

So You Want to “Witness”

You’ve heard people speak about ‘*witnessing*’ to others about Jesus Christ, whether friends, family, co-workers, fellow students or even a stranger. This form of evangelism is something entirely new to Christianity, which believe it or not, finds no support from the Word of God. There are books, articles, classes, and internet web sites dedicated to the purpose of teaching men and women how to ‘*witness*’ for Christ.

Now before you close your mind and stop reading, please consider for a moment what is involved in being a ‘*witness*’ to a crime, or automobile accident. What the court requires for you to testify are that you MUST be an ‘eye’ witness of the facts you are about to recite. Being a witness and giving testimony to what you saw and heard are synonymous terms. Denominational preachers are telling people that they can and should ‘*witness*’ for Christ because the Bible tells us that we must. Just where does God’s Word say such to be the case for men and women today, without taking passages out of context? While I applaud the dedication of all who understand the need to tell others of God’s saving grace, we must be very careful that we do not invent doctrines that find no Scriptural support for so-called ‘*witnessing*.’ Supporters of witnessing for Christ, say that Jesus will confirm your witness, just as He did the witness of His apostles with signs following (Mark 16:20; Matthew 28:19-20). They then quote such passages as “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8; et at). It is then assumed that Jesus gave this authority to all men and women, but is this true? Is it possible in the biblical sense of the word for Christians to ‘*witness*’ or ‘*testify*’ in the name of Jesus Christ? These are the things that we intend to answer as we peruse the Scriptures to see what Jesus actually meant when He told His disciples to be His witnesses and to testify of Him. It is our hope that you will honestly consider the following study the next time you think about ‘*witnessing*.’

To Witness or Not to Witness, That is the Question

In Black’s Law Dictionary, Fifth Edition, the word ‘*testimony*’ is defined as: “*Evidence given by a competent witness under oath or affirmation; as distinguished from evidence derived from writings, and other sources.*” Concerning the word ‘*witness*’ Black’s defines it as: “*one who, being present, personally sees or perceives a thing; a beholder, spectator, or eyewitness.*” With these definitions in mind let us consider the Scriptures often used to justify the practice of ‘*witnessing*.’ Jesus instructed His apostles, “*Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*” (Matthew 28:19-20). There is no doubt that the Lord is here telling the apostles to make disciples of all nations, but this command is also for every disciple of every generation. The Great Commission is a command that every child of God is required to follow unto the furthering of the kingdom of God. Yet proponents of this doctrine say that Matthew 28:19-20 is the authority that Jesus gives for men and women ‘*witnessing*’ today! However, not one mention is made of anyone ‘*witnessing*’ for Christ! A second aspect that is given for ‘*witnessing*,’ is that the person is to listen carefully to the person one is trying to convert as well as to what the Holy Spirit tells us needs to be said. The Scriptural authority for this we are told is found in John 16:7-8 where Jesus said, “*Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.*” Again, we find misinterpretation of a passage meant to apply to those to whom Jesus was speaking in the first century (His apostles), and NOT to be applied to us today. Often people misapply the pronoun “you” to ourselves, when in fact we must first look at the context to see to whom the speaker is

talking. More time than not, we will discover that the speaker is in fact talking only to those of his day and not to anyone in future generations. This is the case with what our Lord spoke of concerning the Comforter (Holy Spirit), that He (The Holy Spirit) would come to the apostles, NOT to us today – that is, NOT in a miraculous way. The only way that the Holy Spirit speaks to all men and women today is through the Word of God, the Bible.

It is evident from the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit does not speak to us personally today, nor does He personally convict people of sin. It is only through our preaching and teaching the gospel, that men and women can learn that they are sinners, and need Christ in their lives (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Romans 3:20; 7:7, et at). Although some may be very sincere in their teachings and belief concerning ‘*witnessing*’ and receiving personal help from the Holy Spirit, the Word of God tells us that such is not true.

Biblical Witnesses

When I hear someone say that they were out ‘*witnessing*,’ I just cringe at the abuse of Scripture. While I commend their enthusiasm and willingness to put themselves on the front line of criticism, I am saddened at their lack of Biblical understanding. Our society has been so blindsided by the emotional hype of Pentecostalism that we have readily accepted emotionalism as our standard for religious practice. No more do preachers tell the members of their congregations that the Bible is the only authority in religion, and if it’s not in the Bible we have no authority to do it; but instead they are whopping their members into an emotional frenzy testifying to this and to that as a pitiful attempt to defend their practices. The question that every Bible based person ought to be asking is, “*What are your credentials for witnessing?*” Jesus had them, as did Paul, Peter, John, and even John the Baptizer before them! So where are your credentials? When preparing the apostles for the absence of their Lord, Jesus told them, “*But when the Comforter is come, whom I*

will send unto from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: And ye also shall bear witness,

BECAUSE YE HAVE BEEN WITH ME FROM THE BEGINNING” (John 15:26-27KJV). Who had been with Jesus from the beginning? You? Me? No, it was the apostles! They and they alone had the authority to testify or give witness of Christ because they had been with Him from the beginning of His ministry. They alone had been **EYE-WITNESSES** of all that was said and done by the Christ. So while the Holy Spirit testified through inspiration to the apostles, they would bear witness. To testify is to bear witness (Acts 23:11; 1 Corinthians 15:15).

