**Building Bridges In Evangelism**

**INTRODUCTION:**

A. One of the great things about Christianity is we serve a God who is in the business of bridge building:

1. Personally, when we were separated from God because of our sins, God took the initiative and built a bridge for us using a hammer and three nails! *(Passage)*
2. God continues to build bridges in our relationships with others as we follow His word *(Passage)*

B. As people of God, it makes sense then that we be in the bridge building business as well:

1. We can build bridges of healing by helping others lay aside past wrongs, feelings of resentment, prejudices, or pride so they can restore relationships that have been broken with others
2. We know can also build bridges of salvation by teaching and leading lost souls to the Lord:
3. But this bridge is not an easy bridge to build, is it? In fact, as hard as it is to heal broken relationships, it often seems harder to help people see their need to obey the gospel
4. In this lesson I’d like to look at three different groups of people, all of which we strive to help build bridges of salvation for, but we often meet roadblocks along the way. Why is this case? What can we do to better teach these individuals? What are some things we need to avoid?

**Building Bridges In Evangelism**

A. Building bridges for the lost who are un-churched:

1. We need to remember that every person deserves the chance to accept or reject the gospel:
   a. We know if we hold the gospel with partiality we’re sinning *(Jas 2:1)* and so we wouldn’t prevent anyone from obeying the gospel, but do we hesitate to teach them?
   b. Sometimes we justify this with the “casting my pearls before swine” reasoning *(Matt 7:6)*
      1) First, how do I know who is a hog or dog & who is someone that collects pearls?
      2) When you consider those in the first century the gospel reached, it becomes clear that we have to wait and see by their reception which category they fit into
   c. Remember, the power in reaching the lost is the gospel of Christ. It is not my spectacular ability to pick & choose who’d be fit for the kingdom and who is unfit *(Rom 1:16-17)*
2. When try to reach souls that are lost, we must begin where they are at: *(Acts 17:22-31)*
   a. Notice where Paul started... God made the world and everything in it. He took them from that point to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Why? They didn’t know about God!
   b. If trying to reach someone who doesn’t believe in God it doesn’t make sense to start with the concept of blood atonement and how Jesus is the Lamb of God. Won’t matter!
3. In building these bridges to those who are un-churched we must start with the greater need of salvation and work toward the more specific problems of their lives *(John 4:10, 16)*
   a. When dealing with the “un-churched” we often run across people who’s lives are a mess... we may feel inclined to try & fix the mess before we get to the heart of the problem
   b. Why didn’t Jesus point out this woman’s marriage situation from the start? While she was wrong for her marriage, that was a symptom of the spiritual void of a God-less life
   c. The many problems we see in people of our society are like this, they are often symptoms of a much deeper problem... Address that problem & the symptoms start healing!
   d. The first thing we need to do is get people to see their need for Jesus, see that sin has separated them from God, see the path for salvation, and then look at other stuff
4. Finally,

**B. Building bridges for those who are caught up in denominationalism:**

1. When trying to build a bridge to one caught up in denominationalism (or some other religious group than the body of Christ), it’s important to build from common ground! (Acts 17:22-23)
   a. Some Christians, when trying to teach someone, feel the necessity to immediately attack every difference that exists, often quickly moving from one disagreement to the next.
   b. Instead of starting off by condemning their idolatry, Paul starts out on common ground…
   c. Starting off on common ground isn’t just about making a disagreement more palatable, but it’s about establishing a strong foundation from which to teach a person.
   d. We think we differ a great amount with the religious community but there is common ground in such controversial subjects as salvation, authority, and grace.

2. One problem we face in reaching those in religious error is a language barrier: (Prov 16:20-24)
   a. When we talk about things such as obeying the gospel of Christ, faith and works, and baptism, we may be saying one thing while they’re hearing something different.
   b. Some things are completely foreign to them – They likely have never heard about the ways to establish authority – Direct command, approved example, necessary inference.
   c. On their side, we don’t necessarily know what all that they have been taught or the misconceptions that exist in their minds about what you believe or the truth itself.
   d. As you are trying to talk to your religious friends then we must not take for granted that they are on the same page as we are in the discussion. Ask questions & listen well.

3. Another thing we must keep remember is that we do not have to correct every single problem we see, but stay with the bigger issues: (Matthew 23:23-24)
   a. Admittedly, this passage has nothing to do with evangelism; however, it establishes the fact that there are issues that are “weightier matters of the law” & some that aren’t.
   b. Why are some “weightier” such as love, justice, and mercy? These are the foundational principles upon which everything else is built! This doesn’t mean the more specific things don’t matter, but they won’t matter if the weightier is being neglected!
   c. When trying to reach our religious friends there are a lot of issues that come up and it’s easy to get so bogged down discussing these we fail to teach the foundational things.
   d. Does it matter when one keeps the L.S. so long as their relationship with God isn’t right?

