

Lecture 10 – Roman Road to Salvation

In our last lesson we talked about some things that divide us and the need for gracious acceptance of one another to keep us united. I thought you might enjoy this little poem:

Ten little churchmen went to church when fine,
But it started raining, then there were nine.
Nine little churchmen stayed up very late,
One overslept himself then there were eight.
Eight little churchmen on the road to heaven,
One joined a rambling club, then there were seven.
Seven little churchmen heard of Sunday "flicks,"
One thought he'd like to go, then there were six.
Six little churchmen kept the place alive,
One bought a television set, then there were five.
Five little churchmen seemed loyal to the cord,
The pastor upset one of them, then there were four.
Four little churchmen argued heatedly,
Over ceremony, then there were three.
Three little churchmen sang the service through,
Got a hymn they didn't know, then there were two.
Two little churchmen disputed who should run
The next church concert, and then there was one.
One faithful churchman, knowing what to do,
Got a friend to come to church, then there were two.
Two sincere churchmen each brought one more,
So their number doubled, then there were four.
Four sturdy churchmen simply couldn't wait
Till they found four others, then there were eight.
Eight eager churchmen, searching around for souls,
Working, praying, witnessing, drew others in by shoals.
Shoals and shoals at every service, cramming every pew,
O God, supply this grace and zeal in my own home church too.

The point and purpose of this lesson today is to ask ourselves, "What if I was that one faithful churchman left? I might know what I needed to do, but would I be intimidated, fearful, unsure of myself if building the church were dependent upon the effectiveness of my witness/testimony?" For too many Christians, the answer would be, "Yes, this is so hard for me to do."

This message is going to be simple and direct and hopefully helpful to all of us. It will have just three simple points:

- 1) The need to be a witness
- 2) The normal opportunities to witness
- 3) The nitty-gritty of how to witness

THE NEED TO BE A WITNESS

I think it's fair to say that the depth of a church is determined by the quality of worship and instruction. The breadth of a church, however, is determined by a commitment to fellowship and evangelism. "When people complain that the church should do something, what they usually mean is that the Pastor should say something." Joe Aldrich says, "for many, evangelism is what the Pastor does on Sunday. The layman's job is to herd the fish within the reach of the big fisherman."

But Sunday worship is to equip the saints for the work of the kingdom. If every message was about evangelism, people would

grow weak and starve. We need a pulpit diet of Bible exposition to teach the Word with application, encouragement to strengthen us, exhortation to challenge and correct us and certainly evangelistic messages brought regularly. The point is . . . each one of us is a "minister of the Gospel." It is not enough to just bring a friend to church and hope someone else will do the soul-winning. I have a responsibility . . . you have a responsibility and we need to be equipped to do our job.

Many Christians feel more comfortable with the idea that "Apart from Christ I can do nothing," (I'm so weak) than they do with the other side of the coin that says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Thinking "I can do nothing" lets me off the hook; but "I can do all things" makes me wonder why I'm not doing anything. It's easier for Christians to mentally loaf around wondering if it's God's will to have them witness to a neighbor or co-worker, than it is to face up to what we know is God's will and go into all the world and make disciples.

Too often an unnecessary burden of guilt is placed on Christians in regards to witnessing. The very word "witness" somehow implies involvement, doesn't it? In our culture today it's common to shy away from becoming involved. We're so busy with our own agendas and demands of life. So, if we're not "involved" then we feel guilty. Although probably unintentional,

the idea is conveyed that Christians are somehow responsible for results. The Bible clearly says (Matthew 9:38) that God alone is the "Lord of the harvest" and in 1 Corinthians 3:7 it is "God who makes things grow."

We've heard the parable Jesus told of the sower and the seed. The challenge from Jesus is to sow good seed anyway. We don't know men's hearts, but God does. It's not your talent, intelligence or charisma but rather the Divine Power of the seed (God's Word) and the Holy Spirit prepared soil that results in a harvest. Results are God's prerogative, while faithfulness is your responsibility.

Isaiah 44:11 "My Word goes out from my mouth: It will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

So, why do we need to witness?

1. My knowledge makes me responsible (Rom. 1:14-16)
2. The Great Commission makes me responsible (Matt. 28:19-20)
3. My position in Christ makes me responsible (2 Cor. 5:20)
4. The constraining love of Christ compels me (2 Cor. 5:14)
5. The judgment of each believer (2 Cor. 5:10)
6. The terror of the Lord's judgment on unbelief (2 Cor. 5:11)
7. The costly work of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:15)

JESUS SAID SO!

