

# *Witnesses Unto Me*

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## Preparation

"And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Lord Jesus Christ gave this commission to His disciples when He was with them for the last time just before He ascended into heaven. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." Witnesses – this is the part, the role that believers are to play in the spread of the Gospel over the whole world.

The simple fact back of all this is that the truth of the Gospel is revealed from heaven. Paul could write, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). You can't get at it naturally; you don't know it naturally. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall, be saved" (Rom. 10:13). That's wonderfully true. Paul went on to say, "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?" With this series of questions Paul points directly to the universal need of man: man needs to be told. Someone who knows the Gospel must tell other persons what is available for them in Christ Jesus. This was back of the Great Commission. When the Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations," the idea was that the nations didn't know. They needed to be taught.

This Gospel message is not an uncovering of some natural potential, something in human nature that was always true and only needed to be seen. We talk today about scientific discoveries such as the discovery of electricity. Electricity was always operative but it had never been recognized. Man had never learned of it or how to control it. The Gospel is not like that. The Gospel is rather the proclamation, the announcement, of a new creation in Christ. Something is true in Christ Jesus that never was true before and isn't true anywhere else. This means that the Christian is not some educated human being, some refined human being, some moral person, some trained person, some disciplined human, being. *The Christian is someone who has received the Lord Jesus Christ as His Savior.* As the Apostle John put it, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God" (1 Jn. 3:2). We didn't used to be, but now we have received Jesus Christ. "To them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name " (Jn. 1:12). The revelation of this new life in God was manifested in Jesus of Nazareth. For instance, we read in Paul's writings about the knowledge of the glory of God which is to be seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ could say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). He was not referring to His personal appearance, because we know nothing about the personal appearance of Jesus of Nazareth. It isn't a case of seeing something about the person of Jesus of Nazareth that will let you know the truth. Nor is it in the manner of His personal behavior among men. There is no description of how the Lord Jesus lived in the neighborhood, how He lived in the community, how He dealt with other people.

But the deeds and event that are recorded and that "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" are such as these. If someone didn't tell you about the Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, you of never know it. If someone didn't tell you that Jesus of Nazareth lived in this world in human form and all the time He only did what God wanted Him to do, He did nothing of Himself, He did only as the Father in heaven, you would never imagine such a life. If someone had not told you of Jesus of Nazareth going to Calvary's cross to die for sinners, you couldn't have thought of such a thing. There's nothing like it on the face of the earth. Especially is this true of the resurrection. No one

else has a story anywhere in the world that's like the resurrection. Consider the ascension into heaven, then Pentecost – God coming down into the hearts of people, and the present ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ – how He acts right now as the Lord and the Head of the Church which is His body, how He is the Lord of those who believe in Him, and also how He is right now the Intercessor and Advocate in heaven, praying for us. Again, nobody could ever imagine about His coming again if it weren't written. All these facts, recorded as events in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, need to be told about. They need to be talked about.

All the truth that is in Christ Jesus seems to be climaxed in the resurrection from the dead. In a sense, that seems to embody all that God wanted to say in Christ Jesus. And He said that would be the only sign He would give of the kingdom of God. When you have said, "But God raised him from the dead" (Acts 13:30), you've said the big thing. This is the crucial consideration in the whole Christian message. Everything else is true if this is real.

But you know, to say in so many words, "God raised him from the dead," is not really telling the truth of it. I wonder if I can share this with you now? You could repeat that. Anybody can repeat it. Will that convey the idea? It was said of the Lord when He was here upon earth that He spake not as the scribes, but "as one having authority." And a witness would be a person who is speaking not as the scribes, repeating something they have heard, but as one having authority, sharing something that they had seen, handled and knew about. Mere talk about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, merely telling the story of the Lord Jesus Christ is not enough. The witness of Jesus Christ must be someone who has authority in his very presentation.

