

143 Witnessing - 2: "You do and you can"

Few of us find Christian witnessing easy, especially in view of the widespread apathy and occasional strong hostility we can encounter.

It helps to remember that witnessing, evangelising and conversion are different from one another, and yet are three parts of one process. We are all to be witnesses for Christ, (the first part of the process), by how we live, what we say, what we do, and what we actually are. People see us, get to know us, weigh us up, and come to respect us, or not; a decent, consistent, cheerful Christian life is something we are all called upon to live out as we are able (eg Galatians 6.10 / Philippians 2.14-16a & 4.5-9 / Ephesians 4.25,29 & 5.11,15-17) - and such lives no doubt play a larger part than we currently realise in promoting the cause of Christ. Witnessing is far more about how we live than what we may occasionally say, and seen like this, we can be encouraged! - for our very living as Christians does make a difference in the Lord's work.

The second and third stages - concerning evangelism and conversions - are more specialist callings, to be carried out primarily by those who have been specifically gifted in these ways by the Holy Spirit (eg Acts 21.8 / Ephesians 4.11-12). If you are so gifted, then hopefully you recognise that fact and are "getting on with it"! - for the rest of us, with other gifts, can't do what you are called to do nearly as well as you can.

Whatever the various stages in the process of bringing people safely into Christ's fold, it is always first and foremost God's gracious work. Realising this is not an excuse for a "kop-out" on our part, but it does reassure us that the Lord is in charge, He knows what He is doing, and He makes use of our own often-feeble contributions along the way as He wishes.

Once we realise that witnessing is happening all the time, simply by what we are and how we live our lives, some of our "Oooh I couldn't possibly do that!"-fears can drop away. Other people around us speak naturally of things that matter to them - we are to do the same. When appropriate, and we tend to know when such a moment is upon us, we just speak of the Lord Jesus Christ, naturally, in a matter-of-fact, no-high-drama sort of way, from personal experience. That is all that that part of witnessing is: a few Lord-Jesus-Christ-seeds strewn from the seed-bag, for the Holy Spirit to make use of as He may wish, either now or in years to come.

If our words lead on to further conversation, so much the better. Drawing on our knowledge of the overall message of the Holy Bible, we can then, prayerfully and kindly, draw on the great biblical truths as appropriate in this particular situation: perhaps regarding the existence of God as our Creator; His holiness; our sinful falling-short before Him; the "great gulf fixed" between God and humanity in our natural state; God's loving mercy in bridging that gulf in His Son, God-as-One-of-us, by His death and resurrection; and the urgent invitation, driven by our great need, for each of us to cross the bridge over the gulf by accepting who Jesus is and what He has done, for you, for me, for any with the sense to receive His gift (eg Romans 10.9 / John 3.16-18).

Last time we identified as one of the great blocks to witnessing and outreach the sheer lack of any sense of need among so many people around us. There is one vital, God-given key to unlocking that firmly-shut door of "I have no need". This key is God's Law - in a nutshell, the Ten Commandments. Next week God willing, we will see why this is so, and how can we use this key with care, courtesy and good effect.

But for now, we can be of good cheer when it comes to witnessing! We ARE witnessing already - (and so, incidentally, is everyone else on the planet, witnessing to something). Remember, everyone around us is only living by their own beliefs, (those KURTS we came across some months ago, Weekly Reflections 130 and 131), just as we are, and the Bible-founded KURTs by which by God's grace we seek to live are immensely well-grounded. So, no cowering; no pretending, like poor Peter that night, that we are "not with Jesus". We ARE with Jesus. We are very, very glad to be, and we have no wish to keep Him to ourselves!

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