

The Most Tragic Response: “I wouldn’t change a thing!”

Earlier this month, I was having a discussion with some Christian friends. One of them seemed very concerned about the fact a close relative of his wife was dying from a terrible disease and there was no hope of recovery. The relative lived several states away. He only has a few weeks, if not days, to live. And what troubled my friend the most was something that he and his wife strongly suspected. They were deeply concerned by the prospect that this man was not saved. So they got in their car and they made a considerable journey to where their relative lived in the hope of sharing with him the fact that Jesus loves him and is his only hope for salvation. But toward the end of a rather long conversation about all of this, the sick man’s response was this: “If I had my life to live over, I wouldn’t change a thing.” My friend’s spirits just sank. Apparently, nothing he had said to this dying man had made any difference. How do you go about explaining to someone, particularly a dying person, the eminent danger that they are in if they have not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? My friend tried to explain to him about sin, about forgiveness, about the need to repent in order to have salvation. But he feared that none of these things had any real meaning to him. He seemed completely unaware as to what “sin” is. He didn’t seem to understand the need to be “forgiven” or what it means to “repent”. Or even to the extent that the concept of “repentance” was understandable, he believed that he had done nothing in his life that he needed to repent of. The idea of “salvation” was completely foreign to him. When asked if he felt that he was going to go to Heaven, it was as if the question had no meaning to him. His only response was, “I guess so.”

My friend was quite distressed by this—as he should be. None of his rather prolonged conversation with this man boded well for his eternal destiny. The moral choices that this man had made throughout his life manifested fairly clearly that he made them solely according to his personal desires, and he simply seemed amazed that his immoral choices would have any adverse effect on in the after-life. After all, he said, “God is supposed to be a loving God. If so, surely He’ll forgive me *if* I have done anything wrong.” It was the only statement that he made that even referenced any notion of forgiveness. What a tragedy that he had embraced such a wrong-headed notion about his standing before God and about his eternal destination.

And because of all of this, my friend felt like he had failed in trying to save his in-law. So how can we go about telling someone, in as simple terms as possible, why they need to live their life according to God’s will rather than one stained by their own immorality? What can we say in response

to someone whose life manifests all the wrong choices according God's Word, yet when they reflect upon their life, they say that they "wouldn't change a thing"?

Well there is a way that can be effective. I have mentioned a time or two in the past, but it bears repeating. It's the method Ray Comfort uses. But it's a method that we may want to add a few verses of Scripture to as part of our witness. But before getting into that, I must warn you that you cannot use any approach in sharing the Gospel in a confrontational way. Before you even start to witness to someone, open your Bible to 1st Peter 3:15, take a deep breath and repeat to yourself Peter's wise advice that we must always bear our witness to others "***with gentleness and respect***. . ." ¹ In this wicked, yet overly sensitive society in which we live, we must be careful not to come over as being judgmental. We are not trying to judge anyone, we are trying to give them the Good News that will save them.

Now, with that in mind, what is it that Ray Comfort does in the way of sharing the Good News? Well, he tries to get people to understand the need to change the way they live. He tries to help them understand that if they look back over their lives and think that they "wouldn't change a thing," then maybe they need to think again. And this is the way he does it. He randomly interviews people on the street and asks them if they think they will go to Heaven when they die. And they give that same answer that my friend's in-law gave: "Sure, I guess so." But Ray Comfort then engages in a short question-answer session that's designed to show them that our natural inclinations are to do things that are not pleasing to God—things that separate us from God. And if those things remain unchanged, they will end up living a life that bars them from entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

Most people, Christian or not, know the Ten Commandments—thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain. Thou shalt not lie or steal or murder or commit adultery, etc. So, when they tell Ray Comfort they believe they are headed to Heaven, he'll ask them if they believe that keeping the Ten Commandments is important if they want to go to Heaven. And they'll answer, "Yes, of course." So he'll ask, have you ever cursed using God's name? They'll answer, "Well, yes—every once in a while." "Have you ever stolen anything?" They say, "Well maybe something small, but that's all." "Have you ever lied about anything?" "Yes, but only little white lies." "Have you ever murdered anyone?" "Of course not!" they quickly state. But then he asks them if they are familiar with the fact that Jesus said even raising your voice in anger at someone is the same as committing murder. In fact, God's Word says if you hate someone, you are a murderer.² And he'll ask if they have ever experienced such anger or hatred, and most will admit that they have. "Have you ever committed adultery?" No, they'll say. "Well, what about viewing porn—have you ever done that?" Generally all males will admit to doing it at least once.