How can a person have this authority? Ordinarily, if a person comes to tell you something, you feel right away like asking him, "Did you see this yourself or has someone else told you?" If the person didn't see it himself, you don't feel it has the same weight. The same is true with a Christian. In order that a Christian might be able to tell the story of the Lord Jesus Christ with authority so that other people will pay attention. to it, the witness needs to be prepared. This preparation will involve certain conditions.

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Does this mean that they were people who would just *tell* the story? Christ meant His witnesses to be people who can, tell the story *with authority*; they will actually convey the impression that this thing is real. Now I want to draw your attention in the first two chapters of Acts to certain conditions that have to be met, certain preparation that can be made for the person who will tell the Gospel story.

The first thing is that there needs to be *conviction*. If you will notice in the opening verses of the first chapter, the Lord Jesus spent some forty days with His disciples, showing them by many infallible proofs that He was actually, literally raised from the dead. Why did He take that long? Hadn't He been there and hadn't He shown it to them? Yes, He had told them and He had even appeared, but the human heart is slow to come to the conviction of a thing like this. Is it really true? Is Jesus actually, really alive? Even if you heard it with your ears can you believe it in your heart? It's when you believe it in your heart that it's effective. Now so far as they were concerned, they needed really and truly inwardly to be convinced and have conviction that Jesus is alive.

This means that heaven is real and God is real and you can actually have communion with God. God can raise the dead, because He did. He does raise the dead even now in the spirits and experience of people who believe. He will raise the dead at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This must be far more than mere words.

Take, for instance, a mother or a father in dealing with their children. If they tell them the story of the Lord Jesus Christ, and if from the bottom of their hearts they actually do believe that Jesus is alive, that heaven is real, that God exists, the children get the impression that it's true. This is sharing the Gospel story. In other words, the man who is bringing the message must be a man who himself knows for sure it

is so.

It's as if a man were coming to bring you a cup of tea, and you ask him if this tea has been sweetened: "Is it sweet?" If the man says, "Well, I think so, they told me it was," that's one thing. But someone who has tasted it can say to you, "Yes, it's sweet." You could ask him, "How do you know?" "I tasted it." That man knows. Someone may bring water to you and you could ask, "Is it hot?" He could tell you it was hot because he took it off the stove and so on. But I'll tell you one man who really knows – and that's the man who puts his finger in it.

If you really want your Sunday School class to get the impression that Jesus Christ is alive, the question is do you believe it? Is it so with you? Is it unquestionably true in your own heart and experience? That makes you a good teacher. That makes you a good preacher. Now you've got conviction and what's in your heart can be passed on to other hearts. You can share it with other people.

Not only were the disciples convinced that Jesus was alive, but they then received a commission. They were to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, and they were to teach the Gospel to all nations. This wasn't an elective for them. They had the responsibility to share with all men everywhere that when Christ Jesus died on Calvary's cross He died for all men, and that salvation is now available for anyone, anywhere. Notice how it is listed. They were to be witnesses unto Him in Jerusalem. That's right where they lived. Then they were to witness in Judaea, which was their neighborhood. Next, He mentioned Samaria and that meant among the people who lived just outside their neighborhood. Finally, they were to go unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Notice the order of this thing. First of all, and most of all, at home, right there in your own home among your own children you are to witness. Then you are to be a witness among your own friends, your own acquaintances and your own neighborhood; then outside your neighborhood with other people, and then to the whole wide world. I am reminded of what happens when you drop a stone in a pool of water. The biggest splash is right where the stone dropped in. Out from that point go the waves in all directions, around and around just like circles. But it starts at home and it's most important there.

