

2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series  
Part 6 “Myths of the Unchurched”  
By Doug Hamilton

Here is what we have covered thus far in our series on evangelism:

- Lesson 1: “The Conversion before the Conversion” –i.e. “Everyone has a soul.”
- Lesson 2: The Mission of Missions –i.e. “Glorifying God”
- Lesson 3: The Message of Salvation: i.e. “The Whole Gospel of Christ”
- Lesson 4: The Magnetism of Evangelism –i.e. “The Love of Christ”
- Lesson 5: The Evangelistic Church Family –i.e. “We are the Called Out Calling Others Out of the World”

Acts 16:1-5 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek,<sup>2</sup> and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.<sup>3</sup> Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.<sup>4</sup> Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.<sup>5</sup> So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

- During Paul’s first missionary journey he met a family in Lystra that was three generations deep in the faith. They were a grandmother named Lois, a daughter named Eunice (2 Tim 1:5) and a grandson named Timothy. Upon the second missionary journey, Timothy has matured enough in the faith that Paul wants to take him out on the mission field. The verb tense indicates that Timothy’s father was dead. For the next fifteen years Paul and Timothy would work the mission trail through good times and bad. Paul would become Timothy’s father figure in the faith.
  - *Phil 2:22 “But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.”*
  - *1 Cor 4:17 “For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord...”*
- There was a problem to deal with before this would come to fruition, for Timothy’s father was Greek. This meant that Timothy was not circumcised. Normally this would not be a problem in Christianity for we are not under this.
  - Circumcision was part of the Law, not Christianity. *Lev 12:3 ‘On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.*
  - We undergo the circumcision of the heart when we are converted. *Col 2:11-12 “...you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;<sup>12</sup> having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*
  - Those who would push circumcision in the gospel voids the blood of Christ. *Galatians 5:2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.*
- Paul constantly fought with the Judaizers of try to force circumcision as part of the gospel. *Phil 3:2-3 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;<sup>3</sup> for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,*

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- There seems to be a contradiction in what Paul was teaching because in Acts 16:3. He wanted to have Timothy go with him, but convinced him to be circumcised. Why? So that he would not be a stumbling block to those potential converts among the Jews. They know that he was not a true Jewish lineage and would likely dismiss his message before even hearing it.
- Paul asked Timothy to go through the painful sacrifice of an adult circumcision in order to remove a stumbling block from those who might hear the gospel of Christ and be converted.

In the sixth and seventh lessons of the 2012 Camp Hill Evangelism Series, I would like to discuss some of the stumbling blocks that we place before ourselves and some that we place before the unchurched. The unchurched as discussed in the last lesson are those that are not part of a local church family. Souls are converted through the gospel of Jesus Christ and then He adds them to the body. *Acts 2:47 And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.* It is within the universal body that Jesus adds His saved people, but it is manifested on a local level called a congregation. Converts have no choice in the Savior or with the universal church of God, but in the local church family it is a different matter.

There are many myths that we can hold concerning the unchurched souls that we are trying to reach. In the study *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, Thom Rainey provides some valuable insight to dispelling some of these myths. He asked 353 individuals that in the last two years left the world of the unchurched and are now “churched”. I would like to use some of this study to dispel some myths that tend to trip us up.

**Myth #1: The “Unchurched” are turned off by the name of the church.**

We in the churches of Christ tend to place a great emphasis on the name, for after all the church is Christ’. The name is descriptive and scriptural. *Romans 16:16 All the churches of Christ greet you.* He purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28) and built her on the fact of the death, burial and resurrection (Matt 16:18). The church is the Bride of Christ and Christ is the Groom. The church is referred to by many names in the NT and the churches of Christ is but one of them. Yes the name of your group is important, but to the world of the unchurched, it really is not that important.

**“Did the name of the church influence your decision to join?”**

- 81% of them said that this had no bearing as to why they actively joined the congregation that they were in. 8% were uncertain and only 11% said yes.
- This is because what they were looking for was not a name, but a purpose. They were not looking for a title, but a teaching. They were not looking for a club, but a family that they could love and be loved back. They were looking for a higher meaning in their lives.

**Myth #2: The Unchurched Never Attend Church.**

We tend to forget that we live in a relatively religious country compared to most in the world. We have freedom of religion and there is still much of it in our society. There really is no escaping it regardless of what the godless sector of society attempts.

