

How to Be a Witness

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Question: “For a long while I have had a great desire to find out how to build up an address, and every attempt at the study of God’s word forces me to see my ignorance of what I have become a little more acquainted with.

“The week before last a friend of my who has been managing a Gospel Mission church at wrote to me, asking if I would take the services on Sunday. I prayed to the Lord, promising to do my best with His help, and I am glad to say that a lady come to me after the evening service, and thanked me for the word,...but in myself I could not think that justice had been done according to the opportunity....

“Now I do not expect to become a preacher, but I want to become a witness for Christ. The reason I have stated my experience is because I want you to advise me what books I should get to read, to help me in my desire to become an effective witness. I have Ellicott’s *Commentary*, Gray’s *Biblical Museum*, Young’s and Cruden’s *Concordances*, Barnes’s *Notes on the Gospels*, Baxter’s *Saints’*

Rest, and Finney's Lectures to Professing Christians. I do not expect to find any royal road, but something to guide me, and enable me to think myself when I read the Word."

Your desire is a most laudable one, for God desires nothing more than that all His people shall be faithful witnesses for Him; and therefore I shall gladly do whatever I can to help you. I take the greater pleasure in this, because I am sure that there are many others who are in very much the same situation that you are,—longing to witness, but not knowing how. If our consideration of the question shall lead to further study of the grand theme, I shall be all the more glad.

The First and Greatest Requisite

One of the first things that comes to my mind when you speak of witnessing, is the promise of the Lord:

Acts 1

⁸ You shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

This really covers the whole ground, because the Holy Ghost is the great Teacher of the Truth (*John* 14:26; 16:13), and the One who teaches us how to tell it.

Another text which came to my mind as I read your letter was this:

Psalm 51

⁹ Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹ Cast me not away from Your presence; and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation; and uphold me with Your free Spirit.

¹³ Then will I teach transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall be converted unto You.

This text amounts to the same thing as the other, because it shows our dependence on the Spirit of God, by whom comes conviction of sin and righteousness.

Revelation 22

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come.

This is all; go and tell the things that you have seen and heard with God. That is all that a true witness can possibly do. True preaching of the Gospel is not a profession; it is simply one soul talking to another, and telling from personal experience the goodness and power of God; telling what one sees and knows.

Jesus Christ the Leading Witness

Jesus Christ “is the faithful and true Witness.” *Revelation* 3:14. We are to be joined with Him in witnessing for God, for we read these words:

Isaiah 43

¹⁰ You are My witnesses says the Lord, and My Servant whom I have chosen.

The Servant whom God has chosen as His chief witness is the Lord Jesus. See *Isaiah* 42:1-4. If we learn how He testifies, we shall know what kind of testimony is expected of us. Hear what He says:

John 8

²⁶ He that sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him.

John 14

²⁴ The word which you hear is not My, but the Father’s which sent Me.

John 12

⁴⁹ For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and

what I should speak.

Taught of God

It is clear, therefore, that our witness is to consist only of the words which God teaches us. The Apostle Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 2

¹³ Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

¹⁴ Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches.

John 6

⁴⁵ As it is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God.

Ambassadors in Christ's Stead

Every soul that is reconciled to God has had put into him the word and ministry of reconciliation, so that we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, to pray in His stead that men will be reconciled unto God, and to do this by the presence of God in us even as it was in Him. *2 Corinthians* 5:18-20. Christ says:

John 20

²¹ As My Father has sent Me, even so send I you.

Christ received His words direct from the Father, and we are to do the same. No one would dare accuse Him of ignorance, or of any lack of tact or courtesy, and He was a most perfect Teacher; yet He studied only one book, the Book of God.

The theological schools of the Jews had nothing to do with training His mind or forming His style; yet all the people were charmed with His manner, and were astonished at His teaching. But He Himself tells us that He spoke only the words that He had learned with the Father.

The Eternal Word Put Into the Mouth

Jesus was the Prophet like unto Moses, speaking only the things which God gave Him. When Moses received the commission from God, he was afraid to go, because he did not think that he could speak. Then the Lord said to him:

Exodus 4

¹¹ Who has made man's mouth? or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?

¹² Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say.

The very same word of encouragement God speaks to every timid, trembling soul. Reassuring us by reminding us of what He did in delivering Israel from Egypt, He says:

Isaiah 51

¹⁶ I have put My words in your mouth, and I have covered you in the shadow of My hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, You are My people.

He says to us, referring to Himself as the deliverer from the Egypt of sin:

Psalms 81

¹⁰ Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

Now read this most blessed assurance:

Isaiah 59

²⁰ And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, says the Lord.