But then Comfort will point out that Jesus said that taking a lustful look at a woman is the same as adultery, because you are committing adultery in your heart.³

Having gone through this exercise, he then says, “Let me summarize what you just told me. Basically, you just admitted to being a foul-mouthed, lying, thieving, murderous adulterer. So, how is it that you expect to get into Heaven with that kind of resume?” What Ray Comfort is pointing out is that we have all sinned some pretty big sins in our lives.

Now this approach is a good starting point because it can help people to understand that they need to change the direction in their lives. They need to turn to God. They need to make a radical reversal in their way of thinking. That’s what “repenting” means—to change your way of thinking. But, don’t stop there. Rather, continue by discussing wage rates with them. In fact, any discussion about the need to come to God needs to go over the wage rates. But it’s not the wage rate in our worldly economy, it is the minimum wage that is the law in God’s spiritual economy. You can start by pointing out that in this life you get paid for the work you do. That’s only fair—right? You do work, you get paid for it. I think that everyone can understand that, and would agree with that. So after pointing out the quality and quantity of their life works (things like lying, murdering, committing adultery, etc.), you can proceed by quoting an appropriate verse from Paul in the Book of Romans: “The wages of sin is death.”

And if you tell them that “the wages of sin is death,” what does that mean? What are “wages”? They are the payment for what you deserve according to your work in this life. And when you break God’s Commandments, the Bible teaches that you deserve a very definite wage: Death. But, what “death” are we talking about here? Everybody dies a physical death—right? So how is the death of an unrepentant sinner any different from the death of a saint? Well, I didn’t quote Paul’s verse in full, and it is important to do so. If the verse only said that the “wages of sin is death,” then we’d all be in big trouble. But, the Good News that’s presented in that full verse says this: “For the wages of sin is death, but the GIFT of God is ETERNAL LIFE in CHRIST JESUS our LORD.” Romans 6:23 (NIV) Paul is talking about eternal life, and the death he is talking about is eternal as well. So the first part of this verse tells us that without Jesus Christ, we will get paid out just wages for the “works” that we have done. The wage rate is eternal death.

What’s “eternal death”? It’s another way of saying permanent separation from God for all eternity in a place called Hell. But then there’s that follow-up Good News: Despite our sins, Hell is not our only possible fate. Rather, a “gift” is available to us. What is a “gift”? Well, it’s something that is given to us freely, not because we deserve it, but because of the generosity of the Giver. But, the one

you might be witnessing to could be the suspicious type. ***“What is the catch?”*** they may be wondering. And they may be thinking, ***“Why would God offer such an amazing gift to me?”***

And so, there is another Bible verse to tell them about—the one found in ***John 3:16***, the one Tim Tebow used to have taped under his eyes during football games. ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”***

John 3:16 (NKJV) Now, we don’t want to confuse them with terms they do not know. We may be wondering what we are talking about when we say ***“eternal life”***. So what is it? It’s eternal life with God in the most wonderful place imaginable called Heaven. It is the capping of our salvation. ***It is the opposite of what our wages call for.*** It is the opposite of eternal death. It is the opposite of being permanently separated from God. So we need to inform them that they need to change if they want life over death. The only change that will do them any good is to have a change of heart—one that shows a true ***faith*** in Jesus Christ—i.e. they must ***believe*** in Him. And that’s where a lot of people get confused. They really don’t understand what it means ***“to believe in Jesus Christ.”*** In fact, there are a lot of Christians running around who say they “believe in Jesus,” but do not have a clue as to what that actually means.

Paul touches upon this when he says that this gift of life is from Christ our ***LORD***. To have faith in Jesus and to believe in Jesus means that you have made Him ***“LORD”***. The Greek word is ***kyrios***. It means ***master*** or ***owner***. It has its root in another Greek word meaning ***“supreme in authority,”*** i.e. someone who has taken ***control of your life.***⁴ If we allow Paul and John to speak together here, they give us the purest statements about the how’s and why’s of being saved. Paul tells us: “For ***by grace*** you have been saved ***through faith***. And this is not your own doing; it is the ***gift*** of God. . .” Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) Grace is the gift to us of ***something*** that is bound up in ***undeserved love***. And John tells us what that ***something*** is: “For God so loved the world” that He gave us the ***gift of His only Son*** to die on the cross.

