

# Faithful Christian Witness in the Space Age Society in Our Job or Business

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It must be a wonderful experience to be a pastor; to serve one's Lord as a captain of His legions, to be His representative. Being a faithful Christian witness is a pastor's job. But a layman is neither spiritual leader nor witness by vocation.

I want you to know, however, that it is also a wonderful experience to be a faithful Christian witness as a layman; to be one who lends substance to the small group of those who will stand up publicly and be counted as an uncompromising Christian.

And it is just as difficult.

The fact is that in their work environment most dedicated laymen feel as did Elijah when he fled from King Ahab, out into the desert. He felt alone in his religious convictions until God told him there were yet 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Let me cite you just one experience. After announcements appeared in the daily press and the Northwestern Lutheran about the Missio Dei Offering and my involvement in it a considerable number of people at my place of work found occasion to give a word of encouragement and their approval of the program, adding that they, too, are Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, and sometimes telling me of their children in our schools. They came out of nowhere, as it were, and declared themselves. Often I thought of Elijah.

How should a layman witness to God and to his faith at his work? An employee is paid to work for his company on his company's affairs and a Christian, particularly, will be conscientious in the use of his working hours; he will not take time from his employer indiscriminately, but there is, of course, some conversation. It is one of the lubricants that make joint efforts pleasant and smoothly running. The most constant indication of a Christian's Christianity, however, is his entire manner of life. It is evidenced in his attitudes toward his work, his fellow man, his God, and those above and below him in his chain of command. It is also evidenced in his language, his conversation, his integrity and his dependability.

A Christian's absolute faith and trust in his Lord gives him an inner joy, a serenity, a contentment with his lot, and an absence of continuing anxiety that are, together, an unmistakable light emanating from his personality. This is the light that must not be hidden under a bushel but set up where the world may see the effects of faith and glorify our Heavenly Father. Right here let me parenthetically emphasize that his contentment with his present lot does not prevent him from constantly striving to use his God given gifts to further his own and his company's welfare. Indeed he will use his talents to the best of his ability if he is a good steward, and use the fruits thereof in a God pleasing manner.

But let us return to the light. This light will not be a deliberately contrived light set up in a conspicuous place, like an advertising sign. It is a spontaneous genuine manifestation of deep faith. We simply *let* it shine, do not deliberately hide it. So we must witness without being ostentatious or overbearing—or we would produce only negative results. Remember, too, that unbelievers also do good works. Our motives and our underlying faith are indicated by our conversation and attitude.

Let me use a parable to illustrate what I mean by judicious witnessing.

Among the workers in a place of business there are three hobbyists, a camera fan, a man interested in automobiles, and a stamp collector.

The photographer is a real enthusiast. He knows he has the best equipment and does not hesitate to tell others its advantages, even if they are just as solidly convinced about their own. He intrudes boldly into conversations, or tries to start them. He does not permit a differing opinion to stand unchallenged. He is sure others could benefit from his undoubted knowledge, and they probably could, but he has made himself and his opinions unwelcome. He has become a bore and a nuisance, along with his opinions, his camera, and his pictures. By pressing his opinions *inappropriately* he has lost his influence.

The second hobbyist likes cars. Ever since he was a boy he has taken a keen interest in what makes them run, how they are built, and the continuing improvements and changes. Of course he takes excellent care of his own car; it is always in good condition and always dependable. When a good opportunity presents itself, his knowledge of his hobby and his enthusiasm bubble over in a friendly manner. He makes observations and suggestions, he shares his knowledge, but he does not offensively criticize. He permits his hearer to make his own decision.

When someone has trouble with his car this man is sought out for a suggestion. At lunch, or on the way to the parking lot, when conversation drifts to automobiles, he joins in. He tells about some new feature of a new model. He is spontaneously helpful but he does not force. He suggests testing the anti-freeze in fall, because he knows the human tendency to forget. He knows the reason for some unpopular law or regulation, such as an unpopular speed limit, and tries to achieve willing acceptance by showing the reason for the regulation. If someone disagrees, he does not insist, but recognizes the other's point of view and lets the matter rest for the time being. He has made his point, and later reflection may yet change the other's opinion.

The third man with a hobby is the stamp collector. He was with his company many years and is a valued employee. At a meeting at which a problem involving a remote foreign country was being discussed, no one seemed to know anything about that country. This man finally, timidly, almost reluctantly admitted that he was somewhat familiar with that area. With some prodding, he told of its exact location, products, transportation, climate, and something of its government.

His surprised colleagues asked how he happened to be so familiar with this remote country. Then, for the first time after all these years, it was discovered that this man had an extensive stamp collection as a hobby. He learned all he could about each country represented in his collection. He was, in fact, a member of the local society of philatelists.

This employee's knowledge would have been valuable many times in the past, but no one knew of it. He never spoke of his special interest. He had seen others who had displayed their hobbies, perhaps not humbly and with consideration, and were rebuffed, so he kept his thoughts to himself.

Which of these three hobbyists let his light shine in a manner to benefit others and influence them favorably?

The answer is obvious. The automobile hobbyist used his knowledge discriminately. He did not hide it. He did not teach, because he did not have a class, and after all he was at work, but he was truly helpful when the occasion presented itself, and he occasionally created those occasions. He did not rub salt into wounds, but when a need arose or it was appropriate, he was the salt of the earth.

