

Christ Reformed Baptist Church – New Castle, IN
Sunday School Class Series: Inspiring & Maintaining Our
Personal Gospel Witness.

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PART ONE:

Inspiring & Maintaining Our Personal Witness:

INTRO

I would like for us as a church to take a look for the next several Sunday School classes at the topic of Personal Witnessing and Evangelism.

I hope that you would agree, that for all the churches in the city of New Castle (population 17,351) there seems to be little to no outward witness or evangelism taking place. Our church has often went door to door and passed out gospel tracts at the main intersections of town, however outside of this the only other people I have ever encountered in the spreading of religion has been the Mormons.

I pray that this observation, if allowed, will not settle well with us. The church of Christ, this church which we are part of has among its top commands from the Lord Jesus himself to ‘go ye therefore and teach all nations; (Matt.28.19). If this is not being done, if we are not seeking to spread His gospel message, then we forfeit the privilege of calling ourselves a New Testament church. Or to put it in another way “Just as we cannot imagine a church without worship services, to the Lord’s mind, a non-witnessing Christian is just as unthinkable.”

Have we stopped trusting in the power of the Lord and His word? **Ps. 5:11** “**But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice**: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.”

Who is it here that may rejoice in the knowledge that the Lord will defend and vindicate them? It is exclusively those who put their trust in Him. Yet, the frightening reality of our time is that the trust of God’s people has been terribly undermined in the particular work of personal witness and evangelism and sometimes even destroyed by faithless churches who have substituted human inventions in the place of this personal ministry.

The many promoters of modern methods, in a sense, effectively tell us that we do not have to rely on the power of the Word and Spirit of God anymore, because their clever systems and super-gifted people and reduction in godly standards will produce the desired results of church growth. In their eyes their own ingenuity has eclipsed and supplanted the old backward, stumbling, slow efforts of simple personal witness.

Now, we are called to trust in entertainment techniques with the aim of closing the gap between the church and the world in order to attract a ‘reluctant generation’. We are urged to trust in various cultural adaptations within our worship such as modern music genres, dance or perhaps drama in order to stir the stony hearts of the unconverted. Leading pastors on the national conference scene constantly press us to trust in new, liberal, worldly lifestyles as a means of reaching the modern non-believer.

All of this current activity under the guise of ‘evangelism’ is nothing more and nothing less than a lack of faith in the effectiveness of the Word and Spirit when utilizing the methods of

personal witness and evangelism that Jesus and the Apostles give us in the Bible.

I pray that in the coming months, as we work through the biblical pattern of ‘how’ to do Personal Witnessing and Personal Evangelism that our hearts would be stirred and rekindled for the high, personal privilege of making the name of Jesus known among our city and all of Henry County.

Rom. 5:20 “...But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:”

ACTS 8:1-4

1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. **2** And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. **3** As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. **4** Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.

The Greek text says simply that they went everywhere evangelizing. We see here then, that from the very earliest days of the Church believers have obeyed the great commission in a personal way...simply meaning that wherever they went, ordinary church members would be seen testifying to their faith and making known the Gospel of Christ to others around them.

This text here in Acts 8 at minimum teaches us they firmly believed that the task of personal witness was ordained by Christ himself and to be acted upon.

In fact, despite what all the ‘church growth experts’ tell us...the ministry of personal witness is by any measure the most effective method for spreading the Gospel to the multitudes of unsaved people. Of course we certainly believe in the centrality of preaching, which has been especially ordained by God for the regular presentation of the way of salvation. But the Lord’s chief method for bringing people under the sound of Gospel preaching has always been the personal witness of individual believers. Furthermore, personal witness is often the chief element used by the Holy Spirit in bringing a sinner to salvation.

Let us admit, personal witness, however, can be hard and often risky for some. It makes us vulnerable to rejection and now a days even outright hostility. It may cause us our careers. It may cause division in our family. It may cost us ‘friendships’. It will often lead to embarrassment and repudiation. Not to mention it is mostly a ‘slow ministry’, involving, in the experience of many, months and even years of rejection and rebuff before someone responds to the Gospel’s claims. And let’s not forget that for many Christians, personal, one on one witnessing of the faith is in direct conflict with one’s deep seated natural shyness.

