

OBSTACLES TO SOUL-WINNING

C.H. Spurgeon begins a sermon on this theme by describing soul-winning as “that most royal appointment”. It is indeed the highest privilege of the child of God to be entrusted with the task of winning the lost for Christ. I was struck once again as I read recently the words of [Luke 20:1](#), [And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and **preached the gospel**, ...*Jesus preached the Gospel!* ... and it is a God-given responsibility that is laid at the feet of every born-again child of God to present in whatever situation God has set us into. Everyone of us has a mission-field that is personal and created especially to our ability.](#)

But we have got to be realistic, - we can't allow 'our heads to be in the clouds', - we have got to face the facts ... there are real and genuine **obstacles to soul-winning**. Let's look at a few of them together.

FROM WITHIN RELIGION ITSELF

(Acts 7:7-13)

- * I find this to be a tremendously difficult obstacle to continually have to face.
- * Religion has always been an enemy of God and His Word.
- * Religion has stripped the Word of God and pulled 'whole chunks' from it and confined it to the scrapheap of being 'an old out-dated book' with no relevance for our modern times.
- * Religion has 'sucked' out of the church its energy and its distinctiveness.
- * Religion robs the Church of its character that God had bestowed upon it.
- * Religion has 'recategorised' truth and set out to interpret it within the context of its own aspirations and as a consequence the country's laws and acts of Parliament portray the state of the nation's heart.
- * Religion has redefined right and wrong ... and produces a country largely bereft of Biblical teaching ... and in the end, a people who reject God receive the church and the religion it ultimately longed for!

- * Take a look at this country in which Jesus lived. The Pharisees and the scribes were its religious conscience. They had their laws and standards based upon Rabbinical writings, and the Talmud and the Midrash, - these religious writings were placed with similar equality to the Old Testament canon.
- * They had reassigned and reinterpreted the Law of Moses. They had their 'Revised Versions' and 'new translations' that stripped the old truth of its Divine legacy.
- * It is no wonder that when Jesus stood outside the temple these religious leaders immediately 'saw red'! *Jesus was the enemy!* But the Bible tells us that Jesus **preached the Gospel**, - and it was the Gospel these religious men *hated*.
- * Of course, we could go through the Scriptures and see the same picture; one of the greatest obstacles to soul-winning has always been this, - **the obstacle of religion**, as seen in their hatred of the Gospel.
- * When you tell someone they need to be saved they are affronted. What do *they* need to be saved from? They're good enough! They've got their church, they've got their religion. They don't need anything more than that! Their Minister says they are alright!
- * It's an insult to them that you should even suggest they are sinners and they need to be saved, ... and so, society formulates a religion with which it is comfortable.
- * We could go on and on about this particular aspect; we could see what it has meant throughout the history of the Church and we could equally see how religion today continues to be one of the greatest **obstacles to soul-winning**.
- * But when you are faced with an obstacle, what can you do?
 - * You can give up ...
 - * You can change your message ...
 - * Or you can set out to overcome the obstacle.
- * I suppose it has all got to do with how serious you are about the task, and how much the task has gripped you.
- * If you see your loved-one out sleep-walking near the edge of a cliff you will make every effort to get to them and waken them before they go over the edge! Aye, it might be a bit ridiculous of an illustration ... but you see the point!

- * Religion is a killer of the soul! It is a hardener of the heart. It is a cloud over the mind.
- * It is an obstacle to saving faith and it is a hindrance ... but it is also an obstacle that with God's help it can be overcome through the continuous proclamation of God's Word.

FROM WITHIN MAN'S OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS (Acts 21:27-36)

- * In some ways, we are not all the same. Spiritually speaking: some people have no thought of religion, others are involved in some sort of religious activity.
- * Some people are completely cold to the Gospel, - it has no bearing upon their lives, it is totally and absolutely irrelevant.
- * Other people can become excited about some form or another of it, - regardless of how unBiblical its origins, ... and there are others who 'blow hot and cold' spiritually.
- * Sometimes you get folk that almost idolise a certain preacher and what he says is 'gospel' ... even if he said the sky was a particular shade of green or purple! They just accept what he says without checking it out for themselves.
- * Religion is emotional and that which is emotional grabs hold of the heart and the senses and blurs your vision. It matters not whether it conflicts with the Bible, - if it works, who cares! Accept it!
- * There are different degrees of man's own righteousness ... but all the different and variant degrees of man's own righteousness, - no matter how clean and polished they may seem, - are as filthy rags to a holy God. He holds to no shades of grey or degrees of sin, whether mortal or venial!
- * When you walk along through Ravenscraig Park and you see what the various dog owners allow their dogs to deposit on the grass, - whether it is much or little, - it doesn't matter, it is all filth.
- * Sin is filth to God and He won't allow it into His Heaven.
- * But man has always been able to make excuses for his sin. He'll tell you that Biblical truth is transient! I have had unsaved tell me how to present the Gospel. They couldn't tell you what it is, but they can tell you how to change it! ... And not only do you have to change the way in which you present the Gospel you also have to change the *content* of the Gospel!

