the conduct we wish to encourage in others. Acts 20:33-35; 1 CO 11:1.
 5. We must be an example of what believers ought to be. 1 TI 4:11-12.
 - C. We advise before we understand.
 1. In general, we have to earn the right to be heard by showing ourselves to be genuinely concerned about the other person.
 2. Sympathy has to do with feeling what others feel; empathy has to do with understanding the situation of others. PH 2:1-2. People don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care.

3. Understanding needs to go before being understood; it ought to be a higher priority. PH 2:4.
 4. Too often, we do not really listen to others in order to truly understand them. While we seem to be listening, we are merely planning our reply, our rebuttal.
 5. One thing that made Jesus the Master Teacher was His perfect understanding and compassion for His hearers. MT 9:36.
- D. We assume that good example and relationship are sufficient.
1. Character and compassion are not enough to communicate the truth of the gospel. It takes words. Acts 11:13-14. RO 10:17. EP 1:13.
 2. The gospel is of no benefit if it is not made “manifest.” EP 6:19-20. CO 4:3-4. Unfortunately, we are sometimes not as clear as we think we are. We assume the other person will read our mind and get the point without the need to make it explicit, to come right out and say it.
 3. In our efforts to communicate the gospel, we must strive to balance courage and consideration.
 - a. We must be courteous as well as candid. CO 4:6.
 - b. Granting the need for tact, however, we must still communicate. We cannot afford to sacrifice clarity for courtesy.
 4. We must personally be what we ought to be and we must seek to understand others, but ultimately we must “warn” and “teach.” CO 1:28.
- E. If we are to be effective, we are going to have to avoid these mistakes and learn to teach in all three of the ways that teaching can be done.
1. The Greeks were correct in their belief that there are three basic forms of teaching.
 - a. Ethos (our character — what we are — influences others)
 - b. Pathos (our understanding and concern influence others).
 - c. Logos (our language — what we say — influences others).
 2. These three things build upon one another and are related in a natural, organic way. Each thing requires those that precede it.
 3. All three of the mistakes above are attempted shortcuts; they are misguided efforts in which we try to have one without the others.
 4. But ultimately these shortcuts prove to be unsuccessful.
 - a. Logos is empty without ethos.
 - b. Logos is powerless without pathos.
 - c. Neither ethos nor pathos are sufficient without logos.
 5. We need to strive for a full, mature ability to influence others for good. 1 TI 4:11, 12, 15-16.

VII. POPPING THE QUESTION

- A. In the matter of personal evangelism, we are often reluctant to do the one thing that most needs to be done: come right out and ask people to study with us.
1. One of the most interesting things about the apostle Paul is how easily and naturally he found people to talk to about the gospel, even in unfamiliar surroundings. In whatever circumstances he was, Paul seems to have spoken about the gospel with confidence. Acts 17:16-17; 28:30-31.
 2. Unfortunately, we are sometimes more reluctant. We may engage in broad discussions of religious topics now and then, and we may even invite others to services of the church. But we do not very often ask people if they will study the Bible with us!
- B. The “waiting game” is popular.