It is no wonder this duty slides out of our view so easily. No wonder we prefer to focus our efforts on ‘corporate’ ministries and programs in place of concentrating on personal witnessing and

individual evangelism. No wonder we are easily inclined to leave evangelism to ministerial professional. No wonder, in our churches, we would rather devise alternative ways, no matter how elaborate and costly they may be of attracting the “un-churched” people within our surrounding communities.

It is these admitted and unavoidable challenges of personal witnessing that allows us to readily confess, that we as Christians need constant encouragement and inspiration in this important spiritual responsibility.

Let’s look then at a number of items that need to be considered if our personal witness is to be enthusiastically and effectively maintained.

1. A Matter of Conviction

In order that our personal witness to others of the Gospel be kept up with, it must be a matter of conviction. The various personal witness texts must speak to our hearts with all their compelling and commissioning force. None of us will ever get down to serious gospel witnessing unless we are really convinced that God has commanded us to do it. I trust that you would agree with me when I tell you that the hardest duties of the Christian life are only performed diligently and continually when we feel obligated to do them by God’s command. This week in your personal and family worship time study the witnessing passages, pray over them, begin to think of ways you can share the gospel with those around you and invite them to church to hear the preached word.

2. A Matter of duty and conscience

We must not only seek to make personal witness a matter of conviction, but we must bind ourselves to perform it as a matter of conscience. We

all know from our own personal experience that a sense of conscious or duty adds further strength to our already established convictions.

Rom.12:1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

We are taught here among other things to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, and this applies equally to witnessing as much as to other duties of the Christian life.

There are, for instance, when a mother in her household feels too exhausted to get the dinner prepared for the family. She is perfectly convinced, in fact she is intellectually aware that their nourishment is necessary...**BUT CONVICTION ALONE** will not always get the job done. When our other emotions fail us...it is the sense of duty and conscious that makes the difference. You see this is the vital difference between **CONVICTION** and **CONCIOUS DUTY**.

It is our conscious duty to get up and go to work when our lazy flesh fights the thought. Likewise, it is our conscious duty to keep up our Christian service when our (un-perfected) emotions are not co-operating as they should.

3. A Matter of Desire

The ministry of personal witness must also be a matter of great desire. **2 Tim. 2:10** “Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” Here we see that the apostle Paul tells us that he was prepared to endure all kinds of difficulties ‘for the elect’s sake’

In his mind’s eye...it was as if Paul could actually see future believers, those who would be humbled and brought to love Christ...and for their sakes he was willing to endure any difficulty in order to proclaim the Gospel to them.

Paul here demonstrates a great desire for the salvation of souls, he demonstrates great sympathy for those who are trapped in the folly of

sin and ignorance. He does not consider his own welfare worthy if it prevents them hearing the gospel which is able to save unto the uttermost. We too, like Paul must foster, through constant prayer, a desire for unsaved souls. We too, like Paul, must fight against our own selfishness and self-concern, and have pity for the spiritual bankruptcy of others.

4. A Matter of Zeal

If our personal witness is to cut through the apathy which at times can surround us...then it must be characterized by ZEAL. King David said in

PS. 69:9 “the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up”

I can't emphasize the need for zeal enough, particularly in our modern culture that leaves us exhausted with all its hustle and bustle which leads us to the point of not having any zeal left for this indispensable service for the Lord. We are often left worn out and all together intimidated at the very thought of personal witnessing.

Then there is an altogether different reason to stress the need for gospel zeal. In the case of many Christians the task of personal witness is simply out of step with their personalities. They are naturally shy and reserved, and making spiritual conversation proves rather difficult for them. For many other, their career circumstances give them surprisingly few natural opportunities...and we really need to face up to the fact that personal witnessing is largely a matter of creating or looking for opportunities. This requires a very definite effort against the general run of a shy personality and against our natural love of ease and a quiet, comfortable life wishing all together to avoid any difficult circumstances.

