

# THE MOST POWERFUL WITNESS

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***"And He went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the Kingdom of God... and many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled 50,000 pieces of silver. So the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed."*** Acts 19:8,18-20

## **In Word and Deed**

The most powerful witness is the life of integrity of a Christian friend, family member or neighbour. Actions always speak much louder than words. There is no more effective sermon illustration than a life of Christian integrity. Say what you mean. Mean what you say. Be a person of your word.

## **Undermining Evangelism**

Our Lord Jesus Christ was most scathing in His denunciation of hypocrisy. Of the lukewarm, He declared that He would spew them out of His mouth. The greatest threat to our witness is not opposition but apathy. Many are unresponsive to the Gospel message because they have been disgusted by double standards. Inconsistency and half-heartedness undermine the Gospel witness. It does not matter how eloquent your words are if your actions and your lifestyle does not back up your message.

## **A Real Christian**

On one of my first missions, behind the Iron Curtain, a pastor in Romania told me that it is easy to see who is a real Christian: "A real Christian loves God. A real Christian loves the Bible. A real Christian loves prayer. A real Christian hates sin."

***"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good."*** Romans 12:9

***"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate."*** Proverbs 8:13

## **Idolatry Today**

Yet, today, it is more common to see Christians loving the world, tolerating evil, ignoring the Bible and neglecting prayer. Idolatry is rampant and blatant. One even speaks of Hollywood idols, screen idols, stage idols, rock idols, pop idols, rap idols, sports idols, and very obviously political idols. Frequently you will find people who will say absolutely nothing while the name of the Lord God is blasphemed in their presence. However, should somebody criticise their favourite musician, sports star or political idol, then you will see them come alive and animated, speaking up for and defending the honour of what is most important in their life.

***"Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way."***

Psalm 119:104

## **What are You Willing to Speak up For?**

Certainly we must choose our battles. What are you willing to fight over? When do you stand up? What are you willing to speak out for?

Some time ago, I was speaking at a missions symposium and in answer to a question concerning the moral climate in South Africa I mentioned: "Since Nelson Mandela legalised abortion in 1997 almost one million babies have been killed, officially, legally, with taxpayers' money, in South Africa."

## **Taking Offense**

Afterwards, a woman came up to me most irate, railing against me for "slandering President Nelson Mandela." I was a little confused as to what she was mentioning, in the context of all that had been presented in the previous two hours concerning the persecuted church, missions and desperate needs in Africa, she had latched onto this one sentence in response to a direct question.

## **Offended by Facts**

"There was no slander of Nelson Mandela; I merely reported a fact, without any adjectives, nor even any personal comment. It is an historical fact that Nelson Mandela signed into law Abortion-on-demand 1 February 1997. It is also an incontrovertible fact, that according to Ministry of Health statistics almost one million babies have been killed through abortion, officially, legally and with taxpayers' money."

The woman was even more irate, and with red-faced fury, she berated me for not speaking respectfully of "President Nelson Mandela."

### **What Offends You?**

I challenged her: What offends you more: The legalised killing of babies by abortion? Or a Christian missionary who reports the facts?

We can ask this question on many different levels. Were you offended by the Danish cartoons on Muhammad? Or were you more offended by the Muslim violence and intolerance that it was responding to?

Does US military action against radical Muslim extremists offend you? Or are you more offended by radical Muslim terrorists hijacking civilian aircraft, crashing into buildings, and killing thousands of innocent people?

Are you offended by Christian missionaries reporting on Islamic persecution of the Church? Or are you more offended by teenage Christian girls enroute to school in Indonesia being beheaded by Muslim radicals? Does it offend you that a twelve-year-old boy in Pakistan can be condemned to death for the "crime" of sharing the Gospel with other young boys?

Are you offended by some missionaries (like David Livingstone) having weapons for self-defence? Or are you more offended by Marxists terrorists murdering defenceless missionaries and their children, such as happened at the Elim Mission station in the Eastern Highlands of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe?

The day after the St. James massacre, one bishop was quoted on the front page of the daily newspapers in Cape Town condemning the missionary church member who shot back at the terrorists and ended the massacre of innocent Christians. He didn't seem to be as offended by the PAC terrorists who had burst into the evening service at St. James church hurtling hand grenades amidst the packed congregation, opening fire with assault rifles.

## **Identifying Idolatry**

You can quickly see what is most important and what is high priority in a person's life by what they are offended by. What a person is willing to speak up for, fight over and defend in argument tells you what is the most important in their life. If it is not Almighty God and His Word, the Bible, then what is most important in their life is actually an idol.