So far as you and I are concerned as witnesses, we need to make the impact right in our own home . . . exactly where you eat breakfast, exactly where you get up in the morning, exactly where you come home to be at night, where you come to eat your evening meal, where the children come to live, exactly where you folks live together, right there is where you need to demonstrate that you know absolutely and for sure that Jesus Christ really is alive, that God is actually real, that He will come to be with you, and you can have dealing with Him. This is the first thing you need in order to be a good witness. The person who is going to tell this story anywhere else needs to be able to tell it with conviction and authority right in the very house where he lives. You can teach this in Sunday School, if you believe it in your own family. If you believe it there at home, then you have a commission that wherever you are, you are to let your light shine.

The next thing we see is in the latter part of the first chapter. The disciples took time out, while they were having their prayer meeting, to correct something that was wrong. They only had eleven and they were supposed to have twelve. (There originally were twelve apostles. One of these fell by the wayside. That was Judas.) Peter stood up among them and said, "This isn't right; there ought to be twelve." And so they corrected it. So I want to put in the word *correction*. Conviction you need to have. Commission you need to feel. Correction you need to submit to.

Just as surely as you want to be a witness for the lord Jesus Christ there may be something in, the way in which you do things that needs to be corrected. It might be that the way you lived up till now you thought was perfectly all right, but after you become a witness for Jesus Christ you need to change that and you need to make it entirely right in His sight. Obedience to Christ will make things right, and a yielded, surrendered person will make any adjustment that is necessary to please the Lord Jesus Christ. As witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ, when we actually do believe in Him, there has got to be something of

His way of doing things to show up in our ways. And, "it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15). If the Lord Jesus Christ were here on earth He would break no laws. He would do everything that He ought to do. And this the Christian witness will do.

I must hurry on now to the second chapter and in the first part of the second chapter, is the story of Pentecost. What I want to leave with you is that here the witnesses were consecrated. They were consecrated by receiving the Holy Spirit of God.

When you are consecrated you receive into your heart the very presence of God. Believers cannot see God and they cannot see His works directly. The ways of God are to be seen in Jesus Christ. But the Holy Spirit will take the truth of Christ and show Him unto you. I need to be conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit, willing to listen to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that I might come to know the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way the believer becomes a member of His body and serves as he is led. I have had to say this rather quickly, but you should have in mind that, in order to be able to witness, a person needs to be conscious of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.

One more thing. Toward the end of the second chapter you'll see that the witness has *communion* with other believers. The Christian person as a witness is never alone. His public utterance will show that he is one with others. And if he associates with other believing people, and they altogether believe these things, there'll be something about their testimony that will cause people on the outside to see and recognize that they have been with Jesus.

## Peter

"When Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas" (Jn. 1:42). This is one of the earliest reports that we have of Simon Peter, when he was brought to meet the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to talk to you about Peter as a witness for Jesus Christ.

Of the twelve apostles, perhaps the best known is Peter, the fisherman. He may well have been the spokesman for the group. So many times when you read of one apostle speaking out, that person was Peter. The record of Peter reflects so many human aspects, and, somehow or other that encourages many people to feel that this man, Peter, was a person very much the same as themselves. And so we often watch him and think to ourselves, "That's just the way it would have been with us."

Perhaps it's very significant that what we notice so particularly are his limitations. I say that's significant, not about Peter, but it is about us. Maybe the reason why we take such encouragement from seeing Peter's various ways of doing things is because we're so human in any case, we oftentimes enjoy repeating to one another the fact that he was a fisherman. He wasn't a scholar. He wasn't a priest. He wasn't a governor. He wasn't a great public official of any sort. He made his livelihood by being partner with some other men in the fishing trade.

Then we notice his natural doubts. We remember the occasion when the Lord Jesus said to him to take his boat and to go out into the lake to catch some fish. Peter answered and said, "Master, we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing" (Lk. 5:5). He didn't have any confidence in going out at that time. We have a real appreciation of that. Or for instance, when he had seen the Lord Jesus walking on the water and, all of the disciples were frightened, it was Peter who spoke up and said, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." The Lord Jesus said, "Come," and Peter stepped out and walked on the water. Then we read, "When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and [began] to sink" (Mt. 14:22-23). Immediately we think to ourselves that is just the way it would be with us, and we think that we're just like Peter. Or we see ourselves with Peter the time the Lord Jesus had been, talking to the rich young ruler and had told him what he would need to give up in order to follow Him. He had to give up everything and take up his cross in order to follow the lord Jesus Christ. It was Peter who spoke up and said, "We have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Mt. 19:27).

