

THE PARABLE OF THE MAN ON FIRE



Imagine a man and his wife settling in for a nice, quiet, evening of entertainment at their comfortable home in suburban America. After a sumptuous and gratifying meal, the couple moves to their living room to enjoy conversation before retiring to bed. Suddenly, they hear a commotion in their front yard. As they peer through the large framed window, they see a man completely engulfed in flames desperately running in circles on their lawn.

The scene is riveting and shocks the sensibilities of the couple: *they can hear the man's frantic cries, see the skin literally burning off his limbs, and can almost smell the charred and smoldering flesh.* Just as quickly as the burning man appeared, a neighbor dashes onto the scene, brutally tackling the human torch, shouting directives, and forcefully extinguishing the fire by beating the flames out with an old broom. Neither the man nor the woman makes the slightest effort to intervene or rescue the burning man. Nonetheless, this doesn't seem to hinder them from offering their opinions about the seemingly unorthodox methods used by their neighbor in his rescue campaign.

The man chimes up first, *"I wonder why our good neighbor would not use more tact in addressing the situation?"*

"Indeed, I believe you're right, dear, tackling someone already battling physical problems can only be seen as a liability and must be awfully painful," his wife replies.

"Hitting someone with an old broom is so rude and offensive, and certainly, there is no reason for him to shout so loudly!" he adds.

"I agree, it was almost barbaric the way he so violently attacked the flame," the wife said with a shudder.

Though they had never attempted to save a burning man, nor were they planning on searching for any burning men to save, they both confidently concluded that there were better methods to rescue men on fire than what they had witnessed. After their conversation, they finished enjoying their evening at home and went to bed.

THE APPLICATION

Who loved the burning man more, the self-absorbed couple who only watched the events from afar or the courageous neighbor who took action to put out the fire? The answer is obvious and plain, the neighbor who acted. *Love* is not good intentions, emotion, or an opinion, but *love* is good will in action; it wishes the highest good of others and does what is within its power to see they realize God's will.

Isn't it strange how individuals can assume they are more loving than others while their actions irrefutably demonstrate exactly the opposite? So it is when we come to the topic of Biblical evangelism. So many professing Christians today seldom witness and have rarely, if ever, stood in the public arena challenging sinners and pointing them to Jesus. Yet, they arrogantly and presumptuously assume they know more about evangelism than those who actually evangelize on a consistent and regular basis.

We often hear stinging criticism for our evangelistic efforts. Many accuse us of lacking love in our preaching, claiming we are too direct and too offensive. Generally, those who criticize maintain their concerns are rooted in love for the sinner. Yet, these same critics, if investigated on a day by day basis, rarely preach, even in the manner they promote as Biblical. In fact, in most cases, they have not even preached to the very sinners they claim motivated their criticism of our methods. This is religious hypocrisy in the extreme.

Before you censure others for using an old broom to put out hell-fire, perhaps you better leave the comfort of your own living room, sacrifice the warm company of your family, and actually blacken your hands while attempting to put out a real spiritual fire. Humble yourself and take a little advice from a seasoned open-air preacher: *allow your theories to be tested by real experience before*

you attempt to apply them to others. At the very least, it gives you some creditability. Otherwise, you probably don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about. If you don't actively evangelize you may not offend anyone. Many may approve of your Christianity. Sinners may applaud you as "real nice". However, don't be deceived, you don't love sinners, you love yourself.

The best way to learn about true, Biblical evangelism is to practice it.

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine..." -John 7:17