

STUDY SIX: BIBLICAL CONSTRAINTS IN WITNESSING

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We can observe today in some of our churches an attitude and approach to witnessing which is noticeably different from the attitude and approach of Jesus Christ.

A. QUANTITY OR QUALITY?

Jesus Christ was not motivated by statistics. John 2:23 tells us that many people 'believed in his name' when they saw the miracles that he did. Verses 24 and 25 tell us that Jesus did not believe in them because he knew what was in their hearts. Here are a large number of people who, to human observation, have all the appearance of wanting to follow Jesus; they are described as 'believing' in Jesus, yet Jesus does not acknowledge them.

When, some time later, offended by his strong teaching, 'many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him' he even offered the remaining twelve the chance to go as well. (John 6:66,67)

Had Jesus modified and moderated his teaching he would have gained and maintained many more followers, but he knew that the strength of his church is not in the number of his followers, but in the integrity and purity of the message it proclaims. Truth can never be truncated and remain truth. Truth can never be minimised and retain its promised power. The moment truth is reduced it ceases to deliver its intended results.

Too often the focus on statistics, both in terms of numbers 'converted', and of numerical growth of the church, has dictated the content of the message proclaimed and the methods used. This jettisoning of quality for quantity is outlawed by the example and teaching of Jesus Christ and his disciples.

Biblical constraint #1: The Christian witness must never minimize the truth of the Gospel in order to maximize the number of 'converts'.

B. HONEST EVANGELISM

There were those who came to Jesus offering to follow him. Today's personal evangelists or witnesses would be over-joyed at such contacts. Not so Jesus. He did not sit them down on the nearest seat and get them to pray the sinner's prayer; he did not even express appreciation that they had come to him. Rather he made it plain, honestly plain, just what was involved in following him; so honest, so plain, that they no longer wanted to do it. So be it. Honest evangelism makes for honest followers. (Matthew 8:18-22; Luke 18:18-22)

Biblical constraint #2: the Christian witness must never imply that being a Christian is easy. Rather he/she must indicate that it involves a life of submission and obedience to Jesus Christ.

C. SAVIOUR OR LORD?

Jesus never allowed people to believe that they could come to him just to 'get saved.' This is what the rich young ruler (Luke 18) wanted to do. What Jesus demanded of people was acknowledgement of him as the Son of God, the Lord (John 8:24), and only consequent to such acknowledgement, did he promise eternal life. It is instructive that Zacchaeus, whose on-going desire was to find out 'who Jesus was' (Luke 19:3), obtained the salvation which the rich ruler sought and missed. Zacchaeus, finding out who Jesus was as he talked with him over dinner, spontaneously submitted to his authority, a thing the rich ruler was commanded, but refused, to do.

It is only to those who believe in him or in his name that Jesus promises eternal life (John 1:12; 3:15,16,18,36). Condemnation and wrath remain for those who refuse to acknowledge the Son of God (John 3:18,36).

Biblical constraint #3: the Christian witness, if he is true to his Lord, will present Jesus first as the Son of God, the Lord, challenging his contact to believe in him as such, and only on the basis of this belief and acknowledgement introduce Jesus as also the Saviour who died on the cross for our forgiveness.

D. LEAVING ROOM FOR THE SPIRIT

Jesus Christ had no doubt that it was impossible for anyone to come to him unless God moved and empowered that person.

'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...' (John 6:44)

Jesus Christ had no doubt that no one can know the Father unless the Son reveals the Father to him/her:

'No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matthew 11:27).

Jesus Christ had no doubt that if anyone enters into the kingdom of God it is because of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit:

'No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.' (John 3:5)

Clearly to Jesus the work of conversion is the work of the triune God: Father, Son and Spirit. Clearly to Jesus conversion is **not** the work of the human witness; and clearly to Jesus it is **not** the work of the convert.

Biblical constraint #4: The Christian witness is not the agent of conversion: he/she is the communicator of the truth about Jesus Christ. For this reason the witness must never see the conversion of the 'sinner' as his/her responsibility.

E. TIMES TO BE SILENT

1] There were occasions on which Jesus specifically directed people not to talk about him. It would seem that his purpose in this was to prevent people from believing in him and following him for the wrong reason. In most instances this wrong reason involved salvation from personal or national physical, temporal problems.

'Many people followed him, and he healed all their sick, warning them not to tell who he was' (Matthew 12:15b,16).

'Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it' (Mark 7:36).

2] There were times when Jesus deliberately avoided or terminated conversations with those who were self-confident in their righteousness or religion.

'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.' (Mark 2:17)

'Jesus then left them and went away.' (Matthew 16:4b)

'Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.' (Matthew 15:14).

3] In a similar vein Jesus told his disciples to move on when people did not want to listen (Matthew 10:11-16).

4] Jesus gives us a direct command not to communicate the Gospel to some people:

'Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to the pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces' (Matthew 7:6).

Obviously this prohibition calls for acute discernment on the part of the witness, and this discernment will come only with experience and sensitivity to God's Spirit.

Biblical constraint #5: If we follow the example and teaching of Jesus Christ we will know that there are times when it is wrong to tell people the truth about him, and there are people to whom it is wrong to tell the truth about him. We will put off the mentality that condemns us if we don't witness to every individual and if we don't talk about Jesus in every conversation.

Complete Section #1 in the Study Six Worksheet now.

D. BIBLICAL BOUNDARIES ROUND PERSONAL SPEECH AND CONDUCT

Because the Christian is a 'witness' of Christ, his/her reputation or witness in the community is very important. This includes the way we speak.

Complete Section #2 in the Study Six Worksheet now.