

## **OVERCOMING BARRIERS . . . SO THAT WE CAN REACH OTHERS**

### **Introduction:**

**There are many barriers to evangelism. *These barriers serve to keep--*** the Christians separated from the unsaved, and the unsaved separated from the Christian. Barriers are often equally difficult to cross from either side. These barriers are both spiritual and natural. (Consider I Cor. 9:22.) A barrier is anything in our lives or the life of the unsaved that hinders sharing the gospel.

**These barriers exist** on the part of the saved who should be reaching out into their circles of influence and on the part of the unsaved, who resist the message of the gospel. One of the great needs in evangelism is to understand barriers or hindrances that keep people from getting saved. The more barriers placed between a lost person and the gospel, the more difficult it is to get that person converted to Christ.

### **BARRIERS ARE ERECTED FROM BOTH SIDES:**

Barriers are like the fence around a prison, or some fence built to be a barrier. We all have seen security chain link fences around some fancy homes, or some business. Sometimes these can even be topped with three or four strands of barbed wire to keep intruders out or people in! Some churches have some “*symbolic chain link fences*” surrounding their churches making it very difficult for the unsaved to cross into the church or to become saved. These may be attitudes of heart, actions in life, words spoken or other things that exist unwittingly.

**Failure to recognize** the existence of barriers or to overcome them is devastating to the cause of evangelism. **If barriers are not removed, that can be removed**, it becomes very difficult to win the unsaved.

### **SPIRITUAL BARRIERS ARE from WITHOUT AND WITHIN:**

Some barriers grow out of the very nature of the gospel message. These barriers cannot be removed, they are spiritual in nature, and there is no way to remove them, *nor can we water down the message!*

#### ***The following are from without--***

**To some there is the barrier in the message of repentance.** The message of **repentance** is often a barrier to those who do not want to even recognize their own sinfulness. (Acts 2:38, 17:20, 20:20-21) The **desired sin** of the lost person may be involved in an act, place, or person, etc., and he does not want to face his sinful life-style. Salvation is inviting a person, the Lord Jesus Christ into their life. It is a matter of conversion, of turning from sin to Jesus, of repentance and faith in Christ. They may feel they can be saved and hold on to their sinful life-style for they do not want any change in their life.

**Another barrier is the message of the gospel is considered to be foolish** to some. (I Cor. 1:18, cf. Rom 1:14-16; I Tim. 1:15) Again this not a barrier that we can change, but we can be careful we don't have a poor presentation of the message that turns others off.

**Then the message of the gospel is an offense to many as they feel offended with the idea of being a sinner, lost, undone, or without hope, etc.** (Gal. 5:11; Eph. 2:1-3) I had an uncle who for years would say that he was not a heathen. He considered himself a good person, and humanly he was -- but say he was lost was more than he wanted to hear.

**Yet another barrier from without is the message that “works won’t do!” Many are offended because they feel their good works out weigh any sin their part.** (Eph. 2:8-9, Titus 3:5; I Cor. 1:18) The belief of many an unsaved person is to save himself, or perform many good works, so in his thinking the conditions of grace are a barrier to his salvation.

**For some the message is so foreign to them as it is not understood, and to many it just does not make sense.** (I Cor. 2:14; II Cor. 4:3-5) The conditions of salvation are often *misunderstood* and *undesired* by the lost person. (I Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 3:9-18) The unsaved would rather remain outside the walls of the church and go on in their natural life without the convicting presence of the people of God. Outside the church they are not faced by those truths that they do not understand.

**For some the message brings conviction they don’t want:** (Acts 24:25; 26:15-28) The barrier is sometimes from the conviction they experience by being in a church service, or in the presence of the people of God. They may sense impending judgment (II Cor. 2:15-16) that produces both fear and discomfort.

**Or their friends make fun of the fact they even listened to the message of the gospel.** Or they are about to receive Christ and some friend ridicules the whole idea, and asks them if they are going to get religion. Their ridicule turns the more recipient person away.

### ***The following are from within --***

**There is the barrier we erect from our mistaken idea of separation:** (II Cor. 6:14-17; John 15:18-25; I Jh. 2:15-17) Christians build the barriers from inside the church. We stay within our cloistered walls, therefore we do not have any friendships with the lost around us. We have only so much time and it is spent with our own family and the church family. Our very indifference becomes a wall we have constructed. Some construct the wall with the fear of being contaminated by the influences of the world. We would rather the unsaved come through the front door of the church, and respond to the gospel. We would feel more comfortable to just stay inside our Christian walls we have built, and not go out to the outsider. It is just too difficult to reach them where they live and how can I relate to them anyway?

Even though the Christian should be separated from sin and the influence of the ungodly, he must not erect a barrier between himself and the lost person through a separation that is not biblical. Reaching them is not a matter of trying to be *like the unsaved, and live like them... play music like them, go where they go.. etc.*, in fact we are to be so different that the difference is what draws them to want our Savior. (Consider: Titus 2:11-14; I Thess. 1:2-10; John 13:34, 35; II Cor. 5:17)

**There is the barrier we erect by our judgmental attitudes:** (Acts 10) Peter had many prejudices that kept him from wanting to go the Gentiles. We are prone to measure the unsaved by our list of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. (Sin is sin... but we may feel their sin is so obnoxious we stay away, or when around the lost they sense our judgmental

attitudes.) Our ideas in this may be a mixture of Biblical truth and tradition, or our prejudice. Non-Christians begin to sense our disapproval.

**Often the lost will even apologize for their conduct**, but such apologies are often not meant. In reality many resent having been censored. Instead of the Christian attracting the sinner to Christ, the Christian by his legalism has driven the sinner away. Peter had his own legalistic stand and desired to stay away from Gentiles! Remember the law brings conviction of sin, but the law never saves, and the law when wrongly presented, is a legalistic barrier to presenting the gospel. The law should be the schoolmaster (help us them see their sinfulness and lostness) to bring people to Christ. While on the one hand we must live a separated like, we must also remember where we came from, what we have been saved from and love the lost in the midst of the wickedness and sins of his life.

(Continued next week)