## **Technological Idols**

There are also technological idols. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with technology. Technology can be a tremendous servant. But that is the point - technology should be a servant not our master. The telephone is meant to be a convenience. If the phone rings at an inconvenient time, such as during devotions, or an important time of counseling, it does not need to be answered. It is shocking how many people will answer phone calls even in church services, in prayer meetings and at funeral services!

## **Easily Distracted**

I read of a man being interviewed for a teacher's position, checking his phone in the middle of the interview as soon as he received a text message. You can be assured he did not get the job.

## **Dangerous Distractions**

There have been numerous cases of drivers crashing while text messaging. The shocking prevalence of drivers not only talking on their cell phones, but reading text messages and sending text messages has led to some horrific vehicle accidents.

## **Obsessive Compulsive Techno-Addicts**

How often haven't we seen a row of teenagers sitting together but all totally absorbed in their cell phones? Nor are young people the only ones guilty of such anti-social behaviour. If you have ever travelled by aircraft, have you noticed how many cell phones, i-phones and blackberry's are immediately checked on to see what messages they might have missed out on in the last hour or so.

## **Idolatrous Twitter**

Reportedly 2.5 million people use Twitter to keep up with every thought and move of Barak Obama. 3.5 million people follow Brittany Spears by Twitter. Do these people not have a life of

their own? These do seem to be other examples of technology being used to advance political idols and stage idols.

***"Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them."*** Deuteronomy 11:16

***"You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. So you shall serve the Lord your God ..."*** Exodus 23:24-25

### **Turning to God Means Turning Away from Idols**

The Apostle Paul taught that an integral part of turning to serve the Living and True God is to turn away from idols. (1 Thessalonians 1:9)

### **The Destructiveness of Sin**

A true Christian hates sin. While doing my military service I witnessed a vivid example of the destructiveness of sin. One of the foulest mouthed, blasphemous pagans in our unit would loudly boast of his drunken orgies and how many girls he had used and abused. He would also regularly make fun of me, as I was the resident "Religious Fanatic" and "Jesus Freak." Then, this individual got into serious trouble for returning late from a pass. He had crashed his vehicle on the way back and was charged with being absent without leave (AWOL). Sometime after that he came to me in some consternation because a girl that he had been with that weekend was pregnant, the father had a large shotgun, and he was being compelled to marry her.

### **What a Man Sows that Shall He Reap**

He admitted that while he had whored around a lot, it had always been his intention to marry a Christian girl, and a virgin! I had to ask him what on earth he thought that he had to offer to such a girl and would he not be a terrible affliction to her?

But this man was overwhelmed with the injustice of it all, that he was being forced to marry someone as immoral as he was! "She already has a child and she's never been married!" He seemed outraged. I pointed out to him that what a man sows that he shall reap. He had no right to expect that his wife would be any different from the way he had behaved.

When the time came for his wedding, he could not organise any special leave or compassionate leave. He had thoroughly exhausted the patience of his unit through his drunkenness and infractions of the rules. He was exasperated, but there was nothing for it but for him to absent himself from the base without leave, with all the risks that it entailed.

As it would happen on the very Saturday that he planned to get married, a Commandant's inspection was called and he could only escape just before noon. As he had wrecked his car on that previous AWOL, he had to hitchhike over 400km. The wedding also had to be postponed into Saturday evening, and the next day he had to begin his hitchhiking back to the unit, in order to avoid being discovered absent on Monday morning.

A couple of months later he came in most somber and serious and informed me that he had been found to have a venerable disease that he had contracted from his wife. This type of sexually transmitted disease would also mean that the child would be born with serious deformities.

Shortly before we completed our military service this same man came in screaming in a rage. Overturning beds and cupboards, he was wild with anger. It turned out, in some argument, that his wife had informed him that he actually wasn't the father of the child, it was his brother, but as he was already married, she had said it was him. He had been too drunk to know the difference!

At this point, I could only say: "Is this the fun I am missing out on?"

***"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."*** Galatians 6:7-8

### **The Wages of Sin is Death**

Sin always takes you further than you want to go. Sin keeps you longer than you want to stay. Sin costs you more than you want to pay.

### **The Most Powerful Witness**

The most powerful witness is a life of integrity of a Christian who has experienced a real encounter with God. A Christian who evidences a vibrant relationship with God in Christ. A

Christian who experiences the power of the Holy Spirit, as he takes up his Cross and follows Christ.

### **Repentance and Restitution**

Destroying the idols in our life, making full restitution for things that we have done wrong, these are some of the most powerful witnesses to a cynical and skeptical world.

A real Christian loves God. A real Christian loves the Bible. A real Christian loves prayer. A real Christian hates sin.

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