God may seem infinitely patient, but when it comes to winning souls, have no doubt . . . God is in a hurry! He wants none to perish. We need to evangelize, which is simply making Christ known with ease, because (you've heard it before) – "Only one life 'twill soon be past . . . only what's done for Christ will last."

I don't think I need to go on to convince you that the need is real. So what about the second point . . .

THE NORMAL OPPORTUNITIES TO WITNESS

We get very intense about methods of evangelism, but relax when it comes to involvement. Jesus' concern was just the opposite. He was intense about involvement with people, but relaxed on methods. People who are soul-winners don't live exclusive lives. No sense of self-righteousness. They stay close enough to the unsaved so they'll hear the message, but not too close to be corrupted by their lifestyle.

But maybe you feel, "I'm so far from God right now. I'm still struggling in some areas of my life. I just don't have my act together. What kind of witness is that?" Believe it or not, even what we'd term a "carnal" Christian can still save souls. Why and how? Again, because the power is in the truth spoken, not you. And because your very struggles are seed for testimony.

A skeptic may deny your doctrine or attack your church, but he cannot honestly ignore the fact that your life has been impacted and even revolutionized by knowing the Lord Jesus. He may not listen to preachers, but you are a human-interest story. A personal testimony at whatever stage of your spiritual growth is compelling and really it's just telling another beggar how you found bread.

There is a steady mission field at your door – cults come knocking. You meet other parents at soccer games or sporting events for the children; the hairdresser/barber (they like to talk and will usually talk about whatever the client initiates). So there is nothing magical about going a long distance to seek a mission field. Opportunities will come your way if you are obedient and available and especially as you pray and pray earnestly for those doors to open.

I still have a few thoughts to share about normal opportunities to witness before we get to the nitty-gritty “how to,” but we’re going to start getting specific. These thoughts are gleaned from numerous resource materials on evangelism and witnessing as well as my own experiences and observations and you are free to sift through your own personality and situations to use whatever will be of benefit to you.

First of all, we don't have to buttonhole anyone. People are not arm-wrestled into the kingdom. People may be lost, but they're not stupid. Don't talk down. A self-righteous "holier than Thou" attitude will turn people off faster than anything. The idea is to expose our faith, not impose it on others. Most people will listen because they're polite, or intellectually stimulated . . . when handled with tact. The 10% who won't listen at all (they're hard core) have either had a previous bad experience with someone trying to jam religion down their throat or else they already consider themselves religious.

One other side note before we begin to expand, if you work for a non-Christian boss, do the work you're paid to do. This is not a place for outspoken soul-winning evangelism. Frankly, you may lose the job and even sometimes families are lost if all you ever talk about is Christ. The key is a balanced life. Your work done with diligence and excellence, your attitude toward punctuality and teamwork with associates, your lifestyle that has a sense of humor and peace about it can speak volumes; but when opportunity presents itself in the normal course of home or work, SPEAK OPENLY. Like Paul, don't be ashamed of the Gospel.

A book One Hundred Percent American by Daniel Weiss says
Only 1% of Americans read the Bible more than once a day
Only 84% of Americans believe heaven exists.

Keep those statistics in mind.

To talk with someone about Christ, you don't need to spend a lot of time studying their religion. In fact, the less you know, the less you will be able to discuss their religion. Whether or not you realize it, this is a great advantage. It isn't witnessing from ignorance, rather it's witnessing from your greatest strength, the truth. Instead of wasting time tearing down alien beliefs, you present your own beliefs and nothing more. Most people in the world could not answer the question, "What is the Gospel?" Don't assume everybody knows. Madeline L'Engle in her book *Walking on Water* says, "We don't draw people to Christ by discrediting what they believe, instead we show them a light so lovely and meaningful to us, they want to know the source." Be gracious, be loving, be accepting. And while you're at it . . .

Tip generously, say "You've been very gracious. Thank you." (Christians have a bad reputation for being lousy tippers.) We're probably meeting more strangers during this shopping month of December than we have all year. Take time to say "I appreciate what a good job you're doing with so many customers this busy time of year."

Renew old acquaintances. Christmas cards are a perfect opportunity. In fact, you might decide to call this year and say a

personal “hello” interjecting how good God has been this year in continuing to meet this need or that.

