

What Will It Take To Rekindle Evangelistic Fervor Among Churches of Christ?

By Bob Young

I was intrigued by the recent news item in a weekly ministry update that I receive.

“The June 2010 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, which took place in Orlando, Fla., saw the approval of a plan that will channel funds away from some established Baptist programs and use them to fund new churches and more missionaries. The Great Commission Resurgence, which was adopted by over 75 percent of the delegates, is named after Jesus' command in Matthew 28 to go into all the world and make new disciples.

“The GCR Task chairman said, ‘The SBC will never be the same again. Tomorrow we will walk through a Red Sea moment. Tuesday's vote is about restoring the local church to primacy in the life of the Southern Baptist Convention, proclaiming the Gospel, planting churches, pushing back lostness, presenting the Gospel to every person, and making disciples of all the nations.’”

I am currently teaching a Sunday morning Bible class to strengthen the faith of believers and help us find fresh and creative ways to confidently share our faith with others. Last Sunday after the Bible class, several wanted to talk further about the decrease in evangelism. The questions are nearly always the same. What has gone wrong? What will it take to rekindle the flame? I have begun my list. It is incomplete; I am still adding to it. How would you answer?

We are less certain that people without Christ are lost.

Only Christ saves. The Bible holds no hope for those outside of covenant relationship with God—strangers from the covenant, the promises, God, Christ, and hope. God can do what he wishes, but the only revealed way of salvation is through Jesus.

We are afraid to say who is lost and who is saved, based on Scripture.

If we are uncertain who is lost and who is saved, we do not know who needs to be saved. Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom. God accepts those who keep his commandments and do his will.

The emphasis in our culture on tolerance has made us timid.

We have become timid in our outreach, especially regarding those closest to us and most likely to respond to the gospel. It is not a sign of love to withhold the truth. It is a sign of genuine love to say boldly that all of us must do everything God requires of us in his Word.

We are ashamed of the simplicity of our worldview and the simple message of the Bible.

I believe we have become ashamed of the gospel. To adopt a worldview that centers in Jesus as the only way is intolerant of other “ways”. We are ashamed of God’s truth.

We have lost our sense of purpose and obligation.

To our great loss, the loss of the kingdom, and the loss of the lost, we have made evangelism optional. We have forgotten why the church exists and have turned inward. We have made evangelism optional. Jesus commissioned his followers to go forth making disciples. The results are in God’s hands, but the responsibility to share the good news with as many as will listen belongs to every Christian.

We do not have strong social bridges.

Sharing the gospel requires connections and contacts. We do not know and interact with as many people outside of Christ as in times past.

We do not know the Bible as in previous times and this lack of knowledge contributes to our fear of engaging others in Bible study.

We are afraid to share the gospel because we ourselves do not know it and fear discussions where we may be asked a questions we cannot answer.

Christians in general (and many preachers) lack confidence to share the good news.

Related to the above point, we are less confident in what we know, what we have been taught, and in the answers we have heard in the past. Some of our lack of confidence comes from the fact that we have not ever been involved in evangelism.

As evangelism has declined, the lack of opportunity to see and experience people becoming Christians has caused a decreased emphasis and expectation.

The church has become accustomed to the lack of evangelism so that it is in emphasized or expected.

I plan write more about each of these reasons and continue to add to my list. What factors would you include in your list?

Looking Ahead

From 2003-2006, Don Petty, from the Webb Chapel church of Christ in Dallas, compiled information concerning "reasons for the decline" in church membership and the number of congregations. College and university professors along with university teachers of missions submitted 88 reasons. Members of the local church submitted 53 reasons. Another 84 reasons were collected in general discussions and conversations in a variety of lectureships, conferences, and other gatherings. The next article in this series addresses the common elements in those 225 reasons.