1. We tend to think that we must “build a relationship” with people before we can speak to them about the gospel.
 2. “Serendipity evangelism” is what some call this approach.
 3. We sometimes rationalize our commitment to questionable activities by saying that we are making “contacts” to study with.
 4. Yet as time goes by, we find that we have asked very few, if any, of these contacts to actually sit down with us and study the Bible. Whether or not we are consciously following the approach of serendipity evangelism, we seem to have trouble popping the question. We delay asking people point-blank for a home study.
- C. But later is not always better.
1. Granted it is not always possible — or even expedient — to ask a new acquaintance if he would like to study the Bible.
 2. What wisdom is always urging us to look for is the optimum moment: the time at which, all things considered, there is the best possible chance of meeting with a positive response. The point is that very often the optimum moment to ask about a Bible study comes earlier, rather than later, in our association with people.
 3. If we plan, at some point, to ask those we come in contact with to study with us, we need to see that most of them will appreciate frankness and candor about that early in the relationship. They will not like to find out later that we have been “maneuvering” to ask them a question.
 - a. We ourselves are uncomfortable with hidden agendas; we would rather know what those around us are up to.
 - b. Most of those we meet will respect honest “plain speaking” about what it is we want, and we can be straightforward about this without being discourteous.
 4. Perhaps my experience is unique, but I have found the quicker I get to the point with a new acquaintance, the easier it is.
 - a. Human nature is such that the farther we go into a relationship with somebody; the less likely we are to ask them for a Bible study, ever.
 - b. The more involved the relationship, the more reluctant we are to jeopardize it by bringing up the touchy subject of religion.
 5. We may wait so long that, when we finally do ask, the person questions how genuine we are. If Bible study is so urgent, why did we not bring it up sooner?
 - a. Waiting often leaves the impression that we believe people are spiritually safe in their present condition.
 - b. Waiting certainly risks the possibility of some unexpected misfortune ending a person’s opportunity to obey the gospel — or our opportunity to teach.
 6. Is there not much to be said for going ahead and promptly asking folks if they will study with us?
 7. Even if the answer is no, we may still develop a relationship and be in an even better position to teach them later.
 8. But if that does not happen, our conscience will know that we have asked the question that really needed to be asked.
- D. Obviously, wisdom may indicate a different timetable in different circumstances — but eventually we must ask people to study the Bible.
1. Whether we build a relationship with folks or not, sooner or later we are going to have to “pop the question” and simply ask them if we can study the Bible.

- a. Admittedly, popping the question is never completely easy.
- b. A man may dread asking a woman to marry him, and he may stumble awkwardly when he finally does it. But get around to it he will, because he loves her! When we need to ask someone to study God's word, delaying the inevitable while we tell ourselves we are "building a relationship" only makes us more miserable.
2. With home studies it may be as James says it is with the Lord's blessings generally: JA 4:2. 2 CO 5:20. 2 TI 1:7.
3. If we will pray about it, God will help us to speak plainly as we ought. Acts 4:29; EP 6:19-20; CO 4:3-4.
4. What if we committed ourselves to ask just one person each week for a Bible study?
5. That would be fifty-two requests a year — and that would generate more studies than we ourselves could handle!
- E. Opportunities to ask for a Bible study are frequent.
 1. Most of us get (and waste!) far more opportunities to ask for Bible studies than we think.
 2. When religious subjects come up in conversation with others, some kind of door is usually open. But rather than go through the door and ask for a study, our courage fails us.
 3. At times we actually run from subjects and statements that provide some of our best opportunities.
 4. For example, we tend to "duck" or change the subject when stereotypes, misconceptions, and prejudices about us come up. Some of these are:
 - a. I know someone who is a member of the Church of Christ, and he is a real hypocrite.
 - b. You are fundamentalists, members of the radical religious fringe.
 - c. You are a cult.
 - d. You people think you are the only ones going to heaven.
 - e. You are the ones who don't have "music" in your church.
 - f. You believe in water salvation.
 5. Sometimes, we go ahead and discuss the subject then and there — perhaps exhausting it —and fail to take the opportunity to ask for an actual sit-down study of the Bible.
 6. At other times, we merely invite the person to visit the services of the church, rather than ask for a home study.
 - a. The services of the church are primarily for the edification of those who are already Christians, and only secondarily or incidentally for the evangelization of those who are not.
 - b. Consider 1 CO 14:1-40; HE 10:24, 25; etc.
 7. But general religious discussions, inviting people to services, etc. will not by themselves get the job done. Joshua and the children of Israel did "march around" Jericho for a few days — but not indefinitely!
 8. Sometimes even in our congregational efforts we fail to get to the heart of the matter quickly enough.
 9. For example, several congregations using telecomputers have found they get equally good results if they just go ahead and ask people if they would be interested in a home study, rather than a correspondence course or some other intermediate step.
- F. Ways to ask for a Bible study are plentiful.

