

Relating to a Lost World
January 25, 2015

Two terms that Christians use often are lost and saved. We speak of people who are Christians as being saved, that is, saved from the consequences of their sins.

Romans 5:9 (NIV) Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Jesus died to save people from the consequences of their sins. The consequences of sin is death and condemnation to hell. Through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus we can be pardoned. So we use the word saved as a reference to Christians. They are the saved. God's wrath is a term used for the time in the future when God will put an end to this planet and all the sinful living on it. God has done this in the past with the flood. The wrath of God is God dealing out justice to those who deserve it.

We use the word lost as a reference to non-Christians. Non-Christians are lost, or are the lost.

Luke 19:10 (NIV) For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

There was a time when most Americans were somewhat familiar with the Bible and/or with church. When you talked with people in the community, most of them, unless they were Jewish, had been to a church at some point in their lives and knew what the Bible was, had heard some of the stories of the Bible. Not all of them were Christians, though many would use that label. When we spoke of lost people, we spoke of all who were not trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. How many people that was, we never knew. But maybe we assumed most of the lost were across the oceans, needing to be reached by missionaries.

The world of lost people is not mainly across the oceans anymore. The lost world lives here, all around us. Lost people live in our neighborhoods, go to our schools, work for our employers. While that has always been the case, it is more radically so than ever before. Many of the lost people around us know nothing of genuine Christianity or the Bible.

We can no longer assume that people we meet have a background that EVER included going to church. We can no longer assume that people have ANY Bible knowledge. We cannot assume that most people hold similar moral values to us. We cannot assume that most people hold similar sexual values or family values as we do. Many, many do not.

The world we live in is radically different from the one I was a teenager in, just 45 years ago. I know to you who are now teenagers 45 years seems like a long time. But in the big scheme of things, it is rather short. It is less than one generation.

When I was a teenager, Mr. Simms, my Sunday School teacher let us talk about anything we brought up. And we brought up plenty of the controversial subjects of that day. But, the questions being asked today, never came up. Today, Christians all over America are asking questions about how to relate to homosexuals, Muslims, Hindus, and atheists.

How are we to relate to people who are very different from us in background, faith, morals, and values? How are we to relate to people radically different from us?

You might ask, "Why do we need to try to relate to lost people?" We must relate to lost people because they need our Savior.

Acts 15:11 (NIV) We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved...

Acts 4:12 (NIV) Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Every lost person can only be saved through the grace of Jesus who died for them. Therefore Christians must relate to non-Christians in order to tell them about Jesus, about being lost and saved, about heaven and hell.

God is in the saving business. God is reaching out to all people today. God is reaching out to people of all nationalities, ethnic groups, tribes, genders, ages, and sexual orientation. God is drawing people, attracting people, stirring their hearts, convicting of sin, preparing for them to hear the good news of salvation in Jesus. That message of salvation must come through Christians. We need to relate to a lost world to tell them about Jesus.

But how do we relate to people who are so different than us?

1) Find common ground. Discover what you have in common. Maybe it is just that you live in the same neighborhood. Maybe you both work at the same place. Maybe you go to the same school. Maybe you are both Star Wars fans and can chat about the new movie coming out this year.

Don't start with the Bible. Don't quote scripture to them, as if they will respect it. You believe everything starts with the Bible. They do not. The Bible is not common ground. You have a Biblical worldview. That is, you believe in God. They may not believe in any god. You believe God created the universe. If they don't believe in any god, then they don't believe a god created the universe. You believe that God has revealed what is right and wrong, moral and immoral. If they do not believe in God then they do not believe in moral absolutes. To them, right may be whatever you want it to be for you.

2) Show people God's love before telling them of God's love.

God demonstrated His love for us in sending us the Savior we needed. This was undeserved love. This was unexpected love. This gets people's attention. Look for opportunities to show kindness, forgiveness, patience towards them. Let the Holy Spirit use this to get their attention. We must show people God's love in order to win an opportunity to tell them about God's love.

3) Don't compromise with sin in order to create common ground.

You don't have to become like them in order to share Jesus with them. At some point they will need to learn that there is a difference in the way they live and the way you live. And that difference is more than that you go to church and they do not.

So, for example, if they suggest wife-swapping, then you will have to tell them that would be a sin for you to do. Do so calmly, gently, with no hint of condemnation in your voice. Don't say it like, "WIFE SWAPPING? HOW COULD YOU SUGGEST SUCH A THING!" They may not take

that very well. It may end any further conversation. Just tell them that you want to be friends, but that your friendship cannot include that kind of activity.

Ephesians 4:17 (NIV) So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do...

We do not have to be like them to relate to them. If you are the one to tell them about Jesus, God will show you the common ground you have. Or God may lead them to change their behavior to create common ground. They may already be convicted of some sin that needs to change so that you can create a friendship.

4) Seek to discover what they believe and why they believe it. Listen a lot, without correcting what they say, without throwing out Bible verses. If you hear inconsistencies, then ask if they have seen them. They may not be aware that some of their beliefs are in conflict with each other.

Ask for permission to share what you believe and why. Do so simply, gently, applying it only to you, concerning you.

5) Don't talk about their sin unless they do.

Eventually we will have to use the "s" word, sin. Eventually we will have to talk about sin, what sin is, and what kinds of sins we are guilty of. But sin is not our primary subject. Sin is not our primary message. **Our primary message is the love of God expressed through the death and resurrection of Jesus.**

Let me give you an example from today. Lot's of Christians have been asked this question. You may be asked this question.

If someone asks you if you believe that homosexuality is a sin, don't answer that question. Tell them that your opinion doesn't matter. Tell them that if there is a God, only what God says matters.

Tell them that you believe in the God of the Bible, that He created the universe, and has revealed Himself through the Bible.

Tell them that you are a sinner. Tell them that you have committed more sinful acts than you could count. Tell them that God revealed your sin to you through the Bible and convicted you of sin in your heart, so that you knew you needed a savior. Tell them that you came to believe that Jesus, and only Jesus is the Savior you need. Tell them that God loves us so much that He sent us the Savior we needed.

Tell them that we all need a Savior. Tell them that every person's only hope of heaven, instead of hell, is to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Tell them that there are lots of things that are sinful. But, being homosexual is not one of them. Tell them it is not a sin to be a homosexual. It is not a sin to be attracted sexually to people of your own gender.

Tell them that the Bible teaches that God meant for sex to be between a man and a woman in the bounds of marriage. Any deviation from that sexual expression is sin. That is not your opinion. That is what the Bible says.

Now, I know, the question, "Is homosexuality a sin" is asked as if that alone will send you to hell, and it will not. Heterosexuals do not automatically go to heaven and homosexuals do not automatically go to hell. But the question is asked a lot, but not often answered well.

You also need to know that many people do not make the distinction between homosexual attraction and homosexual acts. Our culture has so normalized sex outside of marriage as to no longer allow any taboo against consenting sexual expression. It is assumed that people will engage in sex, no matter what their life-situation is.

However, there are single Christian adults, both homosexuals and heterosexuals, who believe that sex outside of marriage is a sin and choose to live celibate lives for Jesus.

Meeting people who are very different from us can be hard. It can be hard to relate to them. We don't want to appear that we are judging them or condemning them. At the same time we don't want to appear to be condoning their sin. It may not be possible to have it both ways. Pray much and proceed cautiously.

It can be hard to relate to them. In fact, you might not want to. But people need the Lord. And you might be the only one God has who can relate to them and tell them about Jesus.

Trust the Holy Spirit to do the attracting through you.