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The 353 “formerly unchurched” people were asked the following question: How many times in a year did you visit a church (for any service) when you had no church affiliation?

- 0 times -0%
- One time -48%
- Two times -30%
- Three times -18%
- Four times -4%
- In fact it is estimated that 12% of all atheist and agnostics attend Easter morning services.

The point is that we are in a society that is filled with people that are searching for something with a higher purpose than what they presently have going on. Many understand that they have problems and that the solution appears possible in Christ and among the people of Christ.

**Myth #3: The Unchurched Cannot Be Reached by Direct Personal Evangelism.**

- Jesus commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15).
- The Philippians participated in the spread of the gospel with Paul (Phil 1:5).
- The Ephesians were to have their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15).
- The Galatians were to hold fast to the teachings of the gospel (Gal 1:6).
- The Romans were not to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16).
- The Corinthians were to be imitators of Paul in sharing the gospel (1 Cor 4:15).
- Nearly every letter in the NT had encouragement from the apostles to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Direct Personal Evangelism has been a core principle from the beginning of the church. Yet we have those today that do not believe the unchurched can be reached with it anymore. Rarely in churches is there a program to follow-up on visitors to see if they understand what the Bible. The primary reason is because we have bought into the myth that direct personal evangelism does not work. There is nothing further from the truth.

The 353 “formerly unchurched” people were asked the following question: Did someone from the church you joined share with you how to become a Christian?

- Yes -53%
- Someone Else did -12%
- No -35%

Simply put 65% of the people that ended up becoming a member of that congregation was a direct result of someone taking the direct personal evangelism path. What would have happened if someone would have bought into that myth?

**Myth #4: We Must Be Careful in Our Teaching and Preaching So That We Do Not Communicate Deep and Complex Biblical.**

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We are living in a dumb-downed world today. Children are not challenged in school like they were in the past. People do not read like they used to. Even Christians are not studying their Bibles like they need to. This is not what God intends for the Christian.

- 1 Cor 3:1-2 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,
- Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Because of this there are those that have accepted the myth that the unchurched do not want to be challenged in our teaching. I have personally been told in the past that we should make the preaching simpler because it would go over our visitor’s heads. Listen to one of the formerly unchurched individuals that found a church home.

“You know what frustrated me the most when I started visiting churches?” Susan M. asked us. Susan was a lifelong unchurched person living in the Cleveland area until a life crisis prompted her to seek God. She tried to find him and his truth in the churches she visited. “What really frustrated me was that I had a deep desire to understand the Bible, to hear in-depth preaching and teaching,” she continued. “But most of the preaching was so watered-down that it was insulting to my intelligence. I went to one church where the message was on fear. I was eager to hear what the Bible had to say about a subject that described my state of mind.”

-Rainer, Thom S. (2009-08-01). *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Kindle Locations 644-649).

The people who want to find Christ and a church family want to hear the deeper issues of the Bible. They want to be challenged to learn more. The 353 “formerly unchurched” people were asked the following question: Was Doctrine (the Beliefs of the Church) an Important Factor in Your Choosing This Church?

- Yes -91%
- No -2%
- Uncertain -7%

We must be willing to preach and teach the deeper issues of our faith. They want to know what we know. They want to know the God Whom we know. Don’t fall for the myth that they are afraid of hearing challenging truths.

**Myth #5: The Sunday Morning Bible Classes and Other Small Groups Are Ineffective in Attracting the Unchurched.**

Going along with the last myth is another that states Sunday morning Bible classes and small group Bible studies are not effective in reaching out to the unchurched. We know that in the first-

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century the church was constantly studying the words of the apostles so as to be better and more fruitful Christians.

- 2 Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
- 1 Tim 4:13 Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching.

The 353 “formerly unchurched” people were asked the following question: In Which Small Group, If Any, Are You Active Today?  
Sunday Morning Bible Classes -68%  
Other Small Groups -17%  
No Response -13%  
None -2%

85% of the new converts in growing churches were drawn in through participation in extra Bible classes outside of the regular worship service. We must not fall for the myth that the unchurched does not care about what the Book of Life. They love it if you give them a chance.

### Conclusion

There are many myths that we must be careful about becoming our stumbling blocks to reaching out to the lost. We simply need to be doing what God has always instructed us to do. He knows the human heart and mind. He knows what we need and has provided it through Jesus Christ and His word. In the next lesson we will be covering some of the stumbling blocks that we are laying in the path of the unchurched.