Or perhaps we understand Peter even in his darkest moment when the Lord Jesus was in the courtroom in front of the high priest, being judged, there in the presence of the council, and when the maid came and said to Peter, "Surely thou also art one of them." To hear Peter say, "I know not the man," repeating it the second time, and the third time, cursing and swearing to say that he knew nothing of Him (Mt. 26:69-75), we can all think to ourselves, "Oh, poor Peter, a weak man who fell in that fashion." It may be, as I say, that the very fact we notice those limitations is an indication of a dread in ourselves that because we're not strong maybe we couldn't come to God. But if a weak person could come, maybe we could come.

It is to be regretted, I think, for everyone of us that we are not ready equally to notice the spiritual experiences of this man and to take note of his obedient responses. Let me go back over some of the things we talked about. I know it's true that when the Lord Jesus told him to go out and cast his net in the lake that Peter said there were no fish out there. I realize that. But will you see that, despite those doubts, he obeyed? "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." If by any chance you think you're like Peter, in that you have doubts, will you be like Peter in that you obey? Will you also go? Oftentimes the conviction will not come from argument but from demonstration. If you would just do what the Lord asks you to do, you'd have your answer.

Take Peter on the occasion when the Lord asked him to come out on the water. Now I am sure that Peter as a fisherman, being on the lake all the time, would know the danger of stepping out of the boat. He wasn't even sure that it was the Lord Jesus out there. He didn't know but what he was just seeing an hallucination. And yet, when this One said to him, "Come," he obeyed the call and he stepped out. I know he began to sink, but don't forget he stepped out. Don't miss the point that although he was a man of little faith, he did have some faith. He had enough faith to start. And he had enough faith to call out to the Lord.

Then again you know he was an impulsive person and he had all kinds of ideas that prompted him quickly to do this or that, though not always along the line the Lord had in mind. But this same man was shown the power of God. Don't forget that this is the person who was with the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His great spiritual experiences. When the Lord Jesus came to the rich man's home and the daughter was lying dead in her bed, you remember the Lord Jesus put everybody out except Peter, James and John. And you will recall that on each occasion, that He performed some miracle Peter was always right there. When the Lord Jesus stood on the Mount of Transfiguration, do you realize that wasn't done in front of everybody? But do you know which apostles were there? Peter, James and John.

This should be a call to you. If you have felt that you were like Peter in that you also had doubts and misgivings and questions, will you now follow Peter in that you will also admit the reality of the things of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you join Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, and see the Lord Jesus actually as the Son of God? You know, despite the fact that the Apostle Peter is the very man who denied his Lord in the presence of a young girl, he was especially commissioned by his Lord, "Feed my sheep." "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

It's true that before the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ this man Peter was like a broken reed. But at the same time you want to remember that he came through with such a response to the Lord that the Lord could deal with him. Before the resurrection Peter was sleeping when he should have been praying, fighting when he should have been yielding, and falling when he could have been standing. Do you remember that on one occasion the Lord Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren"? (Lk. 22:32). It wasn't that the Lord Jesus Christ saw something in Peter that the Lord Jesus could strengthen and make something out of, but He did see in Peter some one who would believe in Him, someone who would receive Him, someone whom He could convince. And when Peter *was* convinced, he gave himself entirely to his Lord.

