

Me...An Evangelist?

Part 3

Steve came for counseling at the request of his wife Ann. They have been married 15 years and have two children in elementary school. Two days ago, Steve shocked Ann with divorce papers and the announcement that he had been unhappy for years. Steve is a successful business owner, a good father, and a respected member of a local church. He teaches Sunday school and sings in the choir. He enters the first counseling session:

Steve: *"I have decided to get a divorce and there is no way you can talk me out of it. I am here simply to appease my wife. I know you're a Christian Counselor...I'm a Christian too. So I don't need you to quote a bunch of Scriptures about what I should or shouldn't do."*

Counselor: *"As a Christian, you already know what the Bible teaches about divorce...correct?"*

Steve: *"Correct."*

Counselor: *"Good. Then you already know that divorce is sin."*

Steve: *"According to some interpretations. I don't take every word 'literally.' I think there is room for current-day applications. The world isn't the way it was in biblical times."*

At this point in the session, I was prompted to remember Paul's writings to the church at Corinth:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).

I wondered about Steve's *true spiritual condition*. Praying silently I asked the Lord to open Steve's heart and to direct my intervention to the most basic need. Clearly, a debate over scriptural teachings on the sin of divorce would bear no fruit with Steve.

Counselor: *"You seem to have some very clear opinions regarding the Bible and I see no point in challenging them."*

Steve: *"Good!"*

Counselor: *"Tell me though, when did you come to know the Lord?"*

Steve: *"Come to know Him? I've always known Him! I was raised in the church and Sunday school and I still am very active. The fact that my marriage is not working out does not change that."*

Counselor: *"So if your life ended today, you are confident that you would go to Heaven?"*

Steve: *"Of course!"*

Counselor: *"Why?"*

Steve: *"Why? That's a stupid question! Because I have always been in church and I am a good person even if I don't stay married...that's why!"*

Counselor: *"So you would go to Heaven because you have faithfully attended church and because you are a good person."*

Steve: *"Yes. We all will get there one way or another."*

As the session advanced, the *spiritual assessment* grew even more dismal. One could assume that Steve's inability to see his sin and thwart his departure from the marriage was grounded in his acceptance of a *false gospel*. He rested in the incorrect theology that good people, church people, maybe all people, get to Heaven one way or another.

Just as in the case of a medical emergency, the counselor must triage and prioritize his/her treatment to the most serious condition presented. A doctor cannot treat a painful twisted ankle ahead of a heart attack that may be fatal. The Christian Counselor cannot address an incorrect perception of marriage when eternal security is at stake. And remember, the counselor may have only one opportunity to respond with the truth.

Counselor: "Steve if you were wrong about any of this, would you want someone to tell you?"

Steve: "Wrong about going to Heaven?"

Counselor: "Yes."

Steve: "Well of course I would."

Counselor: "Steve will you allow me to show you some important passages in the Bible that address this very issue?"

Steve: "You aren't going to show me a bunch of stuff about 'the sin of divorce' are you?"

Counselor: "No. You have made it clear that your mind is set on divorce. I can't persuade you otherwise. I simply want to show you what the Bible says about eternal life and spiritual security."

Steve: "Sure that sounds interesting. I enjoy discussing different views of eternity."

The *spiritual assessment* of Steve was crucial in the process of his recovery. As the Holy Spirit prompted me that Steve might not be a child of God and was in fact *perishing*, the focus and course of the first session changed. I was led to leave the marital issue for now, knowing that until there is a relationship with Christ, there can be no *godly sorrow* for error in the marriage, no *repentance*, and no *correction of sin* (2 Corinthians 7:10).

The Holy Spirit guided me to "*test the spirit*" (1 John 4:1) of Steve; to note "*the spirit of truth and the spirit of error*" (1 John 4:6) that was evident in his acceptance of a false gospel; and then allow God's Word to *discern the thoughts and intents of Steve's heart* (Hebrews 4:12).

Over the next few sessions, Steve heard the true and the complete Gospel of Jesus and accepted Christ as his Savior and Lord.

What about his marriage? As a born-again believer, the Scriptures relating to marriage have a whole new meaning for Steve. He has ruled out divorce as an option and is working, with his wife, toward a biblically sound and healthy marriage. Thankfully, we treated the heart ahead of the twisted ankle and the client was saved.