5. A Matter of Prayer

Personal witness is, of course, a matter of prayer...not only for vital blessings such as zeal and ability, but also for OPPORTUNITIES. If we would only pray for opportunities...God would surely begin to open our eyes to them within His kind Providence.

JAMES 4:2 “... yet ye have not, because ye ask not.”

These words of James must surely also be applicable to witnessing opportunities as to other matters of faith. Thus, we need to pray very specifically for opportunities to arise, and then to be ready for them

6. A Matter of forethought

This thought of being ready leads naturally to the observation the effective witnessing is also a matter of FORETHOUGHT and preparation. There may be some who think that personal witnessing, in order to be genuine and of God, must be entirely spontaneous and unprepared.

I hope you agree that this is not the correct way to think about the matter. One proof text I would offer regarding the importance of FORETHOUGHT and PREPERATION is:

1 PET. 3:15 “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:”

The personal ministry that Peter is here referring to regarding the sharing of the faith certainly requires pre-thinking and preparation.

For instance: How do you intend to open or start a discussion? How will you answer or handle the various questions that might come up? Do you have a back up plan for those times when we are thrown off track by some common red herring? In other words...what will be your strategy. Personal witnessing requires some forethought.

7. A Matter of skill and practice

All this talk of forethought and preparation leads to the need of providing the timid among us with the reassurance that your personal witnessing improves greatly with acquiring some skills that are largely learned through practice.

We know that skill alone can never save a soul, but they do enable us to present the facts of the Gospel simply, and without fruitless digression and rabbit trails being forced upon us by those to whom we

witness to. Be comforted, that with a little more time and practice on your side you will handle yourself with increasingly greater ability and God granted confidence.

8. A Matter of patience

Once you get started you will quickly learn that the ministry of personal witness is a matter of great PATIENCE. Naturally speaking every renewed burst of personal witness zeal is likely to run down and fizzle out within a few weeks. We must prepare ourselves to take up a life-long approach to this sort of ministry which involves the patient but purposeful pursuit of every opportunity God's providence affords.

Witnessing is also a matter of patience in the sense that we not think it is our task to press people to yield to Christ instantly, by getting them to repeat an absurdly simple profession or prayer. True conversion is a deep work of the Holy Spirit, and we are not to 'make' or 'force' false conversions. Our task is simple...but yet, vitally important while engaging in personal witnessing –

- (a) to show people their need,
- (b) to reveal God's remedy
- (c) urge them to seek salvation
- (d) and to show them how

But let us be clear on something...we are to always point them to Christ privately and personally, and then...watch with PATIENCE.

From Moses to Paul, the Bible illustrates for us how God's spokesmen have often waited long for their greatest season of ministry and fruitfulness.

9. A Matter of simplicity

Our personal witness must not ever be complex, but on the contrary done in simplicity. The biblical example is to be observed in the discourses of our Lord Jesus. His evangelistic messages were always both simple and graphic.

We must always remember that the capacity of the unconverted in today's society especially for understanding spiritual matters is very limited...and yet, our natural tendency is to say too much at any one time. If we really believe the truth of Scripture when it says 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him' then we will not use too many arguments on any one occasion.

Of course, by simplicity I am not implying childish. What I mean is avoiding the use elaborate and unnecessary intellectual arguments. This means giving clear and unrushed statements of testimony, and giving uncluttered answers to spiritual questions.

10. A Matter of spirituality and godliness

Last but not least, witness is a matter of spirituality and conduct. John 15 is but one of very many passages of Scripture which does demonstrate that obedience to Christ is a condition of fruitfulness in this particular work of ministry. 1 Peter 2:11-12 provides an exhortation to witnessing Christians coupled with a promise: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

The godly life, the apostle assures us, will speak to unbelievers. The Holy Spirit will use it. Onlookers will be challenged and make no mistake about it...some WILL BE IRRESTIABLY drawn to Christ.