

1. Why Witness? (3Q 2020—Making Friends for God)

Biblical Material: James 5:19, 20; Luke 15:6; Zeph. 3:17; John 7:37, 38; 1 Tim. 2:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15.

Quotes

- Your faith will begin to grow as you witness to others about what the Lord has done in your life, and what you believe can be done because the Bible says so. *Benson Andrew Idahosa*
- We shouldn't be a false witness of the truth. *Peter Nii Korley*
- Yes, let God be the Judge. Your job today is to be a witness. *Warren Wiersbe*
- If you don't know what you're living for, you haven't yet lived. *Rabbi Noah Weinberg*
- I strongly believe that missionaries make better products. They care more. For a missionary, it's not just about the business. There has to be a business, and the business has to make sense, but that's not why you do it. You do it because you have something meaningful that motivates you. *Jeff Bezos*
- If God's love is for anybody anywhere, it's for everybody everywhere. *Edward Lawlor*
- We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God. *John Stott*

Questions

How important is our concept of God to our witnessing? What happens if we have a flawed picture of God? What does God's desire to save us nature say about the kind of Being he is? What implications does this understanding have on how we live and what we do? How do these ideas fit into our usual methods of witnessing?

Bible summary

"My friends, if any one of you strays from the truth and someone brings you back, let them know that whoever rescues a sinner from the error of their ways will save them from death, and will gain forgiveness for many sins" James 5:19, 20 FBV. There is rejoicing over lost sheep that are found (Luke 15:6). The Lord God saves and delights in you (Zeph. 3:17). Jesus calls on those who are thirst to come to him for living water (John 7:37, 38). God wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3, 4). Christ's love compels us (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

Comment

All too often the answer to the question "why witness?" is "because I know I should." But if the Lord is our closest friend and Savior then he should be always on our mind, and sharing about his love and wonderful character just comes naturally. A forced witness always sounds hollow and can turn people away. If we're witnessing because we're told to, or we feel it's a requirement that's demanded, then it will be far from helpful and genuine.

In all our attempts at witnessing we always need to reference our thoughts back to God and our concepts about him. Otherwise we can easily be false representatives of a mistaken or perverted view of God and his methods. (Reference for example Saul before he became Paul—committed to destroying people and their beliefs because of his own preconceptions of God and what God would want). Conversions at the point of a sword or under threat of torture are hardly

the way we would ever envision spreading the message of Jesus, but how often has this happened in the long history of Christianity and its representatives?

While we may cringe at such poor representations of God and his message of loving salvation, isn't it still quite common to misuse church power and believe we are acting for God? Jesus' comment to his disciples was that "You know that foreign rulers lord it over their subjects, and powerful leaders oppress them. It shall not be like that for you." Matt. 20:25, 26 FBV. Yet all too often church authorities ignore these words of Jesus and act like tyrants, abusing the power they have assumed among God's people.

No. Jesus' command was to make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:20). The idea of "name" in Scripture is associated with character—so we are to make disciples following the character of God! How could we ever be true missionaries for Jesus if we deny his very nature and methods? God shows us his unconditional love for all his created beings—how can we act otherwise? It was and is God's desire to bring back those who rebel against him, those who are "enemies and strangers" who need to be won back to love and trust. This is where we too should begin: our basis for witnessing is not compulsion, or duty, or requirement—it is love for those who are lost, following the principles of a God who is love incarnate—literally! If we begin at any other place our attempts at witnessing will be flawed and twisted, and out of harmony with God's will and character.

Ellen White comments

If you truly belong to Christ, you will have opportunities for witnessing for Him. {AH 519.2}

In our life here, earthly, sin-restricted though it is, the greatest joy and the highest education are in service. And in the future state, untrammelled by the limitations of sinful humanity, it is in service that our greatest joy and our highest education will be found—witnessing, and ever as we witness learning anew "the riches of the glory of this mystery;" "which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27. 102 {CSA 67.3}

God has given us the gift of speech that we may recite to others His dealing with us, that His love and compassion may touch other hearts, and that praise may arise from other souls also to Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. The Lord has said, "Ye are My witnesses." Isaiah 43:10. But all who are called to be witnesses for Christ must learn of Him, that they may be efficient witnesses. As children of the heavenly King, they should educate themselves to bear testimony in a clear, distinct voice and in such a manner that no one may receive the impression that they are reluctant to tell of the mercies of the Lord. {CT 243.1}

They bore witness to the power of One mightier than Satan. . . . Through trial and persecution the glory—the character—of God is revealed in His chosen ones. The believers in Christ, hated and persecuted by the world, are educated and disciplined in the school of Christ.. {OFC 311.4}

Jesus came into the world to illustrate the character of God in His own life, and He swept back the misrepresentations that Satan had originated, and revealed the glory of God. It was only by living among men that He could reveal the mercy, compassion, and love of His heavenly Father; for it was only by actions of benevolence that He could set forth the grace of God. The unbelief of men was deep seated, and yet they could not resist the testimony of His God-like example, and His deeds of love and truth. {SD 139.3}