

WITNESSING?

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Several years ago, I was talking with a woman who said that everything in her life was great because she was “witnessing for the Lord” every day. Many in the church today have adopted this denominational idea of witnessing. It is being taught in many pulpits, as well as classrooms. Young people are now being taught how to “witness for the Lord.” This false teaching is not a plea for us to “seek the old paths,” but an attempt to denominationalize the church.

We want to discuss the Biblical account of “witnessing” and see if it is possible for us to witness today. We shall see from the following what it takes, according to scripture, to be a “witness for the Lord.”

BIBLICAL WITNESSING

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines witnessing as “to be a witness, to bear witness, i.e., to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something, or that he knows it because taught by divine revelation or inspiration ... to give (not to keep back) testimony” (p. 390). W.E. Vine, in his book, *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, on page 225 says it: “denotes one who can or does aver what he has seen or heard or knows.” *Webster's* defines it as “attestation of a fact or event ... one that gives evidence ... one who has personal knowledge of something ... to see or know by personal presence or direct cognizance.” If someone witnesses a crime or an accident, he can give his personal testimony of what happened. If he was only told of that crime or accident, he cannot be a witness to it. In a court of law, when a witness is put on the witness stand, it is to give a personal testimony in the case being tried. If that person is told of the events of a case and did not witness it personally, then he/she will not be used as a witness in the case. A jury will not accept his/her testimony if it is second hand.

There are several scriptures in the New Testament that discuss the matter of witnessing: In **John 3:11** we can read, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen ...” In **John 15:27**, we have recorded, “And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.” Jesus, in this passage, was speaking only to the apostles. They were with Him from the beginning of His ministry and as a result would bear witness of Him. **Acts 4:33** records, “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus ...” The apostles were witnesses because they had been with Jesus before His death and had seen Him after His resurrection. In **Acts 22:15**, Paul states, “For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.” Paul was told that he would be a witness of God of what he had seen and heard. For one to be a Biblical witness, he would have to have “seen and heard” Jesus. The apostles could be true witnesses of Jesus because they had both seen and heard the teachings of Jesus. There is no one alive today who has personally seen Jesus or talked to Him.

CAN WE WITNESS TODAY?

In light of the scriptures mentioned above, it is clear that ONLY one who had seen Jesus and had personally heard His teaching, could be a witness. This idea of one “witnessing for the Lord” and telling others what Jesus had done in his/her life is one that has come from the denominational world and not from the Bible. It has been argued that since the subject of witnessing is in the Bible, it needs to be taught and practiced. While it is true that we must follow the teachings of the Bible, there are some things in the Bible that ONLY applied to the those in the

first century. The method of teaching someone about salvation for us today is set forth in the great commission in Matthew 28, Mark 16 and Luke 24. There is no need for us to “give a personal testimony of what Jesus has done in my life,” but to teach them the gospel of salvation as set forth in the New Testament. It is the gospel that saves men’s souls (Rom. 1:16), not a personal testimony by an individual.

The word *witnessing* is widely used today. It is not only prevalent in the denominational world, but sadly, it has crept into the church. The teaching of witnessing is not just an issue of “opinion,” but is a matter of “doctrine.” In the future, if we don’t put a stop to practices such as these, we will be facing more and more trouble in the church. Paul warns us that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3).~