

ESCAPING BONDAGE TO PRESENT-DAY PHARISAISM

"Part IV: Liberated Witnessing Of The Gospel"

(John 15:5; Acts 1:8; 16:6-10; Colossians 4:2-4)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

There are strong obstacles to effective witnessing that Christians face. Here are some of the reasons why:

(1) On the one hand, the worldwide **need** is very burdensome: I once read an Evangelistic tract that said if all of the unsaved people in India who are dying without Christ were lined up, six people abreast, and one started to drive a car past that line, going 25 miles an hour, he would never get to the end of the line! **That is a lot of people entering eternity without Christ, and that from just a single country! How then can we possibly reach all the people in the WORLD who are dying without faith in Christ?!**

(2) On the other hand, there is a big **guilt** trip that is often laid on believers regarding witnessing. I recall being taught that if an unbeliever died without my having witnessed to him, God would hold me personally responsible. The text of Ez. 3:18 was used for this teaching. The thought of having to suffer an eternal reprimand for the loss of another person's soul seemed to urge me at times to act rudely, pushing others away from God!

Well, is there a reprimand for believers who fail to reach every unsaved person they could possibly address?! If so, should we err on the side of being a bit TOO forward in witnessing?!

(3) Conversely, the vast **majority** of unsaved people that I as a pastor have been privileged to address with the Gospel have set up **defensive** postures against what I tell them because of what *Christians* have either thoughtlessly or errantly shared in witnessing efforts!

Well, how does he make headway with hardened unbelievers in view of the roadblocks set up by errant or false actions of OTHER well-meaning Christians?!

(4) Then there's always the tough question unbelievers ask: "How can Christianity be true when so many foreign people haven't heard about Christ? How can the Christian God be loving and discriminate to get the Gospel only to the *developed* nations?!"

What's the answer to that question, anyway?!

What is the solution or solutions to all of these needs?!

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: "If a friend dies without Christ, will God hold me liable for having been a poor witness to him, or accountable for not being a missionary to India when millions there die without salvation?! How can we reach those who are 'turned off' to overly-zealous or sinful Christians, or who think our God is unfair for not having sent the Gospel to the unreached Third World masses like He has us?"

I. **There is a false view and a true view of witnessing the Gospel:**

- A. Jesus complained about the Pharisees who "evangelized" by compassing land and sea, ending up with artificial results, Mtt. 23:15.
- B. On the other hand, Jesus did command His disciples to be witnesses of the saving Gospel under the Holy Spirit's power, Acts 1:8.

II. **Accordingly, we contrast false and true witnessing views and acts:**

- A. A false witnessing format promotes the following ideas and actions:
 - 1. False witnessing promotes a **burdensome** witnessing **incentive**:
 - a. Some say Ezekiel 3:18 teaches God will hold believers liable for associates who die without Christ if they fail to witness to them.
 - b. Some apply this idea to one's failing to become a missionary to witness to unevangelized peoples who die without Christ.
 - 2. False witnessing promotes a **pressured, errant** witnessing **style**.
 - a. If one assumes that he is accountable to witness to all unsaved associates before they die, he naturally tends to use dramatic, forced presentations that "bend" the rules on ethics or politeness.
 - b. Accordingly, mass evangelism can often be practiced at the price of being Biblically correct, and that with the excuse of "getting the Gospel out" to the lost before they die!
 - 3. False witnessing thus produces **imperfect** discipling **results**: due to God's grace, some people are saved due to the power of the Gospel (Is. 55:11) **regardless** of false methods and motivations. However, many **unsaved** people are **repulsed** by thoughtless, errant witnessing approaches, or make decisions that are false due to errant witnessing, complicating their being reached, Mtt. 23:15b.
- B. The true witnessing format promotes the following ideas and actions:
 - 1. True witnessing involves an "easy, light" witnessing **incentive**:

