

Why Don't We Witness

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To witness means to show and/or to share what one has seen or experienced in a defined context. In Christian terms it means to testify through words and actions to the unique place that Jesus Christ holds in one's life and in the plan of God for the Universe.

It seems for some reason unknown to me that I have recently been placed in the company of a number of Christians who have presented me with a version of the following position as regards to witnessing - "I don't witness verbally, I just live my life (or let Christ live His life through me) and wait for others to see the difference in me and ask me why I am acting as I am." I call this the "walk-only" position on Christian witness. This is certainly not something new to me; I have heard it many times before. But at the moment I feel constrained to address it and to do so in the negative. As I do, please notice that for this segment I am speaking in the personal first person voice as I know, and want to stress, that this message applies to me as much as anyone.

Let's begin by acknowledging that the "walk-only" position certainly has some merit and appeal. It certainly is easier and less messy than trying to talk to people about Jesus. And it's not all wrong. In fact, to live the message of the gospel before the world is the ideal foundation for effective witnessing or sharing Christ. It might be the ideal, but it must be pointed out however that persons living very unChrist-like lives have often been used to bring others to Christ through their words alone. New believers who have not been instructed or taught in the Way are often very effective in leading others to the Lord because of their rampant enthusiasm apart from their shortcomings in terms of yet to be realized sanctification. This is in fact true in my personal experience. After meeting Jesus as a 35-year-old adult my joy and wonder at the experience led me to share it with anyone and everyone who would listen. Many believed and still today are on the narrow path because they did. Both they and I are eternally glad they overlooked the faults and sins of the messenger and listened to the message. And yet, I would never justify continued inconsistency as a way of life or effective witness. There is a measure of truth in the "walk only - no talk" position. (It is probably better than the opposite - the famous "talk only - don't walk" position preferred by most hypocrites.) The problem though, as I see, it is that it is at best ineffective and incomplete and at worst a cop-out.

My basis for this resistance to the "walk-only" position is three-fold.

First, I find that, in my personal experience, that those holding the "walk-only" position are not very effective witnesses. The truth is that when I have asked a number of those who have made the "walk-only" statement to me "How many people have you personally led to Christ?" the answer is universally "None" followed by a justifying statement. I don't mean to say that this would be universally true, but I do believe that it would commonly be true. Christian living is not intended to be passive but rather proactive.

Second, I find that living in the "walk-only" paradigm allows for a much lower level of accountability for our lives and actions. When for instance, we don't let our co-workers know that we are Christians verbally, we are less likely to have to react to their actions or our circumstances in a biblical way. It is much easier to justify being seen as non-judgmental when we establish no basis for making judgments. If we do establish a biblical basis for living and profess it for ourselves, we will be held to it or seen as hypocrites.

Finally, while I do not hold myself out to be an authority on the Bible or a biblical scholar in any formal sense, I can speak as one who has read and studied it seriously for over 27 years. I really don't know what level of credibility that this gains me but, for whatever it is worth, I am unable to find even one example of this position or practice that the Bible presents as a positive example or role model. I can't name even one man or woman in the entire Bible who took the position of just letting their lives show their commitment to God and were commended by God for it. If there are any they are surely vastly outnumbered by those who adopted a "walk and share why" position. This would be most obviously true of our New Testament models. Jesus is of course the primary example but surely Peter (Acts 4:20), Paul (II Timothy 4:2), and all the Apostles and lay heroes of the New Testament were men and women who both lived their faith and spoke openly about its focus on and in Jesus Christ. There is power in a godly person living a godly life, but the power is magnified when it is verbalized as well. Jesus said, *If I be lifted up I will draw all men to me*. One way to lift Him up is to speak of Him, His love for us, and our love for Him as we live for Him.

The biblical heroes were at least primarily, if not universally, men and women who both walked and talked and whose integrity of walk and talk made them powerful witnesses. It seems to me that the appropriate stance is not "either-or" in terms of effective witnessing but "both-and." That is not either walk *or* talk but walk *and* talk. The most effective witnessing is surely both, a congruence between what we say and what we do.

Enough of that for now. Let's move on to our major theme for today, *Why Don't We Witness?*

The question of why deals with motivations and motivation is what leads to actions or performance. If we assume, as is the position of this segment, that we don't witness, or at least don't witness as often as we should, we ought to ask ourselves two questions. The first question is the assertion true? And the second, if it is true, why is it so.

Concerning the first it is highly doubtful that one person in a thousand would say that they witness as much as *they* believe that they should or take every opportunity that is presented. I know that personally I have never met anyone who said they did. There may be some but I have never encountered them. And I know that I don't witness as well or as often as I should, probably missing more chances than I take. No, not probably, saying that just makes me look better. Certainly is the better word. Certainly I miss many more than I take. How about you?

And yet, when questioned regarding the value of and need for the atoning work of Jesus in the lives of the lost the universal response among we believers is unquestionably forthright. We say the lost must be saved and salvation comes only through Christ. The destiny of those who refuse to be saved in Christ is eternal damnation in hell, and to experience hell is the worst possible outcome of life that any individual can experience. Intellectually we agree with this truth, but do we really believe it? If we really believe it how can we not see that to share Jesus with others in the highest gift that we can give them? If we care for them at all, even a tiny bit, how can we possibly leave to chance their opportunity to hear the good news if we have any opportunity to do otherwise? Do we really believe in the horror of hell? Do we really care that others will go there? Or are we just satisfied to know that we won't and let it go at that?

