

“Unless You Go Where the Fish Are, You’re Not Going to Catch Any”

A call to authentic, healthy relationships with unbelievers “so that we may win some...”

A Fishing Story:

Two friends rented a boat and fished in a lake every day. One day they caught 60 fish.

The one guy said to his friend, "mark this spot so that we can come back here again tomorrow."

The next day, when they were driving to rent the boat, the same guy asked his friend, "Did you mark that spot?"

His friend replied, "Yeah, I put a big 'X' on the bottom of the boat."

The first one said, "You are so stupid! What if we don't get that same boat today!?!?"

These guys were at least smart enough to know that...

****Unless you go where the fish are, you’re not going to catch any!****

Transition: This is a good principle for fishing, but also for “fishing for men”... Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John by saying - “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19/Mark 1:17)

When it comes to influencing people for Christ, we need to follow Christ to where unbelievers are, or we’ll never win them to Him.

In his book, Jesus Christ Disciple-maker, Bill Hull states that “the most common problem of outreach in our (churches) is finding non-Christians to relate to.” He goes on to say, “the average Christian suffers from a tendency to lose all contact with non-Christian friends, soon after their conversion (to Christ).”

Let’s not lose sight of an important principle here which relates to our need for establishing appropriate, healthy relationships with unbelievers.

Clearly, the message of Scripture is that **believers are completely different from nonbelievers** - we should live differently, act differently and think differently, when it comes to morals, values, motives, attitudes, priorities, etc., and it is from this perspective that we must discern what kind of friendships we ought to have with unbelievers.

➤ There are three approaches we could take in relation to unbelievers:

1. **Stand with them** - Live just like them - fully embrace their habits, their morals, priorities, etc. - some people think it is necessary in order to “identify with them”

2. Stand ***against*** them - have no association with unbelievers what-so-ever. (Isolate/insulate/detach ourselves from any type of contact with them) - as some "religious traditions" attempt to do
3. Stand ***among*** them - meaning... prayerfully/carefully seek to establish healthy and appropriate relationships so as to influence them spiritually.

**** Which "stance" did Jesus take? (No doubt he "stood among them")**

Look with me at Luke 7:34-39 & 15:1&2

- Jesus was known as a "friend of sinners" (this may well have been one of his favorite titles given to him)

* And, aren't you glad since each of us are sinners? *

On many occasions, Jesus spent intentional time ***among unbelievers***. He lived His life of obedience and commitment to the Father before others - yet without compromise, or the lowering of His standards.

* Jesus didn't try to be like them, in order for them to like Him!*

...Which is what I did growing up!!!

Other examples:

- Jesus with Levi (Matthew) the tax collector among his "friends" (Luke 5:27-32)
- Apostle Paul became "all things to all people"
READ = I Corinthians 9:19-23

- What does it mean to "be all things to all people?"

"To the Jew = Jew / to the Gentile = Gentile / to the weak = weak, etc.

- Let's be clear about what Paul did here...***he identified with them in their...***

- + Culture, not their character
- + Social status, not sinful practice
- + Personal situations, not obvious perversions
- + Physical weaknesses, not their prevalent wickedness

... this speaks of Paul's willingness to identify with them in their circumstances, not participate with them in their sinfulness!

You see, it is not inappropriate to associate and to build relationships with unbelievers - but ***the primary focus of such a relationship should be to influence them for Christ*** by sharing the Gospel with them and living out our faith before them.

Let me shift gears here for a moment...

Notice what else God's Word says about having close bonds/friendships with unbelievers. Consider the following cautions and principles from Scripture:

- **Prov. 12:26** - "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray"
- **1 Corinthians 15:33** tells us that bad company corrupts good character (KJV - "morals").
- **2 Corinthians 6:14-16.** "Don't be yoked together with unbelievers... (Yoked = attached, melded-together, intertwined as one - hearts knitted together)
- Unfortunately, because we too often miss the point of verses such as these, **our tendency is to view unbelievers as the enemy, rather than the victim of the enemy!**
- Check out Matthew 5:14-16 - Salt and Light of the world. - Which means... *We have to be near enough to the darkness in order to shed light upon it!*
- **Healthy believers are engaged believers—not isolated believers.** Healthy believers are meaningfully engaged in the lives of their unsaved family members, neighbors, co-workers, and friends, always with a view toward living their life of faith openly and with credibility in these contexts.
- So, we need to be grounded in our faith and ready with reasonable answers to common spiritual questions, and to *"always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the hope that is within you" (1 Peter 3:15)*

*Remember...

**THERE IS NO IMPACT WITHOUT CONTACT:
NO INFLUENCE WITHOUT RELATIONSHIP!!**

Conclusion!