- * “Paul, you’re only a wee fellow and you are coming to us educated people of Corinth, and you are speaking in that dour accent of yours. Look at how you are dressed, - you don’t have the same money as we have to go out and buy something decent to wear. Paul, we like *how* Apollos speaks (it’s not that we listen to what he says, but we like how he speaks!). Paul, you’ve got to accept you’ve got to change this Gospel to suit our society; you’ve got to allow for a young man living with his step-mother; you’ve got to accept Christians taking fellow-Christians to court; you’ve got to allow for the better-off sitting at the front with all their niceties ... Paul, you’re living in 1st century Corinth, waken up to these modern times!”
- * Yes, it’s another real obstacle to soul-winning, - man’s own righteousness, but it is a righteousness that exudes from a depraved and an unrighteous and an unregenerate heart.
- * How do you contend with it? You do what Jesus did outside the temple, - you keep to the Gospel.
- * When Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses and others with their self-righteous gospel come to your door, ... there is an opportunity God gives you. What do you do?
 - * Do you not answer the door? ... Remember, here is God bringing unsaved souls *to you* to speak about Christ.
 - * Do you argue with them and ‘score points’? No, more often that not they could tie you up in knots, and besides you are not being much of an advertisement for Jesus because you are liable to get all ‘heated’.
- * The best thing to do is tell them about the Saviour of which the Bible speaks. *That is all that soul-winning is about.*
- * Doctrine and church membership comes later. Baptism comes later. Their view of millenarianism comes later. Points of doctrine come later. What the sinner in their sin needs to see is a child of God speaking to them of the great change that has taken place in their lives and they need to hear the Gospel that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners ... and they must believe!

- * No matter what anyone says I am convinced that everyone who has ever been born has at some time or another considered the concept of religious belief, - whether it be pagan, idolatrous, a variety of gods, or whatever. Even the atheist has at some time or another considered the possibility of a God-figure.
- * They do think about religion, but they do not believe in the truth of God that we preach to them.
- * Their opinion is to them far more important, more worthy of belief, than God's inspired declarations; they will not accept anything that is revealed in the Scriptures.
- * Here is advice from a great evangelist, "These people are very hard to influence; but I would warn you not to fight them with their own weapons. I do not believe that infidels ever are won by argument; or, if so, it very seldom happens. The argument that convinces men of the reality of religion, is that which they gather from the holiness and earnestness of those who profess to be Christ's followers".
- * Each of us is born with a natural barrier to the Gospel, but as we continue in life we heap more and more on the pile that is already there and we strengthen the barrier. The barrier becomes so uncontrollably fortified. When, in the pursuit of soul-winning, we try to dismantle the barrier using the enemy's tactics we often do more harm than good.
- * Arguments often lead to 'fallings out' and a breakdown in communications where nothing can be said for Jesus.
- * Something else too, probably only a very small portion of our listeners will understand what we are talking about.
- * Yes, while we are trying to do them good, we could be saying something that formulates something in their minds that is not of Scripture and we could be burying them deeper in their spiritual ignorance.
- * Many people are searching; some also are trying to dodge. I remember in College days we were carrying out a mission in South Belfast. A man came to the door and he spoke in a flippant way and asked us, "Ah, but what if God hasn't predestined me to be saved?!" But that is the question of a fool!

- * If you are not saved you start at the beginning ... you start at something that is important for you to understand right at the very outset, - you get right with God ... and then we'll look at these other questions. You don't give a newly-born baby a fillet steak, you give him milk!
- * Again I use the JW's and the Mormons again just simply as an illustration ... You won't impress upon them Christ by arguing points of doctrine, - tell them about Jesus and what He means to you and how He is your Lord and your Saviour. *That is all the Bible tells you to do.* Sometimes the more you argue, the more entrenched the other person becomes.
- * You will do more harm to their unbelief by presenting your faith in a living way rather than by your arguing reason.
- * It is one of the hardest things in the world not to argue when inside you are pushing to win an argument, - even on Biblical matters, - but the road you must travel upon with the unsaved is to point them in the direction of Christ. Instead of bringing them to deep doctrinal matters take them instead to someOne with Whom you are personally familiar.

Acts 24:24-25 *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

- * This is another obstacle to soul-winning, - procrastination. How often have we heard someone saying, "I'll come to Christ later in my life"?
- * It is a false sense of security that the devil lulls the sinner into. There are no guarantees, there is no certainty that you will be afforded the privilege of being able to accept Christ whenever you like.
- * If you hear them saying that to you, pursue them. They mightn't be too far away; impress upon them, *behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*
- * *Now* is all they've got; tomorrow is still not yet within their reach. It has always been an obstacle to soul-winning.

Carnal Security

(Mt. 7:26,27)

- * They reckon they are quite safe, but their foundations have not yet really been tested. They *suppose* that all is well. The winds and the rain haven't come yet.

- * They have made some sort of a decision some time away back in the distant past and they are trusting in that.
- * Well, living for Christ is an up-to-date and ongoing present reality, but there are those who *suppose* all is well when all they are depending upon is a 'sandy' profession.
- * By the time the builder realised his house was never going to last, it was too late for it had collapsed/crumbled around him.
- * CHS, "I am afraid that we sometimes preach smooth things, too soothing and agreeable, and that we do not set before men their real danger as we should. If we shun in this respect to declare all the counsel of God, part at least of the responsibility of their ruin will lie at our door."

CONCLUSION

- * There are so many more obstacles to soul-winning. Despair, love of sin, habits, company, ... we could name them one after another, but at the heart of all the obstacles is the confrontation between man's sin and God's righteousness.
- * Man is entrenched in his sin and God is entrenched in His righteousness. Never can sin become righteousness that is pleasing/acceptable to God. The gap would never have been bridged had it not been for God sending His Son to Calvary.
- * The initiative came from God, because man would never have thought it necessary. Indeed, had God not opened our eyes to its truth we would never have believed. Grace is God's love in action at Calvary ... it was there that He alone broke down the obstacles to soul-winning.
- * There is no barrier that will stand when He sets His mind to causing its collapse.
- * You've got loved ones who are unsaved, - *so unsaved!* Don't give up on them. You can recognise the obstacles they have erected but you also believe in and trust in a Saviour Who can save the hardest sinner from their sin.
- * This Gospel is the means, - the only means, - by which God in Sovereign grace and mercy can save them.
- * I trust that the Lord will bless your efforts and increase your burden and mine for the salvation of lost souls under our care.