When the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, Mary Magdalene and the women were told, "Tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee" (Mt. 28:7). The Lord had His eye on this man. After the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, this man Peter was given special attention. You remember on the shore of the lake when the seven disciples had come in from fishing all night the Lord Jesus called them in to him to dine with Him. In the last chapter of John you read about this. It was Peter He turned to when He asked, "Lovest thou me more than these?" And Peter said, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." And He said to him, "Feed my lambs." Again He asked Peter, "Lovest thou me?" When Peter was grieved because He asked the third time, the Lord Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." And then He gave him a very special instruction: "[When you were young you went where you wanted to go. You acted independently. But when you are mature, when you are an older man and mature], another shall gird thee, and take thee whither thou wouldst not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." And so the word went around among the disciples that Peter would be martyred, and he was, eventually. We hear from tradition that Peter did give his life for his testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ.

After the Lord Jesus had gone into heaven and was sending His Holy Spirit into the disciples' hearts and He had given them their commission, Peter is an outstanding witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. In that prayer meeting they had in the upper room for those ten days after the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, it was Peter who acted as the leader. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to be in the hearts

of the believers, and they all spoke with tongues – some hundred and twenty persons altogether – the one person who got up and acted as the preacher on that occasion was none other than Peter. And there you will remember the amazing thing that some three thousand people became believers.

You will recall that on one occasion in the temple at the hour of prayer it was Peter and John who were used for the healing of the lame man. When the Christians for the first time exercised their faith in the risen Lord on behalf of other people, it was Peter who said, "Such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6), and took him by the hand and raised him up and, made him walk. This was Peter, this witness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The leaders in the temple were unhappy with the emphasis that Peter was giving. They brought him and John in and arrested them, warning them not to preach at all in the name of the Lord Jesus. But Peter stood up to say, "You'll have to be the judges as to whether we should obey you or obey God. We can't do anything we haven't been told to do." Then they told Peter and John. that if they preached, they would be whipped. Then they came out from there, went to their own, church and told them. The church prayed, to Almighty God for grace and strength to bear a strong witness for Christ. It was Peter, among others, who went out preaching in front of everybody about the truth of the risen Christ, bearing witness to all the world that Jesus Christ was really raised from the dead. You will recall that they were put into prison and beaten with rods as the leaders said they would do. But you will remember they didn't complain. They came out "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."

Then Peter was imprisoned by Herod and it looked as though Herod was going to kill him. Herod had killed James with the sword. With the whole church praying for him throughout the night, Peter was there waiting for the morning when Herod was going to put him to death. But during the night he was released by Almighty God and went on, with his testimony. Throughout his whole career Peter went on witnessing to everybody, both small and great, the things that pertain to his living Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ.

On one occasion in Joppa you will remember that men came to him from Cornelius. They asked him to come and tell Cornelius the truth of God. And so, Peter went into the house of a Gentile, ignoring the social tradition of the time, because God led him to do so. Peter did this, although he wasn't careless. He took six men with him. He had them right there with him to see exactly what happened. He went into the house of Cornelius and told the story of the Lord Jesus Christ, and God, gave them the Holy Spirit so that the Gentiles were now admitted into the kingdom of God. Later on, when the whole church came together to argue about the matter and wondered whether or not the Gentiles could receive the Gospel or if they would have to become Jews first, it was Peter who stood up before them and told them what God had done.

All through the first part of the book of Acts you will find Peter is the strong man, and surely he stands like a rock among the others in giving out the witness and the testimony. Now ask yourself what made the difference in this man. Why was it that just a few weeks before, this man would deny his Lord in the presence of the soldiers and, a young maid, but now he would stand up and take a beating if necessary and be glad to take it in order to tell people about the risen lord Jesus Christ? He had been made a witness. He was convinced that Jesus was alive. He really believed that Jesus was in heaven praying for him, and he was having personal fellowship with the Lord. He personally was dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ and, in communion with his brethren, was living here on earth trusting in the living Lord.

To be sure, Peter was just a human being. To be sure, he had human frailties. To be sure, on occasion he didn't understand things as well as Paul understood them, we will say. But always in his testimony for Jesus Christ he was a rock, the kind of a rock the Lord Jesus said He would build His church.