And, if we understand the biblical imperative is to *go into all of the world and make disciples*, and that all of the world includes everywhere we go, why do we hesitate most in those parts of the world that we have the greatest access to; our work and our family including our neighbourhood? Surely we spend the greatest part of our lives among them and have the greatest opportunity for witness within the relationships they comprise. If there is any opportunity, or any consequent responsibility, it must apply to and manifest in these areas. *Why do we hesitate?*

I'm sure there may be other reasons but let's consider the following.

Behavioural psychologists tell us that there are only two primary and dominant motivational factors at play in our lives; the fear of loss and the hope of reward. Each can be equally powerful and operate at different times and in different situations. Let's look at each in terms of our context.

First, the fear of loss. I suspect that this may be the primary culprit that inhibits our open witness for Christ in both areas. These people represent those closest to us and also those whose approval or rejection will most possibly influence or affect us. We fear rejection by them for being classified as "different" "odd" or "radical." The desire to be popular and loved is bred into our lives and culture and to be seen as an unpopular figure, radical or different, would be hard to accept, maybe unacceptable. We fear that our family or our friends will resist our testimony and reject us. We fear the loss of their love and approval. Sometimes we fear that more than we fear their eternal damnation.

In our business we fear being seen as different or radical, which means the same thing, as well. We fear rejection here also. But that is not our real fear. Our real fear is that being seen as different will cause people to reject us, and because of their rejection they will stop doing business with us. Rejection personally we might be willing to accept as it moves further away from hearth and home, but the loss of the perks and goodies that our business provides us and our families, our reputation and stature in the community, the loss of those things we can't accept.

We fear the loss of temporal things and relationships and that inhibits our willingness to witness.

In terms of the hope of reward, we give lip service to the promise of eternal rewards that are based on faithful obedience and service, our "works" done as Christians in obedience to the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians 3:11-15) We acknowledge that we are Ambassadors for Christ intellectually but not deeply enough to allow the recognition of eternal truth to overcome our fear of temporal loss. We gamble that our temporal compromises will not cause us to suffer too great an eternal loss. We don't really fear the loss of eternal rewards because we can't have them or number them *right now*. We really don't know exactly what they will be or exactly when we will get them so we count them as nothing much. Our ability to accept delayed gratification is too low, too influenced by the world, and so we trade what we can have now for what we might have later regardless of the exchange rate.

We don't witness because we believe that the possible loss of the benefit of temporal things will be greater than the possible benefit or gain in eternal rewards. Our motivation is stronger to gain or not lose now than it is to do so in eternity.

All of this speaks of a temporal mindset or life-view. A temporal life-view is anathema to a successful Christian life. In order to succeed as Christians we must develop and maintain an eternal life-view. This world and all of its treasures will burn up one day and disappear forever. All that we accomplish or accumulate here will lose its value to us the moment we draw our last gasp of the atmosphere surrounding this sin-scarred planet. And when we wake up in heaven only those things that we have done that have eternal value will be of any significance to us. And let's be clear - all those things that we will carry with us into eternity will be the result of our witness. The only reason that we have been left here after salvation is to be a visible witness to God's love and redemption to the world. Our lives are meant to be His living message, a living, breathing, speaking gospel. We are not here for any other reason. Not to be purified, not to enjoy temporary and temporal pleasures, not to perform well and earn more of God's love, not as a punishment for our sins, and not for any other reason. We are left here after salvation to serve as God's chosen people, royal priests, ambassadors, and witnesses to the lost. We are not called and left here to merely survive among the heathen and escape beaten and bloodied into heaven by the skin of our teeth. We are called to be lights shining in the darkness; lamps set on a hill. We are called to live among the lost as guides and way-tellers. And the idea that this is to be done in small enclaves huddled together on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights with just one holy man in charge of it all is absurd. It is to be done by each of us, all day, every day, everywhere we go. It is 24/7 and nothing else is ever contemplated in God's plan.

So, *Why Don't We Witness?*

The sad truth is that we do. We witness 24/7 whether we choose to call it that or not. We witness constantly through what we say and what we do. Everything we say or do tells others who are always watching and see us something about us and what we hold as important. The question is not *will* we witness it is *to what?*

The fact is that the *to what* is a choice, a choice we make that is based on what we really believe. If we don't tell others about Christ it is because we really don't believe that it is important that we do, at least not as important as whatever we talk to them about instead.

Is this word too hard? It probably is. I'm not very happy with myself right now, I've copped out too much and too often. I'm embarrassed to be so worldly, so scared of rejection, so desirous of the approval of men, so clingy to the shiny toys of this life. So if I have said "we" and it doesn't apply to you, forgive me and pray for me. What can you pray? Pray for this, that I will walk in the light that I have and stop asking God for more light - when what I really mean is to give me an easier, safer, less risky way. I really know better. What about you? Anything here?