Holding up a John 3:16 sign at a TV camera may seem a way to reach a mass audience, but in reality it means nothing – it’s code talk to Christians, the world doesn’t understand. Instead they mock, “there’s another kook.”

Well, let’s get down to the third point . . .

THE NITTY-GRITTY OF HOW TO WITNESS

You may be a new Christian or shy by nature. Remember this, you already have more Bible in you than most will ever learn. Remember the 1%? It’s a priceless treasure. You have the TRUTH!

Ask God to make you sensitive, alert to opportunity and it’s okay to reach slowly. The *No-Guilt Guide to Witnessing* by George Sweeting says to make love your aim . . . “Do you know the world is dying for a little bit of love? Everywhere we hear them sighing for a little bit of love. Pray for love, love is fruit of the Spirit not something we work up. Allow the Holy Spirit the chance to love through us.” Don’t underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit as you witness. He’s very likely working in the listener’s life. Again, the Power is in the Word of truth.

Have a passion for souls: A heart passion – a caring for others, identify concerns in their life and be ready to share the availability of Jesus to bear those burdens.

Whether we like it or not, man looks at the outward appearance. We represent the King of Kings. Sloppy dress, poor workmanship in our chosen fields, offensive personal habits do not attract. As they say, you never have a second chance to make a first impression. Dress in such a way that supports your witness rather than undermines it. Neatness (not expensive dress) helps establish confidence and acceptance. Personal hygiene – a shower, a breath mint, deodorant, whatever – we should not smell offensive or have a somber jail warden face. People say, “Too many Christians look like they were baptized in lemon juice.” It’s the joy and peace of Christianity that are such attractive qualities. If you don’t have that it can be hard to witness. You know “joy” is not just temporal happiness and God’s “peace” is not just lack of conflict. We know what we’re talking about when we use those terms.

Cordial (or friendly, if you like) is a word we don’t use a lot. But if someone is shy, being cordial provides relief of shyness. You’ve made the first effort at friendliness. If a person is bored/sad, the extension of a cordial interest invigorates cheers

and rejuvenates him. Being cordial is a needed and necessary virtue. It's easy. To be cordial . . .

1. You need a warm smile, don't fake it.
2. A solid handshake – no bone crusher, but not boneless like a glove full of warm pudding. It should be an "I appreciate you" kind of smile or handshake.
3. You need direct eye contact. The eyes reflect a lot of deep feelings of the soul. They can see if you're genuine.
4. If you sense the need, give that word of encouragement.
5. Use the person's name as you talk. Mention something you honestly appreciate about him, but don't do it just for flattery.

You want to be listened to, so be interesting. No one, no matter how gracious, enjoys being bored. It's a contradiction to talk about how exciting Christ really is in an uninteresting way. Don't ramble, get to the point in your wording; know your flow of thought, your key terms. Remember the person isn't saved, so guard against religious clichés and hard to understand terminology like justification, sanctification, and predestination. You want to be understood, so be logical. Don't preach, just talk; don't defend yourself, just declare your story and keep it brief. Glorify God not yourself.

You can divide your testimony into three parts:

1) **Before you came to know Jesus** (struggles within, loneliness, lack of peace, absence of love, unrest, fears, knowing that you were sinful); perhaps identify with some struggle your listener is facing.

2) **The decision that revolutionized your life** (you can mention how it was hard to stop procrastinating, fears of walking down the aisle to make a public acceptance of Jesus, losing friends, not having anymore "fun.") You want your testimony to be useful, so be practical. Don't promise that all problems will end if one becomes a Christian. That isn't true. Theoretical stuff doesn't attract attention as much as practical reality. Yes, heaven is the guarantee of the future, but eternal life begins here and now. There are so many benefits to knowing Jesus in this life. Religion is not the issue, affirm having a relationship. It's okay to admit you have some continuing struggles. (So did Paul in Romans 7) But the wonderful confidence is that now the Holy Spirit lives inside and you're not alone or without all the resources of heaven to help you. Above all, be polite and gracious.

You want the moment of your new birth to be clear, so be specific. Don't be vague about how you became a Christian. Speak of Christ and the church. Refer to the decision you made, a moment of time when you received the Lord. Be simple and direct. Emphasize faith more than feeling. Try your best to

describe precisely what you did or what you prayed or what you said. This is crucial!

