

When They Won't Listen

We have two different questions to think about. One is, *"What should I do differently when I continually try to share Jesus with a friend, and he wants nothing to do with it?"* The second is *"Why can't I convince my friend, who claims to be a Christian, that his lifestyle is not what the Bible expects of a follower of Jesus?"*

We have all had the experience of trying to share our faith, only to have it rebuffed and the message rejected. Our immediate response is to assume that, somehow, we are not presenting it properly. We have read the books on sharing the gospel. We have studied presentations such as Les Stobbel's *"The case for Christ"* and gone over the multiple proofs for our faith, but our efforts seem to go nowhere. To us, Christianity seems so logical that we can't understand why others cannot see it. The same is true regarding a Christian lifestyle. To us the expectations God has for us seem so clear set we cannot understand why other Christians cannot see it as we do.

We have both bad news and good news for you from God's Word.

First the bad news. God's Word tells us why it is so difficult to present the truth of salvation to those who have never believed. Read Ephesians 2:1-2. It is difficult to explain salvation to one outside of Jesus because they are spiritually dead and dead people don't respond well to us. When we try to talk to an individual without Jesus we are talking, according to Ephesians 2, to a spiritually dead person who cannot hear us.

There is a second piece of bad news. A Christian who will not listen to the Word of God concerning his or her lifestyle or activities has a slightly different but equally difficult problem. Paul described those who refuse to listen to what God is seeking to tell them about what it means to live as a Christian. Read Ephesians 4:18-19. Many Christians ignore what seems like obvious truth regarding the way to live because they have listened to the world for so long their hearts and minds have been hardened to the point where they no longer hear.

That's the bad news. All those outside of Jesus are dead to spiritual things so do not naturally respond to the message of salvation and too many Christians have so hardened their hearts that they no longer naturally respond to the watering of God's Word. It's reality.

Now the good news. The first bit of good news comes from Jesus as recorded in John 16. Jesus had just told His disciples He was going to leave them, and they were obviously concerned about that. Read John 16:7. The advocate that Jesus spoke of was the Holy Spirit. Read in John 16:8-11 what Jesus said would be some of the things the Holy Spirit would do when He comes.

The NIV phrase **"he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin"** is an interesting translation. The Greek word literally means *"to convince someone of truth"* or *"reprove"* and is usually translated, *"to convict."* It was sometimes used in Greek literature to refer to the cross-examination of a witness in a trial.

Jesus said that the promised Holy Spirit would do three things. First, He would “**prove the world to be in the wrong (literally convict the world of) about sin.**” Second, He would convict the world of “**righteousness.**” Third, He would convict the world of “**judgment.**”

Jesus then went on to explain each ministry. He said the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin because, “**people do not believe in me.**” It is important to note that Jesus used the singular form of the word “**sin**” because He was referring not to the many sins we commit but to the sin of unbelief. Jesus said earlier, as recorded in John 3:18, “**Whoever believes in him (Jesus) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.**”

The lost are dead in their sin. Dead people don’t respond to us. Jesus, however, sent the Holy Spirit to speak to dead about the truth of the sin of unbelief that condemns one. It is important to note that while we cannot communicate with the dead, God can. Recall the event recorded in John 11. Lazarus had died and Jesus was at his tomb. Read John 11:43-44. It is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to convict the lost of their sins because only He can speak to the dead. Read I Corinthians 3:5-7 and on the final phrase “**only God, who makes things grow.**”

We all have the responsibility of sharing the truth of who Jesus is, what He has done for us, and what one must do to receive that provision. In the end if they make a commitment to Jesus it is because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and if they refuse to it is because they are rejecting not us but the message of the Holy Spirit.

Remember, God gave us the freedom to accept or reject both the salvation He offers and, as we will see next, the call of the Holy Spirit to live godly lives. Our job is to faithfully share the truth so that the Holy Spirit can work through us. Our responsibility is to develop our presentation of the gospel so that what we say, backed up by how we live, can be used by the Holy Spirit to reach individuals. However, the one thing we dare not assume is that our arguments or careful presentation ultimately reach people or that failure is our fault.

The second ministry of the Holy Spirit is to “**convict the world of righteousness.**” Many commentators see this as another way of saying that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convince men and women of their need for Jesus. It is but it also speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers by which He guides us into a lifestyle that is pleasing to God. That is why Paul could write about the characteristics a Christian should exhibit in his life and call them, as he did in Galatians 5:22, “**the fruit of the Spirit.**”

The same principles apply to trying to teach biblical truth regarding lifestyle. Satan is always seeking to harden the hearts of believers so they will not respond to the truth of Scripture. You and I cannot penetrate a hardened heart with logic, but the Holy Spirit can. That does not mean we should not study God’s Word so we can intelligently explain from the Word what a Christlike life looks like and what God calls sin so we should avoid it. As in man’s freedom to choose or to reject a relationship with God, so too we are free to choose to follow God closely and receive His

blessings or to ignore His commands. God has made it very clear that, as our heavenly Father, He will do whatever He can to teach us how to live properly;

The challenges of reaching the lost or sharing our commitment to a Christlike life are many but we need to keep several things in mind.

1. God loves the lost more than we do, and He desires that His children obey Him more than any of us can imagine. Because of that love the Holy Spirit will never stop working to bring about the change in a life that only He can bring about.
2. God wants to use us as a part of the process. He has given us that privilege and responsibility. As frustrating as it will often be, we must press on in loving the lost and those living in ways that we believe contradict the way God's Word says Christians must live.
3. We dare not, in the process of reaching out to either group, assume the role of judge. Conviction of sin and righteousness is the unique responsibility of the Holy Spirit. We have no legitimate way of judging the salvation of anyone and we certainly do not have the right to tell them they are going to hell. All we can do is lovingly share what the Bible says about the need of salvation.

In relationship to right living, we must love deeply and share what we believe the Bible says while leaving the judging to the Holy Spirit. It is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to convict both the dead and the hardened. We must love those who do not see their need of Jesus and we must love those Christians whose lifestyle we do not agree with.

4. Finally, because we can neither convince a sinner of his need for salvation nor a believer of his need to live for Jesus, we must bathe our ministry in prayer. We must approach both with patience, and we must continue to love those who seemingly ignore what we are saying, knowing that they are ignoring the Holy Spirit and not us.