

POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

FOUR THINGS THAT TURN PEOPLE OFF TO CHRISTIANITY *by Wade L. Webster*

Have you ever been in a restaurant and lost your appetite because of something that happened? Perhaps, you found a hair in your food. Maybe, you lost your appetite because the person handling the money didn't wash his/her hands before preparing your food. Although you were hungry when you came into the restaurant, you lost your appetite shortly thereafter.

Something flipped a switch within you and turned you off. Restaurants are fully aware that this can happen. They exercise great care in trying to prevent it. Gloves and hairnets are worn to prevent hairs and germs from getting into food. Also, signs are posted to remind employees to wash their hands and to ease the fears of diners. Restaurant owners know that a bad experience can cost them a customer for life.

As bad as it is to lose one's physical appetite, it is even worse to lose one's spiritual appetite. Yet, we all know that it happens. Sometimes, spiritual appetites are lost because of something that is said or done. Like restaurant workers, we as Christians need to receive training to keep us from turning people off to Christianity.

Peter wrote: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Four words stand out in this passage: *sanctify*, *hope*, *meekness*, and *fear*. These four words reveal what is required to win people

to Christ. If these four things are present, then we are likely to satisfy those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. However, if these four things are missing, then we are likely to cause men to lose their spiritual appetites.

Hypocrisy

Peter began our text of study by encouraging Christians to "*sanctify*" the Lord God in their hearts (1 Pet. 3:15). As you likely know, sanctification has to do with setting something apart for a holy purpose. To the carnal Corinthians, Paul wrote:

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:17-18; cf. Rev. 18:4)."

Please note that the Christians at Corinth were to be separate from the sinful world in which they lived.

In the text that serves as the basis for this study (1 Pet. 3:15), Peter was encouraging Christians to set apart their hearts and minds for Christ. In order for Christ to live in us, our hearts have to be pure and holy (Mt. 5:8; Phil. 4:8). Worldly appetites and attitudes create enmity with him (Jam. 4:4; Col. 3:1-2). Peter wanted the saints to whom he was writing to stand out as lights in the world. He wanted

them to be "the church" or the called out of God.

Earlier in the epistle of First Peter, he wrote, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Please note that the saints to whom Peter was writing had been called out of darkness. They were to be living as "children of light" (John 12:36; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5). They were wearing the name of Christ and had to conduct themselves accordingly. Later, in the epistle of First Peter, we read:

"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:14-16)."

Please note that our conversation must be as it becometh the gospel (Phil. 1:27).

Peter knew that when Christians claim to be different, but aren't, they turn men off to Christianity. He wanted them to dress, act, and talk in

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a manner consistent with their calling (Eph. 4:1). Sadly, many have lost their spiritual appetites because of the hypocrisy of those who claim to follow Christ.

Hopelessness

Peter continued our text of study by speaking of the "hope" that was in them as Christians (1 Pet. 3:15). He wrote:

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15)."

Please note that it was the hope that was within them that prompted men to ask about their faith. I am convinced that one of the reasons why the first century church multiplied so rapidly was because men could see their hope (Acts 2:42-47).

Peter wanted the saints to whom he was writing to have a "lively" hope. In the first chapter of First Peter, we read:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Pet. 1:3-4)."

Sadly, some have a lifeless, rather than a lively hope. A lifeless hope attracts little or no attention.

Let me use an observation from fishing to illustrate this point. I remember fishing with minnows and worms as a child. One of the keys to catching a fish was to keep a lively or active bait on your hook. You wanted the minnow swimming and the worm wiggling as much as possible. Dead minnows and worms attract little attention, while live ones get a lot of attention. The same holds true with hope. A lively hope will catch fish. A lifeless hope will not.

In addition to speaking of the lively hope that they possessed, Peter spoke of the abiding inheritance that the saints had awaiting them (1 Pet. 1:4). Their inheritance was incorruptible and undefiled. It would not rust or be eaten by moths (Mt. 6:19-21). It would not fade away. It was reserved and waiting for them in heaven. It was an anchor that would hold through the storms of life (Heb. 3:6; 6:18-19). Obviously, if we want to get men interested in eternal things, we must be looking forward to heaven ourselves. Our treasure must be there.

Men in our world are looking for hope. They are looking for a better life. Hope will attract them to Christianity. Hopelessness will have the opposite effect.

Harshness

Our chosen text (1 Pet. 3:15) continues with a discussion of the spirit in which we must answer men's questions. Peter wrote, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Meekness refers to gentleness or mildness. Peter knew that harshness would turn men off to Christianity. Evidently,

Paul knew the same. By inspiration, he wrote:

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26; cf. 2 Cor. 10:1; 1 Thess. 2:7)."

Please note that the servant of the Lord is to be gentle, not gruff. Instruction is to be given in meekness, not meanness. The goal is to help individuals to recover from the snare of Satan. It is not to get them told or to win an argument. Satan loves harsh teachers. After all, they drive men in his direction. Furthermore, harsh teachers often harden hearts to the point that loving teachers cannot get through the scar tissue left behind. We must always speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). There never is a time or a place to be hateful or mean. We must never forget that "a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city" and that "their contentions are like the bars of a castle" (Prov. 18:19).

Not only must we use meekness with the alien sinner, we must use it with the erring brother. Paul wrote, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1; cf. Tit. 3:2). A brother who is overtaken in a fault

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needs meekness, not harshness. He is hurting and needs tender, loving care. The word that is translated as restore in this passage has to do with the setting of a bone. If you have ever broken a bone, then you know the gentleness that is needed in setting a bone. We must always treat others as we want to be treated (Mt. 7:12).

Sadly, there are those who have been turned off to Christianity because their questions were not addressed and answered with meekness. They were told the truth, but not in love. Please understand that I am not justifying the rejection of truth. Truth must be received even if it is not delivered in the right spirit. I am simply trying to diagnose what we

can do better in our attempts to win men to Christ. An ounce of prevention is certainly worth more than a pound of cure in this case. As already noted, once the damage is done, it is very hard to undo it.

Haughtiness

In addition to meekness, Peter said that answers are to be given with "fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). In this passage, fear has reference to respect and honor. Peter understood that a haughty or holier than thou attitude would not only condemn the Christian giving the answer, but also cool off the interest of those asking. As Christians, we must not be

"highminded, but fear" (Rom. 11:20). We must not be wise in our own conceits, but rather, "condescend to men of low estate" (Rom. 12:16). Please note that Paul was not encouraging the saints to be condescending in word, attitude, or tone. He was not encouraging them to put others in their places. He was rather encouraging the saints to put themselves into the places of others. We must remember that we were all sinners at one time (Rom. 3:23). Furthermore, we must realize that we can fall from the grace that we now enjoy (Gal. 5:4; 1 Cor. 10:12).

Although some believe that all

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judgment is condemned, it isn't. Jesus commanded righteous judgment (John 7:24). However, He did condemn hypocritical and harsh judgment. He declared:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Mt. 7:1-5).

In judging others, we must first examine ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5). Then, we must judge others with the same mercy that we would like to receive. Judgment will be without mercy to those who have shown no mercy (Jam. 2:13).

In this study, we have seen four things that turn people off to Christianity: *hypocrisy, hopelessness, harshness, and haughtiness*. Sadly, we may never get another opportunity with those who have already had bad experiences. However, we can do our best to keep from turning people off to Christianity in the future.

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