

STUDY ONE: THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF WITNESS AND EVANGELISM

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A. YOUR PERSONAL ATTITUDE TO 'WITNESSING' AND EVANGELISM

Complete Section #1 in the Study One Worksheet now

A.1 Quote from Dick Innes

'I had a big problem and needed to tell God about it.

"God," I nervously prayed, "I know that as a Christian and especially as a Christian minister I'm supposed to be doing a lot of witnessing for you. I know that I should be sharing your plan of salvation more than I am. Furthermore, it's my job. But, God, I'm sick to death of witnessing for you out of a sense of duty and trying to tell others about you because that's what I'm supposed to do. In spite of all my years of training and experience, I am as frightened as ever to witness. I have never found it easy. I hate witnessing and I'm quitting! I absolutely refuse to keep playing this game any longer. I'm afraid I'm finished."

'I waited for the lightening to strike – but nothing happened. I'm not a mystic. I'd never seen any great visions or heard God speak to me in any dramatic ways before, but that morning I felt I heard God speak to me. Deep inside I heard His still small voice, "Amen, Dick, I hate the way you witness too."

'The kind of witnessing I hated was sharing the gospel more out of a sense of guilt and compulsion rather than out of a sense of freedom and liberty. It's that little voice inside your head that keeps on saying, "You've got to do it!" and when you do, you're so uptight you feel you'd burst if somebody stuck a pin in you.

'It's like the minister who said: "I feel guilty when I don't witness to my neighbours. And I feel guilty when I do because I make such a botch of it.'" [P6,7 *I Hate Witnessing*]

A.2 Quotes from Rebecca Pippert

'Christians and non-Christians have something in common: We're both uptight about evangelism. Our fear as Christians seems to be: "How many people did I offend this week?" ... a tension builds inside: Should I be sensitive to people and forget about evangelism, or should I blast them with the gospel and forget about their dignity as human beings? Many Christians choose to be aware of the person but then feel defensive and guilty for not evangelizing ...

'I wanted my friends to know God. But every time I got up courage to be vocal about Jesus, an image leaped into my mind of an aggressive Christian buttonholing an unwitting victim. As a nonbeliever, I had thought many Christians were weird, spreading leaflets on street corners and nabbing strangers. I was terrified that if I said anything at all about Christ, my friends would consider me just as strange. ... There was a part of me that secretly felt evangelism was something you shouldn't do to your dog, let alone a friend...

'I would put off witnessing as long as possible. Whenever the guilt became too great to bear, I would overpower the nearest unsuspecting sceptic with a non-stop running monolog and then dash away thinking, "Whew! Well, I did it. It's spring and hopefully the guilt won't overcome me again till Christmas." And I'm sure my sceptic friends hoped the same!)

'I witnessed like a Pavlovian dog. The bell would ring, I would get ready, activated, juices running and then BAM! I'd spit it out.' [p 11-12 *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World*]

Discuss these two sets of quotes.

Have you ever felt like this?

How do these quotes impact you?

B. JUST WHAT IS WITNESSING?

Complete Section #2 in the Study One Worksheet now.

B.1 What does the Bible mean by the word 'witness'?

If we check through the Biblical words for witnessing we find that they are related to the Greek word *martureo*. This word and its relatives are translated by a variety of English words:

witness	testimony
testify	record
report	evidence
attest	attestation.

If we look at these words in their Biblical context we find that they are used in the following ways:

[1] I witness (that is, I perceive, see, know) who Jesus is and what Jesus did.

Here, **witness is the act of perception or observation.**

[2] Because I have perceived, seen and observed who Jesus is and what he has done, I am a witness. Whether I open my mouth or not, I am a witness. I have seen and I know who Jesus is and what he has done.

Here, **witness is an inescapable fact: if I have seen Jesus Christ then I am a witness.**

(For the original disciples this was both a physical and a spiritual seeing; for us it is only a spiritual seeing. This difference is insignificant, for there were many who saw him physically who did not see him spiritually).

[3] I have the evidence - it is in my knowledge. The total content of my knowledge of Jesus Christ is my witness about him.

Here **witness is knowledge.**

[4] I witness, that is, I talk about what I know and what I have seen of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here, **witness is verbal communication.**

[5] People, and God, have a witness about me; they have observed me and formed conclusions about me.

Here, **witness is reputation.**

However, in its use in the church today our understanding of the word 'witness' is almost exclusively seen as something that we must do, before we can consider ourselves 'witnesses'. In other words, we are witnesses because we engage in the act of witnessing, that is, of verbally communicating our knowledge of Christ [meaning #4 above]. The Bible understands it the other way around: because we are already witnesses we witness. Jesus Christ, in Matthew 5:13-16, put it this way:

You are the salt of the earth so be salty.

You are the light of the world so shine.

Every Christian is essentially a witness, because every Christian has seen and known Jesus Christ. If we have not seen him, if we do not know him, then we are not Christian believers. Christians know the truth about who Jesus is and what Jesus did. That knowledge makes us witnesses.

B.2 What does the Bible mean by the word 'evangelism'?

The words 'evangelism' and 'evangelize' derive from the Greek *euangelion* which simply means 'good message'. To evangelize, to participate in evangelism, is to tell the good news.

Complete Section #3 in the Study One Worksheet now

B.3 Definitions of evangelism

Quotes from Michael Green:

'It is a matter of the Christian community sharing good news of a Saviour with those who do not know him.'

'... evangelism is not the same as mission. Mission is a much broader term than evangelism. It speaks of the total impact of the church on society, while evangelism is more restricted, the passing on of the good news.'

'... evangelism is bringing someone face to face with this person. It cannot be done by a system.'

'Evangelism is sharing the good news of what God has done for us all.'

'Evangelism is not finding pew fodder.'

'Evangelism is not man-made propaganda. God is involved in it. ... Evangelism is the outworking of the love of God in a fallen world. It is no man-made opiate.'

'... evangelism is neither Christian proclamation alone nor Christian presence alone. It is both.'

[p14-15 *Evangelism – Now and Then*]

Quote from John Chapman:

'When I use the term 'evangelism' I am talking about the process whereby a person tells other people the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with a view to persuading them to put their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Whether that telling is a simple chat over coffee or preaching to a hundred thousand makes no difference. Methods vary with people's abilities to use them'.

[p14 *Know and Tell the Gospel*]