

TAKE THE STAND PLEASE

At the most basic level, to be a witness is to stand for the truth. We do this not only with what we say but also by our lifestyle.

In a recent missions conference, I heard a veteran servant of the Lord suggest that American churches should do what the missionaries did on his particular field. He said that they refuse to accept a new convert into the church until he...

- publicly confesses his faith,
- is baptized,
- gives evidence of a godly life,
- supports the Lord's work, and
- actively witnesses to others.

I have the idea that if we were to follow this procedure, it would drastically reduce our church rolls! Some Christians might qualify in two or three areas, but not all of them. Many would be eliminated by the last requirement, *witnessing*, which is the topic of this article.

EVERY BELIEVER A WITNESS

To begin, let me establish the broad premise that every Christian is to give testimony of his faith in Christ. The New Testament puts every professing believer on the witness stand. No one can avoid it.

With the wide acceptance of the "live and let live" philosophy the world just can't understand why Christians witness. They think we are trying to "push" our faith on others, and they maintain we have no right to do so.

Not all religions call upon their adherents to propagate their beliefs. A basic tenet of Christianity, however, is the call to give a firm, loyal testimony to the person of Christ and His power to transform lives.

A TRUE WITNESS

Before considering the true nature of witnessing, let's look at some of the common false notions about it

1. **Witnessing is not always a verbal explanation of the gospel, nor is it necessarily a confrontation with unbelievers.** It is far more complex and compelling, for it centers on the person of Christ. True, witnessing may result in telling what

we know about Christ, but that is not all there is to it.

2, **Witnessing is not simply soul-winning.** One result of a consistent, Christlike life will be the opportunity to speak to people about their inner needs. To see soul-winning as the climax of witnessing, however, is to miss the purpose of the witness - to speak out for the truth whatever the cost. Our commitment to the truth makes us a witness, not our ranking as a soul-winner.

3. **Witnessing is not a gift.** When we look at Christians who have great ability, tact, and talent for speaking, we may have the idea that they have been given something special for witnessing. Even though some can articulate their beliefs better than others, without exception we are all witnesses. Sweet winsomeness and quiet consistency are just as important as boldness and zeal. The New Testament does not recognize witnessing as a gift for the few but a command for all to obey.

What, then, is at the heart of witnessing? The pattern is set by the injunction of Acts 1:8, “Ye shall be *witnesses* unto Me.” This identifies us with the Savior on one hand and the lost on the other. We take our place within the structure of society; we are not isolated from it. All methods of witnessing are necessary (verbal and written, individual and corporate, direct and indirect), and all are to focus upon Christ.

The word “witness” is derived from the Greek word from which we get our English word “martyr.” This again reminds us that to witness is to take a firm, uncompromising stand for the truth. Furthermore, a martyr stands firm even unto death. His oath to tell nothing but the truth puts him into opposition with all that is false.

Christians, therefore, are not only to affirm the truth, they are to identify the false. Our failure to do so has no doubt contributed to the success of the cults. Part of our witness involves “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), “walking in truth” (3 John 4), and “obeying the truth” (1 Peter 1:22). But we must also stand against false prophets, spirits, and teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; Jude 4).

A WORTHY WITNESS

The value of our witness falls into three areas:

1. **Our witness is personal.** The individual believer is to bring his personal testimony for Christ into his daily life. What he does is to match what he says in all his relationships.
2. **Our witness is productive.** In one sense, our witness verifies our union with Christ. In another sense, it becomes a source of blessing and encouragement to fellow believers. Our witness joins with that of others to produce a combined effect. No one does the whole task of witnessing. One testimony may be personalized by another, verified by another, and complemented by still another. Collectively, they bring the weight of conviction to the one who needs Christ. All of this is guided and used by the Holy Spirit of truth - the great and true Convincer.
3. **Our witness is persuasive.** It has an impact for good or ill. The sum total of our words, deeds, responses, lifestyle, demeanor, and attitude either supports the gospel or negates its effect. To profess Christ and not follow Him in life is to become a false witness.

John wrote, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4). May this first-century testimony be the goal and guide of our 20th-century witness!

by Jerry A. Paulson