

Being a Good Witness to Christ

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3rd in a four-part series

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1 Corinthians 14:20-33 (CEB)

²⁰ Brothers and sisters, don't be like children in the way you think. Well, be babies when it comes to evil, but be adults in your thinking. ²¹ In the Law it is written: *I will speak to this people with foreign languages and foreigners' lips, but they will not even listen to me this way, says the Lord.* ²² So then, tongues are a sign for those who don't believe, not for those who believe. But prophecy is a sign for believers, not for those who don't believe. ²³ So suppose that the whole church is meeting and everyone is speaking in tongues. If people come in who are outsiders or unbelievers, won't they say that you are out of your minds? ²⁴ But if everyone is prophesying when an unbeliever or outsider comes in, they are tested by all and called to account by all. ²⁵ The secrets of their hearts are brought to light. When that happens, they will fall on their faces and worship God, proclaiming out loud that truly God is among you!

²⁶ What is the outcome of this, brothers and sisters? When you meet together, each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. All these things must be done to build up the church. ²⁷ If some speak in a tongue, then let two or at most three speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ However, if there is no interpreter, then they should keep quiet in the meeting. They should speak privately to themselves and to God. ²⁹ In the case of prophets, let two or three speak and have the rest evaluate what is said. ³⁰ And if some revelation comes to someone else who is sitting down, the first one should be quiet. ³¹ You can all prophesy one at a time so that everyone can learn and be encouraged. ³² The spirits of prophets are under the control of the prophets. ³³ God isn't a God of disorder but of peace.

Luke 18:35-43 (CEB)

³⁵ As Jesus came to Jericho, a certain blind man was sitting beside the road begging. ³⁶ When the man heard the crowd passing by, he asked what was happening. ³⁷ They told him, "Jesus the Nazarene is passing by."

³⁸ The blind man shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy." ³⁹ Those leading the procession scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, "Son of David, show me mercy."

⁴⁰ Jesus stopped and called for the man to be brought to him. When he was present Jesus asked, ⁴¹ "What do you want me to do for you?"

He said, "Lord, I want to see."

⁴² Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight! Your faith has healed you." ⁴³ At once he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they praised God too.

Isaiah 58:6-7 (NRSV)

⁶ "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

⁷ "Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe him,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

What we do is often an even more powerful witness than what we say.

Back to that 2x2 matrix which, for Paul, summarizes his view of how our lives in Christ are to be shaped. For the apostle, this is how we build for God's kingdom. If we are going to ask God to build his kingdom here, this is our part:

1. Do what builds up the body of Christ.
2. Do what is a good witness to Jesus.
3. Avoid what tears down the body of Christ.
4. Avoid what is a bad witness to Jesus.

Clearly, Paul emphasizes our part in building thriving Christian communities, for then, and only then, can we truly carry out Jesus' mandate to offer Christ to the world, to feed the

hungry, and to house the poor. Either we do this together, Paul would say, or we are not going to do it at all.

Thus, the last two weeks we talked about building up the body of Christ and, in turn, how easy it can be to tear down the Church through complacency and neglect. This week, we turn to being a good witness to Christ. What does it mean? How does it affect every part of

Speaking in Tongues

from the entry in the *Eerdmann's Bible Dictionary*

The terms "speaking in tongues" and "glossolalia" both arise from Gk. *laleín hetérais glóssais* "to speak in other tongues [i.e., languages]" (Acts 2:4) and similar forms used in the New Testament of miraculous ecstatic speech. Ecstatic speech and praise are common to many religions ancient and modern, and was present among the early prophets of Israel and surrounding nations (1 Sam. 10:5-6, 9-13; 1 Kgs. 18:29).

The church in Corinth placed a high value on glossolalia and regarded it as a spectacular evidence of the Spirit's presence. At their meetings large numbers, it appears, were involved in ecstatic speaking. Paul feared that the resulting scene would be needlessly offensive to outsiders (1 Cor. 14:23) and that it would stand in the way of what would be more upbuilding and instructive for both church members and outsiders (vv. 2-6, 12, 16-19, 23-25). He himself was glad that he was able to speak in tongues (v. 18) and wanted all the Corinthian Christians to do so as well (v. 5), but either in private devotions or with the aid of inspired interpretation (vv. 13-19, 28). Such "interpretation" was probably not translation but something closer to the explication of dreams or signs or an activity similar to prophecy. To regain the proper perspective, Paul set a limit of two or three glossalalic utterances in a meeting (v. 27). He also placed glossolalia within the larger context of the gifts of the Spirit (ch. 12) and sought to subordinate the exercise of all the gifts to the rule of love within the congregation (13:8; cf. 8:1), thus seeking to substitute a concern for the Church for a desire for spectacular display.

our lives and everything we do at St. Andrew?

"Won't they say you are out of your minds?"

What does the title of this study bring to mind? Perhaps "witness" means to you sitting down with someone to tell them about Jesus. Perhaps it is knocking on a few doors. Or being a bit kinder to the slow grocery clerk. Or even serving meals down at the Salvation Army or helping out in our food pantry.

In truth, all this and more is encompassed by the simple word "witnessing." It is everything that we say and do in relationship with others, even if our "relationship" is nothing more than a fleeting encounter. There is no moment when we are not a disciple of Christ.