We need not spend much time with the camera fan. We know of some people of this type in the field of religion and their tactics are not ours.

But aren't most of us laymen in the rut of the timid stamp collector? This man knew he had a relatively unpopular hobby, and he did not want to be known as a member of a minority, so he kept still. Had he been interested in sports, for example, he may have joined in innocuous recounting of the exploits of well accepted heroes. But philately! He hid his light under a bushel. It is prudent to keep quiet about one's religion when to speak up would be casting pearls to the swine to be trodden underfoot, but we should speak up at the right time.

Sometimes we must answer a challenge, and not shy away from it. An acquaintance of mine attended the funeral of a friend. The sermon stressed that despite sins and shortcomings in this life, as we all have, the deceased had a strong faith in her Savior and therefore, through the grace of God, was now relieved of earthly cares and in the bliss of heaven.

A friend who also attended the funeral strongly berated the sermon. The minister, she said, stressed the deceased's sins more than all her good works, for she was a very good woman, and she really had very few faults. This friend wanted neither law nor gospel, only a soothing eulogy.

My acquaintance told her friend that she liked the sermon very much. Our comfort at the death of a loved one comes from the surety of salvation. Since we are not perfect, we know that we cannot earn salvation ourselves; we must, accept the salvation of Jesus, through faith, which this deceased had evidenced. The pastor was not only comforting the survivors, he was also urging his hearers to put their faith in Him as the deceased had done.

Questions concerning religion arise from time to time in daily conversation. We should answer them if we can, but do it amicably and with understanding of the other person and his background. If we don't know the answer we should make it a point to find out for our own later use.

And while we are still talking about witnessing by word of mouth, let us not overlook those despoilers of communication: cursing and swearing. Such blatant defiance of the explicit commands of God to love and not to hate our neighbor and not to swear by God or what is in the heavens or on the earth or under the earth, is certainly witnessing *against* our faith in our Lord.

We witness to our faith by our attitudes toward those about us as well as by our words. Do we follow the biblical admonitions regarding our superiors? Do we show loyalty, faithfulness, obedience? How about those who work for us? Are we always considerate, reasonable? Are we respectful of their work and techniques, yet provide leadership and guidance? Or do we tend to be dictatorial, haughty and proud, reluctant to admit mistakes?

Some of the strongest witnessing is done by our actions. When our actions light lights, their beams are seen farther and longer than those created by our words.

When we have been patently and seriously wronged, how do we react? Do we crave to get even? If we cannot correct the situation we should peacefully accept our lot, not in fear, but in the strength of confidence that God will provide for us.

Not long ago a man was demoted unfairly. A man who was present at the demotion meeting later talked privately with the victim. He told him that he was greatly impressed with the calm, Christian-like manner in which he took the rebuff. He said it clearly showed an inner strength of character—of faith. This, too, was witnessing, effectual witnessing.

A Christian witnesses strongly for Christ when he is obviously content with what God has given him, even though he may also be working hard for betterment.

Now, for a moment, let us look at a few examples of witnessing against our Lord. Everyone who mixes with people has heard the boasts of those who habitually break the speed or other traffic laws. If they do not see a policeman around, they feel the law is fair game for them. The Bible says the government is God's representative, and we are bound by its laws as long as they are on the books and are not contrary to the Word of God. Such a boast is obviously witnessing against, not for, God.

Or consider the tax laws. Trying to get by illegally with the government is as much withholding from Caesar that which is Caesar's today as it was when Jesus was discussing this matter with the Jews, who felt the tax burden perhaps even more keenly than we do. Again, for whom are these so loudly witnessing when they boast of their shady accomplishments, and perhaps advise others not to be "suckers"?

The man who is known to take unfair advantage of others on occasion, who gives himself an edge in a deal, who schemes and uses clever but shady devices, is witnessing the wrong way. So is the man who forces his way by usurping prerogatives, who plays the "big shot." And so are those who avoid helping others who are in need. These are like the Levite and the priest who passed by the robbed and wounded traveler. It was the Samaritan who witnessed as we should witness.

We all witness by our words, our attitudes and our deeds. The conscientious Christian sees to it that his witness is in the right direction, and he doesn't hide it.

This is a large and difficult order, indeed. I said at the beginning that it is just as difficult for a layman to be a faithful, Christian witness as it is for a pastor. We can expect this. Jesus has said that he who will not take up his cross and follow Him is not worthy of Him. But He also promised us that He would give us the strength to bear the burdens He places upon us, and that He would not give us burdens we could not bear.

How, then, shall we get the strength and the ability to do all this ?

1. By prayer—earnest, frequent, sincere, about everything that concerns us. We should especially ask that our faith be strengthened. "Ye have not because ye ask not." "Ask and it shall be given you.
2. By continuing study of God's Word. Search the Scriptures, in church, in classes, by reading and home discussions. By knowing, whereof we speak, and knowing what we believe.
3. By practicing our faith. Of course we will waver at times. Then we should work all the harder at our practicing, prayerfully. Remember the words of the father of the ailing son, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief."
4. By living a day at a time, confident in the goodness of God. Be diligent, but don't worry and fret unduly about the future. God will take care of His own. Remember the fourth petition in the Lord's prayer says, "Give us *this day* our daily bread."

Then, by the grace of God, we will have true humility, abiding faith, and we will know what we believe and be able to explain it to others. Our witness will be inevitable and it will not be lukewarm!