## Stephen

"And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:5). In these words we are introduced to the man who was to become the first person to die because of his faith in Jesus Christ. The occasion of his being brought to our attention is the choice by the early church of the first deacons, as we read in Chapter 6 of the Book of the Acts. The apostles told the people, "Look ye out among you seven, men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," that they might appoint them to the business of administering the food to the church. The apostles said they would give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. So we read, "And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost."

It is often, true that when you call a man a real Christian you're really praising him as being exceptional. When you think of a person as being a real Christian you might say he is kind, honest, clean, considerate, helpful, humble, meek – all these things go together to make up what we customarily would think of as a Christian. Those outside the faith have a clear picture of the virtue, integrity and honesty that they expect to find in a Christian. The world outside will tell you that a Christian is a person who helps the poor. He guides the blind. He is to comfort the mourning and the grieving ones. He is to assure and strengthen the fearful ones. And perhaps he is even to keep foolish men from their foolishness at any cost and with no limit to himself. And no doubt there are many sincere Christians who wish that they could just fill this picture.

But right here we must be very careful in our own understanding. The significant element in any person's being a Christian is not his sweet unselfish character and conduct. The significant element in any man, who is a Christian is Christ Jesus. It's that the man believes in and belongs to the Lord. The Lord Jesus said, "Without me ye can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). He called upon His disciples to abide in Him and said that He would abide in them. This is the important thing. Christians must beware that they are not tricked at this point. "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:5). To be sure, Christians may be sweet. It's nice when they are. They may be kind, gentle and unselfish. But the Christian is a witness in his deed and his word to Christ Jesus.

So it was with Stephen. Let us look again at Acts 6:5, "They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." What is this thing of being "full of faith"?

In what sense would you be full of faith? You would be full if every part of your mind, every area in your consciousness were filled with the realization of Jesus Christ, affected by the living Lord Jesus Christ. When we say that Stephen was full of faith we mean that in every part of his personal experience faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was a living real factor. By faith we mean that he was committing himself to the Lord in, the thing he had faith about.

For a man to be full of faith you would mean to say that in the dairy round of work and living he is conscious of the lord Jesus Christ at all times. This man, would be full of faith in his daily work. When he is thinking about his family, his children, what is going to happen to them afterwards, what is happening now to his parents, to his brothers and sisters – when this man thinks of them in their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, then he is full of faith.

In community life, perhaps he lives on a certain street and he's got neighbors around. If a man is full of faith it will mean so far as that community life is concerned, he is conscious of the reality of God and is living in the presence of God. He is concerned about common public interest. For instance, he may be interested in the government. of his city, in the mayor, in the town council, in the school board. He may be

interested in, the state government. He may be interested in the federal government. He may even be interested in the United Nations or any of the things that are going on in the whole world. Now if the man is full of faith it will mean that he has faith toward God in everything. Or in the matter of his own personal prospects, he will have faith concerning what is going to happen today, tomorrow, next week. How much longer will I have in this world? How will I ever get my work done? A man who is full of faith will have faith in God about these things in his personal perspective. Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit will make the believer conscious of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. "He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you" (Jn. 16:15). When you are full of the Holy Spirit, it means that insofar as you think of yourself in relation to Almighty God you're standing in His presence as a sinner and as a person dependent upon Him. God knows all about you and is watching over you. You will remember that Christ died for you, that He is interceding for you, that He is your advocate in the presence of God. You can have a quietness and confidence in the very presence of God which shall be your strength.

So far as your personal conduct is concerned, the way in which you live your own life, you will realize you don't always do the things that you ought to do. If you're full of the Holy Spirit, He will remind you of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus died for your sins. You are to commit yourself to the Lord Jesus and be crucified with Him, that you may be raised with Him and live with Him.

