

Christ Reformed Baptist Church – New Castle, IN
Sunday School Class Series: Inspiring & Maintaining Our
Personal Gospel Witness.

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PART FIVE:

The self-interested person & the convinced atheist

Malachi 2:6 >> The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

Jer. 23:22 >> But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings

Daniel 12:3>> And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Prov. 11:30>> The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

1 Cor. 9:22 >>To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

INTRO:

These verses are intended to encourage us in the privilege and duty of personal witnessing by way of reminding us that in God's economy we are His chosen messengers to communicate the good news of the gospel to those around us, in order that it may be used by God the Spirit to convict and save some unto eternal life.

We have been looking at how Jesus dealt with various types of unbelieving people which He encountered during His earthly ministry, in order that we might learn from the Master about the appropriate principals that are related to sharing the Christian faith.

Today, I would like to wrap up our classes by attempting to cover two remaining categories of unbelievers that we may encounter: The self-interested person and the convinced atheist.

THE SELF-INTERESTED PERSON:

Let's begin with the Self-Interested person. This type of unbeliever needs particular care and attention in our day...because it appears they are too easy to reach with the gospel witness at first, they seemingly come to the faith too quickly and although they yes, supply large initial numbers to our churches it all winds up with not so pleasant outcomes.

“Converts” from this category either fall back into the world's way of thinking and behaving and leave the church or worse remain in the church and become sympathetic to outside liberal influences seeking to damage the purity of the Christian faith.

It seems that we do not detect, at first, that they are only interested in the Christian faith because they have seen something

which they like or want for themselves. Nevertheless, they are attracted by something other than the need for forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God and Christ as Lord of their lives.

How does this happen? What do we need to consider in our evangelizing to the self-interested person that will help prevent such mistaken easy believism?

#1 EMPHASISING TRUE REPENTANCE: MATT.16:24-26

Once again the teaching of our Lord Jesus helps us. During His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus took pains to rebuff with solemn warnings all who tried to follow Him in some superficial way, without having first understood the way of true repentance and the cost of true discipleship. **MATT.16:24-26** “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.²⁵ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.²⁶ For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? ”

Now, we must admit that there are vast numbers of truly converted people who first came to church and/or Christianity out of self-interest. And in fact, today, they bless God that there were those, following Christ’s example, who continued to witness to them and were determined to make them understand the real issues of repentance and biblical conversion. So, then you see...we must be consistent and faithful in our dealings with the self-interested person, or people with only a meaningless, superficial profession

of faith will enter and many times remain in the churches merely out of self-interest. So, we must always emphasize real conviction and true repentance.

Regarding the self-interested class of unbeliever, it is fair to observe that they are slightly on the increase in our present day, judging from the outward ‘success’ of certain church growth techniques that are popularly employed today which says ‘give the people what they want’. These tactics shamelessly mix a morsel of real Gospel with an abundance of entertainment, worldliness, companionship and pleasure are attracting numbers of ‘out-siders’ into churches.

#2 AVOIDING EARTHLY INCENTIVES: JHN. 6

In addition to emphasizing conviction and repentance we have recorded for us in JHN 6 an account of how the Lord dealt with people who followed Him for the wrong reasons.

6:2 Sets up the scene “And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.”

- They seemed to be ready to listen, but as learn a majority of them really had NO interest in spiritual information or any inclination to repent of their sins.

Some wanted to see miracles.

Some wanted to see what could be a great national leader.

Jesus did not entertain the ‘best life now’ philosophy...in fact He wanted them to know the raw truth...being a disciple of mine, means you make sacrifices, it means you starve at times, it means

you are imprisoned at times, it means you are financially broke sometimes, it even means that you may have to give up some things that otherwise you formerly enjoyed.

JHN.6:66

Perhaps that is why by the end of Chp. 6 we read in v.66 “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him”. When faced with only superficial self-interest the Lord Jesus put it to the test and questioned it. He made the terms of discipleship so clear that only people with a real spiritual concern for repentance and life continued to follow Him.

#3 THE FOLLY OF ‘NEED-BASED’ EVANGELISM

JHN.6:26-27

Looking at vv.26-27, we learn that the self-interested person may be ready to listen...but only because they want or need something in return. Nowadays, we commonly here of church evangelism programs largely that pander to these sort of perceived needs in what is called ‘need-based evangelism’ which offers joy to those that are sad, a sense of community to those who are lonely, counselling and restoration to those in martial and family difficulties, recreation and excitement to those who are bored with church as usual, and a sense of purpose and empowerment to those without a sense of meaning in life.

However, we must not forget that if we bait and lure people by offering whatever it may be that they desire, we better not be surprised to discover, in the end, that our ‘new converts’ are sadly deluded, unfulfilled and still highly self-interested un-contented people.

It is only as we, in our gospel witness stick firmly to our emphasis on repentance, turning away from the world, and yielding to the lordship of Christ, will we be faithful in following our Master's example in how to deal with the self-interested person.

THE CONVINCED ATHEIST:

After commenting on the self-interested person, lets now consider another considerable type of unbeliever who we are most likely to encounter in our modern day where rationalism has been so long the influence. The convinced atheist.

The atheist is not to be confused with the indifferent person who may vaguely believe in the general existence of God, even though they care not to go any further regarding spiritual matter. Atheists, however are those who have thought about the matter and have decided to expel the recongintion of God from the minds all together and will argue the point...and in fact welcome the opportunity to do so.

#1 AVOID MERE INTELLECTUAL ARGUMENTS:

JHN3:19-20

The root cause of atheism is expressed by the Lord in:

vv.19-20 "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprovod."

There are THREE crucial facts taught in these words.

1. Sin is the basis of atheism.
2. Fear of reproof, thus avoiding the mentioning of God.
3. Proud independence hates light / instruction, guidance from outside of self.

These three factors are all matters of the heart rather than the head, and thus, while the atheist does need his intellectual unbelief challenged, his real problem is a moral one, namely – rebellion and their three symptoms are described by the Lord as: sinful behavior, hatred of conscience, and pride.

And so, actually we will be doing the worst thing if we flatter an atheist's intellectual objections, treat them as reasonable, and enter into long discussions on debatable themes, struggling to prove God by rational arguments.

#2 EXPOSING THE FOLLY AND CONSEQUENCE OF SIN

We must approach convinced atheists in a way which takes account of the Lord's analysis of their unbelief. As they appear to love sin, more than truth, and value above all else their liberty/freedom to please themselves as they so choose, and simply do as they like, we ought to emphasize the suffering and squalor which results from such a naïve worldview.

The evident disorder which prevails at personal, family, national and international levels cries out against the atheist's theory that people have the self-sufficient power to make real transformative progress and order themselves righteously.

#3 EXPOSING THE CRUELTY & IMPOTENCY OF ATHEISM

#4 EXPOSING THE INTELLECTUAL DISHONESTY OF ATHEISM

COMMON QUESTIONS:

Why does a good God allow wars, sickness and tragedies?

How can I be sure that there really is a God?

Why are there so many religions?

How can a God of love send people to hell?

Isn't religion just for the inadequate and co-dependent type of people, who need a crutch to get them through life?