Thus, in our first example, from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he tells them to hold down the chaos in worship. It seems that some of the Corinthians are speaking in tongues. Paul tells them he too uses this prayer language. But, Paul adds, when the Corinthians gather together there must be those who interpret the tongues speaking, otherwise how could it build up the body of Christ. And, more to the point of this study, Paul tells them that each tongues speaker must go in turn. Paul knows that if it seems like a bunch of chaotic babbling, passers by will think these Jesus-people have lost their minds. And if someone thinks you are crazy (or mean or rude or arrogant or spiteful or racist or . . .), then how could you be a good witness to Jesus? Paul's point is as apt now as it was then.

We must always be aware of how we seem to others. That doesn't mean that we will always do or say what pleases everyone. That doesn't mean we will back off from proclaiming the Good News. But it does mean that we must constantly strive to be Christ-like with all people at all times. We must surprise them with our kindness, our compassion, our understanding, our joy, our contentment, and so on.

"They saw it and praised God"

For our second example of witnessing, we turn to Jesus, whose trip to Jerusalem begins in the ninth chapter of Luke's gospel. The trip would end with Jesus on a cross, having passed through

Jericho, a town about eight miles northeast of Jerusalem. As Jesus passed through the town, a blind man in the crowd managed to attract Jesus' attention. When Jesus asked the man what he wanted, his reply was "Lord, let me see again." And the man was healed, enabled to see.

What do you suppose was the crowd's reaction to all this? Well . . . it was pretty much what you'd expect. They were amazed and went around telling everyone what they had seen, praising and proclaiming God the whole time.

Jesus' healing of the blind man was both an act of compassion and an enactment of God's kingdom, in which there are no blind, or lame, or ill, or grieving. But Jesus' healing was still more – it was a powerful *witness* to the power of God.

The modern world often blinds us to God's work. God is reduced to a “god of the gaps” whose work is only credited when we don't think we have a scientific explanation for the event or the phenomena. The problem with this view is that as science explains more and more of our “natural” world, the gap for God to fill gets narrower and narrower. But can science really explain all that is? We say no. We say that if you have the eyes to see and ears to hear, God's work is evident throughout this world. Part of our Christian task is to help the world see the glories of God's creation and his on-going work in this creation.

God's fast

Finally, in our third example, we turn to the book of Isaiah and a few words about fasting, which has a long and rich tradition in Christianity and other religions. John Wesley practiced fasting on a regular basis. I've tried it, though I've only gotten hungry. Still, though I have not mastered fasting as a Christian discipline, I know that many Christians have found it to be a *means* of deepening and enriching their faith. However, it is easy for us to turn a *means* into an *end*. Hundreds of years before Jesus, Isaiah brought God's word that though fasting may be a valuable practice, it is not what God truly desires, it isn't the *end* that we ought to pursue. Rather, what God really wants from us is to “break the chains of injustice . . . to set the oppressed free . . . to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter.”

If this sounds a lot like Jesus, it should. Jesus' teachings echo much of Isaiah and his actions are often the enactment of what Isaiah had promised God would do. It is this call to feed the poor and clothe the naked that drove much of John Wesley's ministry. The England of his day was an often-brutal place, filled with the beyond-hope-poor and ravaged by cheap and deadly alcohol. He preached among them and served them for decades.

The United Methodist Church (UMC) remains strongly committed to social justice and to providing for all those in need. Being a diverse church, we may disagree about the *means* to those *ends*, but we know that pursuit of those ends is an enduring witness to the power of God's Good News. So we open a food pantry and a coat closet. We help women who are out of hope. We help those out of work find a job. We provide college scholarships. We help people learn to manage their finances. We build medical clinics in Costa Rica . . . And in all this, we are witnessing to the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. How does the word “witnessing” strike you? Have you tended to think of it as mostly what you say? Do you agree that witnessing to Christ encompasses all that we say or do? How would you feel if the statement, “I am a Christian,” were stenciled on your forehead? How might it change your activities or your interactions with others? Do you see the problem that arises if you think that the stencil would necessitate big changes in your life? How could we come to live as if the stencil were always there?
2. When it comes to witnessing in what we say and in what we do, taking inventory is always a good idea. Look back over the last week. On what occasions were you a good witness? Any times that you were not so good a witness? How can we go about becoming a better witness? You might discuss how the Holy Spirit helps us in this. How do other Christians help you in this?
3. David Bartlett writes, “. . . [the] difference between Christians and non-Christians is not that we see different things but that we see the same things differently.” What do you think he means? What sort of persons can see things differently? Bartlett writes that the difference between the two ways is faith. How does our faith in Jesus Christ shape our way of seeing? How does our faith help to shape us into the people of love, joy, discipline, humility, and courage that Peter urges Christians to be?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday Isaiah 58 The entire chapter on genuine fasting</p>	<p>Tuesday Isaiah 59:1-8 Why do prayers and fasting have no effect? Not because of God, but because of the people's violence and social injustice.</p>
<p>Wednesday Acts 20:17-35 Paul sends a message to the Christian leaders in Ephesus. See esp. v. 19-24.</p>	<p>Thursday 2 Timothy 4:1-5 Be ready to proclaim the Good News, whether it is convenient or inconvenient.</p>
<p>Friday 1 Peter 2:11-3:20 A long passage about how the Christians are to live in the larger society.</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class - now studying 2 Kings

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class - now studying 1 John

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series:

Why I am not a Calvinist, a neo-Calvinist, or a pseudo-Calvinist, though your son or daughter might be.

Our next series - starting the week after Easter:

The History, Scope, and Goals of the Jihadist Ideology

Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at www.standrewumc.org. Just go to "worship" and then "sermons." You'll find the study with each week's recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at www.scottengle.org

Sermon Notes