Luke confirms that the apostles chosen by Jesus were given commandments by Him, “*To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:2-3). Jesus then instructed them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father (Holy Spirit), “*But ye (the apostles) shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you (the apostles): and ye (the apostles) shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*” (Acts 1:4-8). This text is often used to justify men and women ‘*witnessing*’ for Christ today, yet Jesus clearly is speaking to the apostles as being His witnesses, and not anyone today. When Peter began preaching the gospel on Pentecost, he discussed the resurrection of Jesus Christ saying, “*this Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses*” (Acts 2:32). To whom does the pronoun ‘we’ refer? To the apostles! Acts 1:22 states that being an eye-witness of Christ’s resurrection was a qualification to being an apostle.

Despite the overwhelming evidence against ‘*witnessing*’ someone will cry foul anyway by asserting that they are merely sharing their heartfelt faith in Christ with others. But where in the Bible was such a thing ever done? Please give me book, chapter and verse where one Christian in the early church ever ‘*witnessed*’ to others in the

way that some do today. The truth of the matter is that there is no book, chapter or verse that authorizes anyone to bear witness of Jesus Christ! Why? Because there is not one person alive today who has the qualifications to bear witness of Christ, or to testify of Him.

In defense of his preaching the gospel, the apostle Paul recounted his conversion when Jesus had appeared before him on the road to Damascus, "...*The God of our fathers has chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard*" (Acts 22:14-15). Just a few verses later the Lord tells Paul, "...*Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me*" (Acts 22:18). What was the subject of Paul's testimony? Was it his personal faith in Jesus? Was it what God had personally done to change Paul's life? The main subject of the apostle's testimony was Christ – not Paul himself! He was to bear witness to what he had personally "**SEEN and HEARD.**" Who living today is able to testify concerning what Jesus taught and the miracles He performed as did Paul, Peter, and the other apostles? The answer is NO ONE!

Like John the Baptizer, Peter and Paul, John gives testimony concerning what he and all the apostles were given special authority to do, "*And we have SEEN and do TESTIFY that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world*" (1 John 4:14). What could possibly have given him the right to 'testify' or 'bear witness' of what the Father did? The Holy Spirit gives us the answer about John's 'witness' when he wrote, "*This is the disciple which TESTIFIETH of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that HIS TESTIMONY IS TRUE*" (John 21:24). The disciple who 'testified' of the things concerning what Jesus Christ did and taught was the apostle John. Unlike so many today who claim they can 'testify,' John had the credentials. He had personally witnessed (seen and heard) the things of Christ. Like John the Baptizer before him, whom God sent into the world to bear witness of the Light, John the apostle

was also a chosen vessel, sent by Jesus Christ Himself to 'bear witness' of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord, confirming his testimony with signs and wonders (John 1:6-9; Mark 16:20).

Conclusion

To what can anyone of us attest to, that has not already been recorded in holy writ by eye-witnesses? The answer is NOTHING! The fact of the matter is that men think that God needs assistance in saving the souls of others. They invent to themselves doctrines that appear to be divinely approved, but are in all actuality doctrines of demons. God said that it is HIS WORD – THE GOSPEL – that has the power to save souls of men and women (Romans 1:16). God said that HIS WORD – THE GOSPEL – is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, being able to furnish all men unto good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God also said that HIS WORD – THE GOSPEL – gives us everything we need to know that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Not once was 'witnessing' mentioned as a means of reaching the lost, or assisting us unto godliness.

It is the duty of every man and woman to define spiritual things by the Bible and not in accordance to what men think or say. When the Bible speaks of men without wings being angels, then we must accept it as truth and teach the same. When the Bible says that baptism is 'unto' – that is in order to receive – the forgiveness of sins, then it is our duty to accept and obey it. This being true, the same must be said of witnessing. Because the Bible has already defined for us what true witnessing and testifying is, then we dare not add to God's Word, lest God take away our part from the tree of life (Revelation 22:18-19)!

Is it possible for men and women today, to tell others about the saving grace of God found only in Jesus Christ our Lord, without having to submit to the idea of 'witnessing'? The answer is a resounding YES there is! The Bible authorized method is known as 'evangelism.' Jesus gave it to us in the Great Commission, by commanding us to

make disciples of all nations, and to preach the gospel to every creature (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). When we simply take the gospel message out into the world, we are giving them all the information they need to know concerning what will save a soul from the fires of hell. Telling others that there is salvation in none other than Jesus Christ (Acts 4:11); that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6); that unless we repent, we will perish (Luke 13:3); that everyone who will not confess with the mouth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God before men is antichrist (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9; 2 John 7); and that baptism does not save us (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21).

Please keep in mind that being a witness in civil court does not mean that you can tell what you heard or read that others said – you must be an eye-witness to the facts. The Bible truth about 'witnessing' is that those in the first century who did so knew the facts personally because they had been with Jesus. No one today qualifies with the ability to 'bear witness' or to 'testify' for God or Jesus Christ. Shame on all spiritual plagiarists who imitate what the true eye-witnesses left for us through their written word. Let us all be satisfied with what God has left us to do, making disciples of all nations by preaching the gospel message that has been left to us by qualified witnesses, to every creature!

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Witnessing



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