4. Another thing we must be careful about when attempting to build this bridge is that we don’t hide the truth and we don’t present the truth in an untactful manner: (Colossians 4:4-6)
   a. Be ready for the hard questions – Such as, “Do you think members of the Christ of Christ are the only ones going to Heaven?” or “Do you believe I am a Christian?”
   b. I have found that when someone asks this question they are often either done listening to me or they see they are wrong & they don’t want to admit it. We must be gracious!
   c. There is a right way & a wrong way to present the truth! Often the truth is painful & costly enough for them to accept, I don’t need to make it more abrasive by my approach!
   d. We must be careful as we present the truth that we don’t come across as self-righteous or a know-it-all, but that we show humility, a desire to learn, and an openness to them.

---

**C. Building bridges for those who are seeking to leave institutional churches:**
1. First of all, we need to understand why bridges need to be built – During the 1950’s and 1960’s there was a big division among churches of Christ over several issues:
   a. Some of the issues were whether or not churches could send money to support colleges, whether they could organize or support orphan homes, and whether or not it was right for churches to have common meals together as a work of the church.
   b. Some people were teaching that anything that is right for an individual to do, a church also has the right to. There was a failure to distinguish between God’s instructions for the church and it’s responsibilities and the individual and his responsibilities.
   c. There were very unchristian reactions – Name calling, resentment, & the call by some influential preachers to “blackball” those preachers who held a particular view.
   d. By the time all the dust settled there was clearly two different groups of churches... Those who are institutional and those who are non-institutional (like the church here).

2. Since this division, there has been a progressive digression further and further away from the Biblical pattern among many institutional churches, & this has disturbed many of their members!
   a. Whereas it started with supporting colleges, using organizations to carry out benevolent efforts, and church sponsored common meals... It did not end there.
   b. They have seen entertainment become a major focus of the church’s work & its worship, church sponsored exercise programs, coffee houses being built by churches, church sponsored carnivals and many other things that don’t fall in the Biblical pattern.
   c. There has been a change in doctrine... Some of the churches are embracing instrumental music in worship and are no longer teaching the necessity of baptism for salvation.
   d. This is the natural result of what was taught years ago... “Anything the individual is able to do, the church can do” Now some who have held this view see it’s problem!

3. As they are fighting battles over these issues, this provides a great opportunity for bridge building... But as with the other things we’ve looked at, this is not an easy bridge to build!
   a. When the division first occurred there were many hurt feelings & some wounds still hurt.
   b. There has been the years of practices and ideas that are ingrained in the minds of people.
   c. There are many misconceptions on both sides about what those on the other side believe.

4. One of the most important things needed for this bridge to be built is Christian attitudes!
   a. Remember, one of the biggest problems in the division were bad attitudes and personality problems... We must act and speak in with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-24)
   b. There must be no name calling, no ostracizing, no blackballing, and no resentment.
   c. Remember this change is a growth process. We cannot expect there to be complete agreement or total change overnight. So everyone must be patient with everyone.
   d. Part of a Christian attitude is not be content with division. As time has gone on many have become satisfied with the existence of two totally separate groups. This satisfaction would have never been tolerated by the Lord or Paul (John 17:21; I Cor 1:10-11)

5. Another big building block in this bridge is the maintaining of church autonomy: (I Peter 5:2)
   a. When the division happened, this NT pattern was ignored! There was too much collective organizing of churches and too much controlling by one church or man over what another church believed or practiced. How do you blackball & maintain autonomy?
   b. The bridge cannot be built by a churches coming together and determining what will be taught & practiced in some great effort to achieve unity – This is denominationalism!
   c. Any unity that sought must be unity between individual Christians... The restoration of fellowship between Christians which was lost with the division some 50 years ago.
6. Everyone must go back to the NT and maintain a strong respect for authority: *(Matt 7:21-23)*
   a. When the division occurred & since then there has been a departure from the NT pattern... and many of the newer generations simply have not been taught about authority.
   b. Until everyone decides to do follow the Bible pattern in everything, there will be no possibility of unity. Without this foundation, unity has no basis on which to stand!
   c. This presents a great challenge. We must not embrace any teaching or practice that doesn’t follow the NT pattern! When discussing this with a guy from the institutional side, he said, “If someone is wrong it is us, and if anyone needs to move it will be us”

7. Practically speaking, as we find people who are interested in moving back to the NT pattern, we need to lend them our support and our prayers *(2 Cor 13:11-14)*