

Antiques and the Great Commission

George Sturm

My mother was an antique collector. As I young boy I thought that was a pretty boring hobby. After all, what value did all that “old junk” have? I remember asking her how she could tell if something were an antique or not. Whether she was using an exact formula or not I don’t know, but she said, “When something turns 50 years old, it is considered an antique.”

A few years later she turned 50. So, to play a joke on her, I gave her a birthday card and inside was the following: “Congratulations Mom, you just became an antique!” Needless to say, I ran for my life that day!

This year I turned 50 and according to my mother’s formula, I’ve physically become an antique. However, I’m beginning to think that maybe I’m a “spiritual” antique in the eyes of some. You know, when people don’t take you seriously anymore because they think you are OLD-fashioned in your thinking and your convictions are from the OLD school.

Being labeled a “spiritual” antique should not surprise us since we know from the Scriptures “for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

In other words, if you believe in the sufficiency of the Word of God (and the emptiness of psychology) for a life of godliness, the Biblical role of men and women instead of following the “modern” way of the university sociologists, laying up treasures in heaven instead of on earth as Mat. 6:19-21 commands, raising your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord instead of leaving them unrestrained, being committed to the local church, modest dress and appearance for both men and women, etc., you will find out very quickly that many people (even in the assemblies) are not able to endure such sound doctrine. Because they have turned aside to fables (“modern” thinking), they label basic fundamental beliefs and those who believe in them as coming from the “antique shop,” that is, from the OLD school.

However, an area where some really believe that your convictions are “antiquated” is if you hold to the non-negotiable position that people everywhere need to hear the gospel in order to be saved. To say it from the opposite viewpoint, in our current “modern generation” with all of its “progressive thinking” there are more and more people who are no longer gripped by a burning conviction that men everywhere are lost without Christ.

This was illustrated quite vividly during a recent meeting in North America when a young man approached me during the fellowship time afterwards. I had just finished giving a message concerning the importance of faith in the work of world missions.

“Mr. Sturm, may I ask you a question about something you said?” he asked. “Certainly,” was my reply.

“During your message you mentioned that people without knowledge of the Savior are lost and need to hear the gospel in order to be saved. Do you really believe that?”

My answer was, “Yes, young man, I do.”

He retorted with, “What Scripture can you use to support your position?” I quoted what William MacDonald calls the “heartbeat of Christian missions,” that is, Romans 10:14-15, hoping this would be sufficient to satisfy his curiosity:

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How

beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Unfortunately it didn't satisfy him since his rebuttal was something like this: "I find it hard to believe that an all-loving God would condemn to Hell someone who was in complete ignorance of the gospel and never had the opportunity to hear it, especially if that person had responded to the witness of creation and believed there was a Creator. Don't you think God would look favorably upon that person and accept him into Heaven? You cited one verse, but can you cite others to support your position?"

At this point, I quickly woke up to the fact that this young man was dead serious with his questioning. After lifting up a quick prayer to the Lord, I answered, "Friend, the Bible has many verses I could cite. For example, 'He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life' (1 John 5:12). A person living in total ignorance of the gospel obviously does not have the Son, and hence does not have life. Likewise, a person who might have responded to creation light (although Romans 1 says that is uncommon), rejects evolutionary thought that he came from a monkey, believes there is a Creator, and attempts to live righteously, but knows nothing of the Savior, that person is still without the Son and hence without life."

Continuing, I added, "However, let us go deeper and simply ask ourselves this: if God could forgive, cleanse, and make fit for heaven a person through some other means besides faith in Christ (e.g. through God's compassion and mercy), then Christ surely died needlessly. If there was another way (besides the sending of His beloved Son to be crucified for our sins), it would have been much simpler for God to leave every soul in ignorance of the gospel and then save us through His mercy the moment a soul responded somehow to the witness of creation. However, the frank reality is that He spared not His Son. Why? Because there WAS no other way, and there IS no other way. People NEED to believe in Christ in order to be saved."

Having reached an impasse, my young inquirer thanked me for my time and simply stated, "I'm not convinced. But I will think about what you said."

Whether he thought about the issue anymore that night I do not know. Maybe he simply thought that I was pretty "old fashioned" in my thinking--an antique. But I do know that I have thought about it many, many times and I can't escape this question: why do we find a young person in the assemblies who does not have a conviction that people without Christ are lost? Excuse me, but to me, this old antique, this is simply Bible 101 in the school of Christ.