In relation to your own future hope of glory, if the Holy Spirit is actually working in your consciousness and in your soul, He will remind you that when you leave this world you will go to be with the Lord. He has gone to prepare a place for you. He will come again and receive you unto Himself. You will never be away from the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will remind you of this. Every person who is a Christian and with the Scriptures of the New Testament in mind will, be aware that, so far as His own personal life is concerned, the Lord Jesus comes to live with him and to be with him. Christ Jesus is actually available at all times. And the Holy Spirit will make you conscious of the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we see when they chose a man who was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, they were really choosing a man who was a true Christian.

Now look in verse 8 of Chapter 6. "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Stephen had just been elected a deacon. As a chosen representative of the Christians, people would naturally come to him about the Gospel. They would want to find out what this thing is that he is representing. Here we find again, that he was a man full of faith and power. Now we have already talked about what being full of faith would mean. Anything that was brought before him to consider he would handle, not in his own wisdom or strength, but he would relate each and every situation, to the living Lord. Power is what you have when things actually come to pass. The living Lord Jesus who would have this personal fellowship with Stephen would work through Stephen and produce results beyond the natural. Such results would draw interest and attention. This would gain favor.

I want to draw your attention in what follows here to a number of things about the Christian when he is thus attracting attention through the miracles and wonders which he does. The record says, "He did great wonders and miracles among the people." We see now that the Christian aroused opposition from unbelievers. They were opposed to him. This is unavoidable. But notice in verse 10, "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." Stephen, was able to give such a witness, such a testimony that his opponents could not gain any advantage over him. And, of course, this would cause them to be very much chagrined and more inclined to violence. Then we read that because they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake, the Christian is falsely accused. There seems to be no way to escape from this so far as the world is concerned. If they can't beat you one way, they will do it some other way. The Christian will be accused of something which may have an element and an appearance of justification about it, but it's wrong in the way in which it is presented.

You will remember that when Hannah, who later bore Samuel, was praying so earnestly, Eli thought she was drunk. When the Hebrews wanted to leave Egypt and go three days journey into the desert to worship God, Pharaoh thought they were lazy and wanted to get out of work. When Mordecai was living in the city where Esther was, Haman sought every way possible to have him killed. You will remember that there were people opposed to Daniel because he was so successful. In that way he aroused their animosity and opposition. The Lord Jesus, standing before Pilate, was accused of all kind of things. The disciples on the day of Pentecost were accused of being drunk when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul in court was falsely accused. There doesn't seem to be any way of avoiding this.

I have given a little bit of extra attention to this matter of the Christian's being falsely accused because you will find this one of the hardest things to face. You try living the Christian life. You try to do the right thing and the people who are opposed to you, and who don't want to live the way you live, will I actually find fault with you and falsely accuse you. But the Christian will be sustained by the Lord as Stephen was. We read in Acts 6:15, they "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."

Then we find that the Christian was ready to answer for the hope that he had. Throughout the whole seventh chapter we have a long account of Stephen telling why he believed as he did. He gave a masterly review of Scripture to show God's way and that he was in God's way. When the people began to get ready to stone him to death and gathered around him in that final scene, we find that the Christian is very conscious of his living Lord. He was able to witness to the world outside because he personally knew the Lord. He could say, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." That's in 7:56. This enraged the unbelievers. So in verses 57 and 58 we find that they stoned him. But the Christian put himself in the hands of God: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And with all that persecution going on, actually killing him, the Christian was meek, with no malice: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And so we come to the end of his days, finding that the Christian witness can rest quietly in the Lord. We read, "When he had said this, he fell asleep." The language is that of a little baby falling asleep in his mother's arms.

This Christian witness did not suffer in vain. A certain young man was there that day and he saw it all. This was Saul, whom God later called to be His own servant.

## Philip

"Then, Philip went down, to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). In this study we're going to look at a man who witnessed to Christ in his service. We can always appreciate the martyr who gives his life. We humbly pause before such faithfulness, loyalty and commitment to God.