²¹ As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says the Lord: My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.

There need be no lack of testifying power with the one who learned from the great Teacher. There is nothing that God wishes to have done, that cannot be done by the one

whose soul is cleansed from sin by the abiding presence of the Spirit.

It is the Spirit that Bears Witness

Even if it has not struck you that we are here in Christ's place, to carry on the work which He begun, and that therefore we may confidently expect that the Father will give us the same equipment that He gave to Him, we must know that we are sent by God.

Surely it is a most presumptuous thing for any person to undertake to present the message of God without having been sent. But

John 3

³⁴ He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for God gives not the Spirit by measure.

Proverbs 1

²⁰ Wisdom cries without; she utters her voice in the streets;

²¹ She cries in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates; in the city she utters her words, saying,

²³ Turn you at My reproof; behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you, I will make known My words unto you.

This is like *Psalms* 51:9-13. First hearken to the voice of the Spirit convicting of sin, not in a half-way manner, but submitting to every word of God, and then the Spirit will be poured out in a way to make you a witness. You will then be but the mouthpiece of the Spirit, for:

1 John 5

⁶ It is the Spirit that bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.

The Experience of Isaiah

This was the experience of the prophet Isaiah. When he saw God sitting on His high throne, he cried,

Isaiah 6

⁵ Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean

lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

⁶ Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar;

⁷ And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.

⁸ Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?

⁹ Then said I, Here am I; send me, and He said, Go.

The Great Secret of Witnessing

The great secret of witnessing is to become acquainted with the Lord, and to know His sin-cleansing and His keeping power. He who knows this for himself, because he has the Spirit's own testimony, so that he has no need of any human assurance of the fact, can speak with an authority that is impossible to the greatest scholar in the world, who has not that witness. The whole secret of the power of the apostles was that "they had been with Jesus."

Not only will one who has been with Jesus, and who walks with Him, be able to witness for Him, but he will not be able to keep from testifying. The rulers threatened the apostles with the severest punishment if they persisted in witnessing for Christ, but they said,

Acts 4

²⁰ We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Jeremiah had a similar experience. He was derided and reproached and threatened, and he says:

Jeremiah 20

⁹ Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

Remember that these men were ordinary men, such as we are. The apostles were fishermen whom the Lord called; and Jeremiah was a timid child until God put His words in his mouth. *Jeremiah 1:4-9.*

Building Up an Address

Now a word about “building up an address.” Let me beg of you as a friend never to attempt such a thing. Think what your message is, and the condition of those to whom you are sent. You are sent to save men who are on the brink of destruction. Would you “build up an address” to men who were drowning? It makes me wince when I hear people talk about “giving an address” at some Gospel meeting.

Preparation is needed, and abundance of it, but when the Word has been incorporated into the heart and life, then your work is simply to give it forth. The Word must be made flesh in you, and then you can speak as Christ did. You are not to take something in your hand or in your head, and pass it on to the people, but you are to give them yourself,—your transformed self,—your life.

I know the danger of looseness and of rambling talk; but the one who testifies “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” is saved from it. Stephen, Paul, and Peter, of whose sermons we have some outlines, did not “build up an address” when they moved the multitudes, but they were not illogical nor rambling in their talk. The reason is that they preached Christ, not about Christ, and He is the *Logos*, the beginning and the end of logic.

I know that this is contrary to all the canons of theological teaching; but one can learn more in five minutes from the Holy Spirit, about preaching, than in five years at any theological seminary without the Holy Spirit.

Avoid Religious Quackery

Do you know that there is such a thing as religious quackery, just the same as there is medical quackery? A quack in medicine is one who has a few prescriptions, which may have proved useful in some cases, and who applies them to every case. He will tell you just what sort of remedy to give for every disease, regardless of the differences in different patients.

But the real physician is the one who studies the principles of health and of disease, and who endeavors to bring the healing life to each person just according to his need.

Even so with the religious teacher. You can find books that will tell you just how to deal with every sort of sinner, and just what texts are applicable to each state, and you may read them all through and be no better fitted to deal with souls than before.

Fill yourself with the Word of God, and then let the Holy Spirit bring to your remembrance on each occasion just the things that are needed by the person or persons before you.

The Books that are Needed

Now what books are necessary? Here I can give you exact and definite information. You need a fairly large library, not less than sixty-six books; but they are not very expensive, and I doubt not that you have them already. They are the books of the Old and the New Testament. It is absolutely impossible for you to learn to witness for Christ from any other books than these.

I will not disparage commentaries, any more than the good men who have written them; but remember this one thing: You are called to be a witness, and a witness must tell what he knows, and must not repeat what somebody else has already said. You do not want to be a phonograph.

