

Reason 1: Evangephobia

*But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardships,
do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

2 Timothy 4:5

A phobia is a fear and we all have fears; fear of heights, fear of public speaking, fear of spiders, fear of confined spaces, fear of going to the dentist, fear of being found out, fear of failure, to name a few. In observing the American church, I have discovered a fear that is running at epidemic proportions, the fear of evangelizing, or as I have come to call it, *evangephobia*. This fear has paralyzed the American church, making it one of the least effective at evangelizing of all the national churches in the world.

I find this both tragic and embarrassing. Every second of every day God is building His invisible, eternal church as He brings the world's lost men, women and children to Himself. The Christian church in many countries of the world is exploding with growth, and yet the American church, with the world's best-educated clergy, the world's most resources, and the world's most political freedom, declines. Why? The American church is afraid to share its faith, caught in a sweeping outbreak of evangephobia.

When questioned about their evangephobia, American Christians list many causes, but several are cited with great frequency. Some avoid evangelizing because they don't have the spiritual gift of evangelism, seeing this lack of gifting as a free pass when it comes to the responsibility of sharing the faith. It's interesting to note that the Great Commission doesn't come with a qualifier. Mathew 28:19 doesn't tell us to go into the

world and make disciples unless we don't have the gift of evangelism. Acts 1:8 doesn't carry a contingency that instructs us to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth unless, of course, we don't have the gift of evangelism.

Others have shied away from evangelizing because they don't want to offend people. Encouraging someone to embrace Christ and the Christian faith can be interpreted by the objects of our evangelism efforts as being arrogant, as if we are better or smarter than they. We've found it, they haven't; we've arrived at the spiritual pinnacle, they haven't; we have the eternal answer, they're drowning in questions; we're superior, they're inferior. Imagine someone with an eternal supply of bread refusing to share it with those who are starving for fear they might be offended.

Some wrap the fear of evangelizing around another fear, the fear of rejection. They are afraid that sharing their faith will peg them as Jesus freaks, religious fanatics, or bigoted fundamentalists. Therefore, faith for them will be a personal thing, a private experience between them and God, something that, if it's shared at all, will be shared in the safety of their church bodies with those that think and believe the way they do.

Many confess that their evangeophobia results from the fact that they just don't know how to share their faith, that they don't know how to tell someone about Jesus or how to guide someone toward receiving Christ should that someone express the desire to do so. It seems odd that so many of these same Christians can easily communicate their personal experiences at having read a great book, seen a great movie, dined at a great restaurant, or received great service from an auto mechanic. Recommendations and testimonies flow freely in regard to these everyday occurrences, yet when it comes to

sharing our personal experiences with our great Savior, we suddenly lose all ability to communicate.

Sharing the faith, or witnessing, is borne in personal testimony. Recommending a book, movie, restaurant or auto mechanic begins with our giving testimony to our personal experiences. We say that we found the book to be entertaining, educational or full of meaning. We report that the movie was hilarious or dramatic and know that others would love it as well. The food was delicious and well presented and so we rave about the dining experience. The mechanic did a great job in a timely manner at a reasonable price. We have benefited through these personal experiences so we urge others to benefit as well.

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Why is it that we give such effective testimony about so many things in our lives but go mute when it comes to giving testimony to the most important thing? Is it really that we don't know how, or is it that our faith is more intellectual than experiential so that we really don't have much of a testimony to share? What if we never read the book, never saw the movie, never ate the meal or never took our car to the auto mechanic? What kind of testimony could we give? Regardless of the causes, evangeophobia continues to spread through the American church, and we continue to keep the Good News to ourselves.