What is the answer? Maybe the elders of his assembly are not convinced themselves and, hence, are not lifting up the missionary calling as the most desirable way to consume one's life. Maybe academically people believe in the utter lostness of mankind, but practically another message is transmitted.

Too often young people from Christian homes are being taught the importance of the Great Career instead of that we are here to live for Christ and fulfill the Great Commission. Instead of being soldiers for Christ who live sacrificially and endure hardships for the cause of the gospel, too often young people are encouraged to chase after a college degree, a professional position, job security, pleasures, and the laying up of earthly treasures. More times than we would like to admit, the warning of 1 Tim 6:10 is not heeded and the love of money subtly takes precedence. In other words, our young people are often trained for the world and not for the cause of Christ, to seek after a life of ease and comfort instead of "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Perhaps it is as William MacDonald puts it: "We have become basically worldly in our outlook, and we are raising a generation of young folk who will give their finest talents to a

corporation but not to Christ. We train them to do for money what they will not do for the Master.”

Therefore, it is no mystery why more and more young people are not gripped by the burning conviction that men everywhere are lost without Christ, let alone why we see fewer and fewer giving themselves over for missionary work. To be consumed by such a conviction would dramatically alter one’s lifestyle, priorities, ambitions, and direction. For many this is too uncomfortable. Thus, the lost perish in droves because no one comes to tell them about Christ.

Some might consider the opinion of A. B. Simpson to be from the “antique shop.” However, his thoughts on this matter are worth noting:

The heathen pass out of wretched existence here, into a darker future beyond. Do you say you do not believe this--that God is too merciful to let them be lost, and that there must be some other way of hope of salvation for them? Beloved, this settled unbelief of God’s Word is probably the secret of most of our sinful neglect of the heathen world. We are pillowing our conscience on a lie. God has solemnly told us in His Word that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus. The tenderest voice that ever spake on earth declared, “Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” If God could have saved men in any easier way, He would never have given His Son to the horrors of Calvary.

Still another “antique,” Charles Spurgeon, when asked if he thought the heathen who had never heard the gospel would be saved, replied, “It is more of a question with me whether we, who have had the gospel and fail to give it to those who have it not, can be saved.”

Have you ever purchased furniture? Of course--we all have. My mother said although antique furniture was more expensive, it was much better quality and a better long-term investment. But alas, we often take the easy and quick road. How often are we tempted by the newspaper ads that go something like this: “A complete living room set for only \$500”? Unfortunately, after we get it home and use it for a few months we find that cheap pressed-board stuff really wasn’t worth the trouble.

It is the same way in the Christian life. Divine guidance is to believe what God has said about the lost and live your life fulfilling the Great Commission. If you do so, your service will be with quality and endurance and will be greatly rewarded.

However, if you choose the easy way, the path of the majority, you’ll find that your service for the Lord becomes like one of those modern glued sawdust pieces of furniture with a thin layer of cheap veneer. It is all beautiful in the beginning, but it won’t last in the light of eternity. It is wood, hay and stubble (1 Cor. 3:12).

Maybe this is the first time you have really understood in the depths of your soul that we, who have Christ, have a great responsibility toward the lost. They will never be saved unless one GOES to them (Mat. 28:19-20). There is no room for a compromise position.

What is your choice? Perhaps God is speaking to your heart today. If so, may you respond like another “antique” of old did:

Unable to bear the sight of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian people rejoicing in their own security, while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, I wandered out on the sands alone, in great spiritual agony; and there the Lord conquered my unbelief, and I surrendered myself for this service. - Hudson Taylor

“He conquered my unbelief.” Isn’t unbelief always the problem of man? Oftentimes unbelief doesn’t believe that tried and tested paths of discipleship are the best, but rather that they are old-fashioned. I recall the words of the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah: “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein” (Jer. 6:16).

God called upon His people to ask for the old paths (the “antique” road of sound doctrine and practice), to walk in them, and promised that therein they would find rest for their souls. However, their problem was unbelief for they said, “We will not walk therein.” Maybe to them the “old paths” were too old-fashioned, too hard, or too unpopular. But whatever the reason, due to their unbelief they chose an inferior path, the way of a fable (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

As we consider the claims of the Great Commission, may we allow Him to conquer our unbelief.

We have a blood-bought pardon;
'Twas purchased at infinite cost;
That pardon left undelivered
Leaves men eternally lost.
- G. Playfair