Why did He have to die on the cross? Someone had to accept the wages that we deserve—those wages we so richly earned for all of our foul-mouthed, lying, thieving, murderous, adulterous activities, along with a billion other sinful acts. And without ***believing*** in Jesus Christ (making Him the ***Lord of their lives***), a huge pay check is awaiting those who do not believe in Jesus Christ because they have never truly made Him ***Lord of their lives***. They will cash that paycheck when they enter the Gates of Hell. And once you go in, there is no getting out—it is, indeed, eternal death.

Witnessing to people who say that they are completely satisfied with their lives and that there is absolutely nothing that they would change in their past—well, that is always a difficult person to witness

to. But once they begin to understand the kind of “*wage earner*” they really are, there is a chance that they will begin to see the light. But, in order to witness to them, you don’t need a stack of theological books or a bunch of theological terms. You need only one Book—God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. Focus on the basics. Share with them the Ten Commandments. Tell them what Paul says in Romans 6:23 and in Ephesians 2:8. Give them the Good News of John 3:16.

Now, having witnessed to someone in this way, what do you hope to see? A changed person—right? A person with a new heart, a new creation—right? And is that what always happens? Unfortunately, the answer is, “No.” We don’t always see that. And I know that that can be discouraging—just like it was so discouraging for my friend who witnessed to his terminally ill in-law. We like to see positive results—and the sooner the better. But quite often that is not the case. Do not be discouraged about that. We are evangelists—that means we spread the Good News of God’s Word. The person’s reaction to that Good News is dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit. It is dependent upon their reaction to the grace God extends to them. But just because you don’t always see the results right away, that doesn’t mean something good has not occurred. In closing, let me give you a modern day parable that relates to how this can work. Actually, it’s not really a parable because it’s a true story. But it’s moral works like a parable.

In his book, *The Fall of Fortresses*, Elmer Bendiner tells about a B-17 that was returning from a bombing mission over Nazi Germany near the end of World War II. The bomber was so shot-up that it barely made it back to the Allied airfield. After landing safely, the flight crew found 11 *unexploded* anti-aircraft shells that were actually lodged in the B-17’s fuel tank. That was amazing! How could the Germans hit the bomber 11 times—each one being a direct hit on the most explosive part of the plane (i.e. the fuel tank)—yet not a one of those shells exploded? Now occasionally, you might find one shell as being a dud, but 11 shells? The airmen were so puzzled that they investigated a little further and carefully dismantled each shell. To their surprise, none of the shells were armed with any explosive charge. All 11 were empty of any warhead whatsoever. But that was not the most surprising thing that they found. The most surprising thing was a scrap of paper found inside one of the shells. And scribbled on that paper was a little note written in Czechoslovakian. When they had it translated, this is what it said: “*This is all we can do for you now.*” Apparently, a Czech worker who had been forced to work in some Nazi munitions factory had sabotaged each of these 11 shells by deliberately leaving out the part that explodes. And this worker had written this message and slipped it into one of the shell casings.⁵ And after this worker did that, they may have well wondered why they even bothered taking the time, and the risk, to write that note. What good would sharing that message do when the chances of it ever

getting through to someone was so very slim? But, it was an important message. And it ended up being the message that told this B-17 crew what their salvation depended upon. Messages get through in the most unexpected ways—many times we are just not aware that it has happened.

And that is the way it is with us. There are risks in sharing the message of Jesus Christ in such a society as we live. While they won't lock you up for it yet, many will frown and ridicule you—call you a “religious nut” for doing so. And maybe the one you share God's Word with turns and says to you, “***I am perfectly fine with the way I've lived my life, I don't need your Christ.***” But, the seed was planted—you did that when you took the time to share God's Word. Even though the initial reaction may not sound positive—who knows, one day you might be walking the streets of gold, feel a tap on the shoulder and when you turn around that soul hands you a note: “Thank you. I was saved because of you.” And then you will realize, just how powerful the Holy Spirit is if you just share the Gospel with others.

Let us pray.

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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2018

¹ 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) “[In] your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect. . .”

² Matthew 5:21-22 (ESV) [Jesus said:] ²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” See: 1 John 3:15 (ESV) Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

³ Matthew 5:27-28 (NASB) [Jesus said:] ²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; ²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

⁴ James Strong, *Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary*, (Austin, TX: WORDsearch Corp., 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: “2962”.

⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, quoted in *Men of Integrity*, Vol. 3, no. 6, *Today's Best Illustrations – Volume 5*, (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1997), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: “MERCY”.