

Like Your Sinful Neighbor

As we continue this series on our calling to be the light of the world and share the gospel in our neighborhood, we must remember these words from the Apostle Paul: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

With all the negativity in the media and the shifting public opinion on Christianity, it's understandable why many of us might feel increasingly ashamed, or at least timid.

As our culture grows increasingly secular and hostile to the core beliefs of the Bible, it's tempting to go into hiding and not be as bold. So, we must remind ourselves not to be ashamed of the gospel while also meditating on the power, promises, presence, provision, and protection of God as we evangelize!

But there is another statement from the Apostle Paul that is equally as important: “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Timothy 1:15).

What does this have to do with sharing the gospel with nonbelievers? I'm deeply persuaded that one of the reasons we aren't as effective as we could be in our witness is because we have forgotten who we are.

Yes, we need reminders to be bold. Yes, we should improve our apologetics so we can reason for and defend the Christian faith. But it's essential that, all the while, you acknowledge that **you are more like your non-Christian neighbor than unlike them.**

I don't know about you, but it's tempting to look down on an unbeliever with a self-righteous, condemning attitude. “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector” (Luke 18:11).

Even if we begin with compassion for the lost, our sinful, impatient hearts could quickly allow that to transform into condescending, haughty pity. At worst, it can morph into an adversarial attitude if and when conflict arises.

So, if you want to patiently and graciously share the Good News while incarnating the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, you have to admit that you are fundamentally more like your neighbor than unlike them.

Notice that Paul does not say, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and thankfully, I am not one of them!” No, quite the opposite—I must be the biggest and baddest of all of them!

Further, notice that Paul writes in the **present** tense. He doesn't say, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom **I used to be** the foremost.” Or, “God, I thank you that **I am no longer like** my neighbor.”

No, Paul understood that in the present moment, he was still more like the lost sinners

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around him than unlike them.

As you build relationships and witness with your non-Christian neighbors, do you have that same attitude of humility? Are you quick to confess what a mess you still are? Do you admit that you still have an impure heart, driven by a love of self, which causes you to think, speak, and act in harmful ways?

No one shows mercy better than a person who deeply understands their own need for mercy. If you begin to think of yourself as a grace graduate, you will not do well with your broken, lost neighbors.

Humility is what fuels effective evangelism in your neighborhood!

Discussion & Application Questions:

1. Why do you think it's difficult to believe that you are more like your non-Christian neighbor than unlike them? What kinds of patterns or behaviors are in your non-believing neighbor friends that make you feel better or more morally upright than them? In what specific ways are you looking down on them?
2. Why do you think Paul calls himself the "foremost of sinners" in his letter to Timothy? Is he exaggerating or being honest about his self-opinion? Why does his self-statement matter? How can we learn from it as we think about our own lives?
3. Why is it so important to have a proper view of ourselves as we think about communicating the gospel with others who don't believe? How quick are you to confess how sinful you still are? Are you willing to admit your faults and failures in a posture of humility to others in your life? How can an admonition of sinfulness on our part be an important part of sharing the gospel with others? Why would something like that matter in the context of a gospel conversation and presentation?
4. Do you have a proper understanding of your need for mercy from God? How does that proper understanding fuel humility in your life, and in turn fuel effective evangelism in your neighborhood?