Some other man may have given a good testimony, but

that testimony is his, not yours. If he has written it down, then everybody can read it for himself, and he can continue to witness after he is dead. It is his own voice. But if you or I repeat that testimony, we are not witnessing, but are merely echoing.

God wants fresh testimony from every individual, and not the repetition of what somebody else has said better than we can. If he could speak better than me, then it is folly for us to ape him. God sends us to tell what we have seen, even though it be but little.

If we do not know much, then we cannot testify much; but the little that we know, if we do indeed know it, is just as effective as the same amount spoken by the most learned man in the world; and if we speak that which we do not absolutely know for ourselves as the direct revelation from God, then our talk is worse than useless. In such a case we cannot know but that we are leading the people astray.

A Royal Road

You say that you do not expect to find any royal road, but I am happy to be able to point one out to you. Here it is, described by the king who trod it to a greater extent than any other person in the world except Christ:

Proverbs 2

¹ My son, if you will receive My words, and hide My commandments with you;

² So that you incline your ear unto wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding;

³ Yea, if you cry after knowledge, and lift up your voice for understanding;

⁴ If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures;

⁵ Then shall you understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

⁶ For the Lord gives wisdom; out of His mouth comes knowl-

edge and understanding.

⁷ He lays up sound wisdom for the righteous; He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.

⁸ He keeps the paths of judgment, and preserves the way of His saints.

⁹ Then shall you understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.

When you have this preparation, you will not need to “build up an address” to sinners seeking the way of salvation, any more than you would to point out the road with which you are familiar, to a traveler who asks you the way.

If you are but the instrument of the Spirit, He will speak to each one through you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it” (*Isaiah* 30:21); and there will be no wavering in the testimony.

Some Personal Experience

Will you let me give you a little personal experience in this matter of studying the Bible and using commentaries? It may help you.

When I was a good deal younger than I am now, and was desirous as you are of knowing God’s Word, so that I could carry the message of salvation to others, I set myself to study a certain book in the Bible, which attracted me wonderfully.

I determined to know it thoroughly, so I took my commentary and began to study systematically. I began to read the *Introduction*, in which the author tells all about the circumstances under which the book was written, the condition of the people to whom it was addressed, and other general matter, all drawn from the book itself.

In this *Introduction* there were frequent references to the Scripture text, and as I wished to know everything for myself, I had to look up these references. But this was slow work, and interrupted the continuity of the thought.

I saw that if I wished to get the most profit from my com-

mentator, and to follow him easily, I must have in my mind the whole of the text of the book on which he was commenting, so that whenever he made any reference to it I would know, without turning to it, just what he said. In short, I saw that in order to be able to understand what the Scripture writer meant, I must know just what he said.

So I laid aside my commentary for a time, until I could get the words of the Scripture in my mind. I labored indeed as one who seeks a fortune, for I was in earnest. Verse by verse, sentence by sentence, I went through the whole of the book under consideration. By day and by night I meditated upon the relation of one particular sentence to that which preceded and followed it. Night after night as I lay in bed I repeated the words until I fell asleep.

I must remind you, by the way, that I, like you, did not expect to become a preacher; I simply wished to understand God's Word for myself. Nor was I merely a student, without any other occupation. All the time I was studying I was working with my hands and head during the day.

But as I walked to my work in the morning and at noon, and as I returned home, I had my little Bible in my pocket, and was studying my precious book, getting ready to study and understand the commentary upon it. At last frequent reference to the text, and a most diligent questioning of it, fixed it so firmly in my mind that if any sentence in it was quoted I could instantly tell all the context. If a verse were referred to by number, the words of it at once flashed through my mind.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times I repeated the entire book slowly and thoughtfully, until I could take in the whole of it at a glance. Then I took up my long-neglected commentary, but lo, it had lost all its interest for me. It had nothing to tell me, that I did not already know; and I discovered that no man can possibly know anything more about the Bible than what he learns from the Bible itself.

If any man knows any truth of God's Word, he must have learned it from that Word, and the Word stands open for every other man to learn the same thing for himself. God is no respecter of persons, but gives wisdom to all who ask. Even people of little learning may be wise in the things of God, for He has hid His deep things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes. Inspiration says,

2 Timothy 2

⁷ Consider what I say; for the Lord shall give you understanding in all things.

John 7

¹⁷ If any man wills to do His will, He shall know of the teaching.

I have written you much more than I thought to write, but the subject is inexhaustible, and one that lies very close to my heart. May the Lord bless you, and make you able to be a minister of life.