- a. According to Ezekiel 3:18, were Ezekiel to have failed to warn his Hebrew countrymen to repent, and they consequently died in judgment in the Babylonian invasion, God would execute Ezekiel for their physical, **temporal** deaths! Ezekiel 3:18 dealt with capital punishment, *not* witnessing for *eternal* salvation!
 - b. Well, regarding *eternal* issues, every individual's soul is his **own** responsibility: (a) God has arranged historical events to create in every individual's mind an awareness of his need for God, Acts 17:26-27a. (b) God has also stationed Himself close to every person in the world so **were** that party to **seek** after God, he would **easily find** the Lord, Acts 17:27b. (c) Men are without excuse regarding their being aware of God's existence, for even **nature** reveals God's power and Godhead, Rom. 1:18-20. (d) Further, not only the Church ("the Bride"), but also the Spirit **directly** urges men to come to Christ, Rev. 22:17a; Jn. 16:7-11.
 - c. Thus, there is no need for a believer to devise a witnessing event to be **effective**, for **God** covers all outreach bases! Our witness **incentive** itself is thus made "easy" and "light", Mtt. 11:28-30.
2. True outreach then has a **God-led, God-equipped style** as follows:
 - a. The apostles were to **wait** to witness until **endowed** by the Holy Spirit, Acts 1:4-5, 8, so **God MADE them effective witnesses**. Here's the proof: (a) God sometimes **restrained** apostles from witnessing, Acts 16:6-10; (b) then they had to pray for the **opportunities** (Col. 4:3) and (c) **boldness** to witness, Eph. 6:19.
 - b. Thus, the believer should heed God's **lead** to get into his proper "team" **ROLE** in God's outreach program: 1 Cor. 12:29-30's questions expecting negative answers (UBS Grk. N.T., p. 607; Machan, N.T. Greek for Beginners, p. 197) together with Eph. 4:11 reveal that not every Christian has the "gift" of evangelism.
 - c. Also, since Christ told His disciples that without **Him** involved, they could achieve **nothing**, Jn. 15:5, the believer should follow the **Lord's leading in his role's ACTIONS** of outreach!
 - d. Additionally, 1 Tim. 2:1-6 implies that **God** wants the **MEANS** of outreach primarily to be that of a "godly lifestyle with word of mouth" approach. Statistics prove this out: Inter-Varsity reports that about 2% of converts are won to Christ by large crusades, nearly 5% by local pastors, close to 13% by other Christian efforts, but 80% by grassroots level friends-reaching-friends!

Lesson Application: As witnessing is a **LIFESTYLE joint-venture with GOD in HIS sovereign, world-wide outreach effort, (1) acquire a godly life by (a) believing on Christ as Savior to be indwelt by His enabling Spirit, Jn. 7:38-39; Acts 1:8a . (b) Then, confess any sins that block our usefulness to God (1 Jn. 1:9), (c) depend on the Spirit for godly living (Gal. 5:16-23) and (d) FOLLOW the Holy Spirit's Biblical LEAD in living and verbally witnessing as a WAY of LIFE!**

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

The testimony of Amy Tracy's conversion is an illustration and encouragement of effective evangelism in our country today. Her story is in the March 1998 issue of Focus on the Family, p. 3-4:

Amy Tracy was once president of the Alexandria, Virginia chapter of the National Organization for Women. Amy testifies that "Throughout my career I interacted with Christians on the front lines of political battles . . . During the heat of the confrontation, my actions did little to endear me to them. **Unfortunately, the actions of many Christians did little to endear Christ to me, either.**"

But in the fall of 1992, Amy began to feel herself "inexplicably drawn to God. There were times when I would be . . . working on my computer, and a powerful hunger for God would overtake me, followed by an incredible feeling of peace." She **fought** these feelings for "three years" as "I **couldn't reconcile** my heart's yearning with the **hostile** behavior I encountered in some **Christians**."

However, on one occasion she ran into a Christian activist who offered the "other side" of the faith. Amy Tracy felt the man was unfairly manipulating her, and moved away from him. However, she later recognized the "manipulation" as the Holy Spirit's working in her.

Meanwhile, her yearnings for God increased, driving Amy to a therapist to get **over** "feeling vulnerable to God and Christianity."

She finally entered a Church and heard the Gospel. On September 19, 1995, she accepted Christ as her Savior!

We can draw direction and help from Amy's testimony: (a) First, we must watch that our actions do not misrepresent our Gospel of God's grace to the lost. (b) Second, GOD works to reach the lost INDEPENDENT of our witnessing efforts (Rev. 22:17) -- a great encouragement regarding the "unreached" world's millions! (c) Third, even the ERRONEOUS witnessing efforts of believers can't block God's outreach!

Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Seminary had the forward to his book, True Evangelism written by Henry Varley. Mr. Varley, who had known C. H. Spurgeon, wrote in that forward two days before his death in 1911: ". . . nor must we fail to point out what poor 'soul-winners' at best we all are. Our cry must be: 'O Lord, be with us, and help us, for without thee we can do nothing.'" **Amen!**