People want to know “how” – You can share, “I went home, got on my knees, said something like “Lord, I believe Jesus died for my sins. I’m a sinner, I turn my life over to you asking for forgiveness and the privilege of being your child.” Or, “I walked up the aisle to a wonderful counselor who helped me. All I had to do was confess that I believed Jesus is the Son of God and that I wanted Him as my personal Lord and Savior.” No one embarrassed me.

3) **You can obviously share what has taken place since you’ve become a Christian.** Mention being baptized, joining the fellowship of a church. The main thing about sharing a personal testimony is –

DON’T OVERDO IT, BUT DON’T HOLD BACK, AND DON’T WORRY ABOUT THE FEW WHO RESIST YOUR TESTIMONY.

Too many of us are so tactful we don’t make contact. Not all will listen and you just have to have a tough hide but tender heart. They are not rejecting you, but the One who sent the Lord Jesus. You can’t override free-will. There is an individual responsibility. Paul Little reminded us of his experience. “Every six months or so, I feel the pressure to witness. So I hit someone

hard with Scripture and when they back off, I could feel the job was done. The Holy Spirit helped me realize, however, that it was I, not the Gospel or the cross that was offensive.”

It’s obvious that we seldom get to launch right into our personal testimony. More often, it’s a gradual communication about spiritual things. It’s good to remember that 84% already believe in heaven. Timing can be important. Donald Barnhouse tells of a barber inspired for evangelism after attending a stirring service. So he got a man in the chair for a shave and with a razor in hand asked, “Are you ready to die?” So timing is important.

Simplicity is the key to effective witnessing. Don’t get sidetracked with deity of Christ, or the virgin birth, or other issues, but focus on Jesus as sin-bearer. If you let others pick the route of discussion, you’ll end up talking in circles about nonessentials that deal more with the side issues or church traditions and less about the basic truths of salvation. More than likely it will develop into talking about churchianity rather than Christianity. If someone has a Scripture, start there and make a beeline to the cross.

What will happen when you die? Will you go to heaven? How do you know? The real basic question is, “Will I be assured of heaven if I decide to believe as you do about Jesus as my

personal Savior?" No one but a grace filled believer in Christianity can say unequivocally "Yes!"

What is the one thing that could keep us from heaven? What keeps us from salvation (being saved or unsaved)? There must be something. We need to find out what it is . . . that's the important issue.

For the most part people are now walking on ground that is unfamiliar to them, but not to you. Most people believe basically, the good guy goes to heaven and the bad guy goes to hell. Of course, no one they know has ever gone there. Most have some redeeming quality deserving heaven, or purgatory, which is a place Catholics believe will prepare them for heaven in the afterlife.

Agreeing is a powerful weapon. Don't be afraid of it. They present a point. So, state, "If what you say about ___ is true, would that guarantee my salvation?" If certain verses might be taken two different ways, or if it's a side issue, say "That's certainly worth thinking about."

Stick with the issue of sin separating us from God. Turn to Romans 3:23 in your Bible (I have mine marked with a little piece of tape so I can go right to it). "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And you might note in the margin 1 John

1:8 also "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

To deal with man's sin, we turn to Romans 5:12. The result of sin is death. But if we turn to Romans 6:23 "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus paid for those sins on our behalf with His blood. When the death of Christ procured payment for sins, was it total and complete? Past, present and future?

If sin is the only thing that keeps us from heaven, and Christ paid for my sins, then everything must be okay? Right? (No works necessary). Many will object – too easy. Remember – No Argument.

Try this . . . take three coins/paper clips/whatever (God, sin, you. Take sin out.) Nothing keeps you from God when sin is removed. Absolutely refuse to argue. People must be charmed into righteousness. Anytime you're in a discussion like this, send up those "arrow prayers" and ask God to open your lips appropriately and honor your words.

Some may want to talk about the place and meaning of the Ten Commandments. Galatians 2:21 "if salvation comes by following rules, then Christ died for nothing." Wages of sin equals death, not as mandatory course in holy living in order to avoid death.

Salvation is by grace through faith. You may want to mention Ephesians 2:8,9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourself, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." Grace is a free gift. So how do you get this gift?

Turn to Romans 10:9-13 "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead you will be saved. For with your heart you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth you confess and are saved . . . All who call on the Lord will be saved."