1. What is it about asking people to study the Bible that fills us with such fear and trembling?
 - a. We may claim to be too bashful and shy to do it.
 - b. Yet we demonstrate when we talk enthusiastically about other things that this is nothing more than an excuse when the subject happens to be religion.
 - c. In any case, there is no need for us to be bashful about the gospel. Acts 28:30-31; RO 1:16; 2 TI 1:7.
 2. Depending on the opportunity, there are various ways we can ask people to study.
 - a. We might ask the person what they think a Christian is, and then zero in on the fact that there happen to be many different ideas about that in the religious world, that the question can only be settled by an appeal to scriptural authority, etc.
 - b. We might ask the person if they have ever wondered how the present divided state of "Christendom" got to be the way it is, what can be done about it, etc.
 - c. We might ask them what they have heard about the "Church of Christ," whether they know anything about us, etc., and then ask whether they would give us a chance to show how some of the commonly held ideas about us are not accurate. Perhaps best of all, we might inquire into a person's own religious background and say something like this: "If I could show you from the New Testament how you could be closer to genuine Christianity than you are, would you be interested?"
 3. The main thing is to place the challenge on ourselves.
 - a. We must accept the burden of proof, the responsibility to show people from the Scriptures that we have some things worth thinking about.
 - b. If we cannot persuade people from the Scriptures to obey the gospel — if our case is not strong enough to stand on its own — then they should not, in fact, be interested in what we have to say.
 4. When all is said and done, asking people to study the Bible is like many other skills in that there are tips that can help us, but basically we learn how to do it by doing it.
 - a. If we keep at it long enough, we will gradually develop an effective way that is right for us.
 - b. In the process of finding out what works for us, we can be encouraged by knowing that most people will make allowances for our mistakes of method as long as they know we are acting with love and integrity. Honest sincerity on our part will compensate for many blunders in the communication process.
 - c. We need not be afraid of the word no or be discouraged by it. It takes hearing a certain number of no's to get to a yes.
 - d. We need to respect other people's answer — even when it is no — just as we want them to respect our question.
 - e. There is no need for fear or discourtesy on either side.
 5. Most folks appreciate plain talk. We can be straightforward and candid without being discourteous. EP 4:29.
- G. Love will find a way!
1. We need to develop the habit of speaking early and honestly with people about spiritual matters. CO 4:5-6. We need to have more courage to ask people

if we can study the Bible with them. However long it takes us to build up to it, we must eventually pop the question.

2. As to the specifics, there are things we can learn from the experience of others.
3. But in the end, love will find a way. Paul said that he had not withheld the gospel from the Ephesians: Acts 20:20, 26-27.
4. It is in actions, such as sharing the gospel, that we demonstrate whether we truly do love our fellow man. 1 JN 3:18.

CONCLUSION

- A. If we imagine we can thrive spiritually without sharing the gospel with those around us, we are fooling no one but ourselves. Evangelism is as necessary to our own survival as it is to the salvation of others' souls.
- B. When we sit down and become lethargic in the matter of evangelism, the devil is able to insinuate all kinds of evil things into our midst. If he can keep us inactive in this area, he will have robbed us of many of the blessings of our faith and kept us from being effective in many of the other things the Lord wants us to do.
- C. Too many of us are failing to be personal evangelists, and that failure is costing us dearly.
- D. Our shortage of personal evangelism is one of our worst problems. We will either correct it, or we will be destroyed by it!
- E. There is no safe middle ground.
- F. Satan would like nothing better than for us to be distracted and discouraged in regard to God's work of rescuing the lost.
- G. If he can keep us from that work the devil need do nothing else to hinder us spiritually.
Song: Rescue the Perishing
- H. We simply cannot allow the devil to have his way. We must forge ahead knowing that – 2 CO 9:8.
- I. Through our great God, we must abound in the work of communicating the gospel to mankind.