So what is justified? "The act by which God declares a sinner righteous in His sight while he is still in his sinning state." God does it, we don't have to clean up our act to be worthy. Romans 5:1 "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Peace with God of the Universe. Isn't that a wonderful gift and privilege!

Baptism is a big issue as to its effect and meaning of baptism – for some, baptism results in salvation through God's grace, but that's where grace ends. First serious sin destroys the major effect of that baptism and the sinner is now headed for hell unless necessary steps of works are taken to offset this. Again, the focus is on salvation (not baptism modes, etc.).

Paul challenged in Galatians 3 “Having begun in the spirit are you now being perfected in the flesh?” You can give assurance of a position in God’s family that is undeniable. Romans 8:1 “There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”

Rather than argue any point, try to find a way to agree. Don’t attack, uphold the dignity of the individual with a right of opinion. As questions are asked, kindly offer an answer. Stay calm. But come to the point. Sin separates – salvation comes through the Savior.

It’s helpful if you know the answers to some popular objections. But maybe it’s best not to “dump” all at once. Maybe arrange for another chat when you’ve had some time to think about “what they’ve said.” It’s not so much for you, but to give them an “out” – a chance to let the Spirit work in their lives.

Remember Romans 10:17 (faith comes by hearing). So we need dialogue. We get anxious. Why wouldn’t people be quick to accept such a wonderful gift as salvation by grace through faith? Unfortunately, some want to stay in their sinful condition; some may be confused by what you’ve said; or not really convinced the gospel is true; afraid; feel too much pressure. There were times when Paul had to say, “Now I’m going to the Gentiles.” You’ll

know when you should cease efforts and leave them to God or let someone else water the seeds you have planted.

The best we can do is make sure of our own spiritual preparation as we witness:

Have assurance of your own salvation

Lead a consistent Christian life

Have a love for people

Be ever persistent in prayer

Be willing to persevere

Mentally we prepare to witness by:

Knowing Scriptures (the Roman Road). Again I suggest you have your Bible marked as we showed you in the lesson so you can go from one point to the next.

Understand the gospel of grace

Have a right attitude (we're not scalp seekers)

Relax . . . witnessing is just sharing.

Our fear of rejection makes it so tempting to change/soften the message, especially when the issue of sin must be faced. Perhaps in the past we've experienced indifference or had our Bible ignorance exposed. So instead of admitting, "I don't know but I'll find out," we just let the bad experience keep us from ever trying again.

Can you remember when you first heard the good news? Remember the person God used in your life? Are you mad at the messenger now? Initiative is important. It's the first plank in the bridge building process.

Try again. Maybe ask these types of questions:

. . . I'm interested in lives of great men/women. Who do you think was the greatest person who ever lived?

. . . With all these earthquakes and disasters, what keeps you from being afraid?

. . . Did you see the front page today? What do you think about prayer in school? Or the reason behind the mass shootings?

. . . I love Christmas, especially the Christmas carols. What do you like best about Christmas?

You may win a hearing someday with that neighbor by taking food in when the family is ill, or seeing your neighbor in the yard shoveling dirt – off to help. Often the door opens as we go that second mile. It's called servanthood.

We've got to pray and pray some more for both opportunity and effectiveness. Some day you'll have that wonderful opportunity to be the one to ask directly, "Have you received Christ as your Savior yet? Do you think you're ready to take that step now?" When you get a rousing "yes," evangelism gives birth to discipleship and that's a whole other lecture.

If you knew the lives you've already helped, the people who watch you and found courage to go on, you'd be most encouraged. A silent witness of lifestyle is powerful and effective, but the ability to effectively witness verbally may make all the difference in the world to someone.

There's a story about a man walking along the beach after a violent storm had sent breakers thundering against the shoreline. As he strolled, he saw that the beach was covered with starfish that had been thrown ashore and helplessly stranded by the great waves. Once the morning sun burned through the clouds, the starfish would dry out and die.

Suddenly the man saw an interesting sight. A young boy had also noticed the plight of the starfish and picking them up, one at a time, flinging them back into the ocean.

"Why are you doing that?" the man asked. "Can't you see one person will never make a difference – you'll never be able to get all those starfish back into the water, there are just too many."

"Yes, that's true," the boy sighed as he bent over and picked up another and tossed it into the water. Then he watched it sink and looked at the man and smiled, and said, "But it sure made a difference to that one."