But now I want us also to realize that we can appreciate the messenger who gives his life in service. It's true that some, when they declare their faith in Jesus Christ, must face sharp opposition. It's also true that some, when they declare their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, must serve in steady opportunity. You will, appreciate right away that there is a sense in which it's easier in one great dramatic moment, by the inspiration of the hour, to stand up and to give your life than to bear your cross day by day, constantly denying self in humble, wearying service. Not very many of us are going to be called upon, to die for our faith. But every single Christian is being called on day by day to live for it.

There will be times when we must witness to people who disagree with our ideas. That may amount to contention. We will try to encourage people to believe in Christ who don't want to. Some of us want to read the Bible and other people don't. Some of us think we ought to do visitation for the sake of the Gospel. Other people think we ought to leave people alone. There will be times when our testimony and our witnessing for Jesus Christ will enter into disagreement with people. But there will also be other times when our witness to the Lord Jesus Christ is not a matter of contention and not a matter of disagreement. We will be witnessing to people who simply do not know, but who are ignorant.

This is the way it is with parents and children. Parents try to teach their children something the children don't know. Children sometimes are not willing to learn. But parents have the steady task, day in and day out, here a little, there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept, to teach to their children the things that pertain to the truth of God and of the Gospel.

We find the same to be true with neighbors. We may have neighbors who do not give us any particular opposition so far as spiritual things are concerned, but they have no idea how to use the Lord's Day. They have no idea what it means to go to prayer meeting. They don't have any idea of what it means to read the Bible or to have prayer in their homes. And their fellowship with us causes us to be under constant tension in the sense that we have a wearying task of telling them and showing them, over and over again, what it really means to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This can happen with your friends or other people.

In Philip we see the life of service in witnessing. He is an example of a man who witnessed by seeking to win people to the Lord.

The first place in which we find Philip doesn't refer to him alone. He was one of those of whom it was said, in Acts 6:3, "Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." Honest report means he had a good reputation. It means not only that he was honest and faithful in business, but also he had a good testimony. Doubtless everybody knew that he was a believer. And he conducted himself in that way. He lived openly and outwardly and plainly in front of people, and they had to admit that he acted like a Christian. Full of the Holy Ghost, as we saw in the study on Stephen, meant he was conscious of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at all times. And his having wisdom would indicate he had good common sense. He was practical. He was a committed man, a spiritually-minded man, and a practical man with good sense.

In Acts 8:5 we come to find out about this man in action. This was after Stephen had given his witness and had been stoned to death. We read, "Then, Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." This is a bit different. You'd have to make some study to see the difference between the

way Philip presented his material and Stephen's witness. You may ask which one was better, but it's not a question of which one was better. Where as Stephen was in Jerusalem giving his testimony, Philip went to Samaria. When you're dealing with people who claim to know, you often have to differ with them. If you are dealing with people who admit that they don't know, in a certain sense it's easier to start talking to them. In any case, Philip went down to the city of Samaria.

He preached Christ. He preached to them the truth of John 3:16. He told them that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He told the Samaritans that "the Son of man. is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:1-10). And you know that he assured them that all who come to Christ will in no wise be cast out (John 6:37). You know, too, that he emphasized that Jesus Christ is alive. He preached Christ, the Savior and the Lord, alive now and coming again. He preached this way to the people of Samaria.

In verse 6, we read, "The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." If we take that sentence as a whole, we find that it's a deeper, more profound statement than appears on the surface. When we read that the people all paid attention to what Philip said, we could think that perhaps he was an interesting speaker. Or maybe they were the kind of people that would listen courteously to anybody who would talk to them. But that's not the truth. Read the last of the verse, "Hearing and seeing the miracles which, he did." So Philip is saying things that would *tell* the Gospel story, and he was doing things would *show* the Gospel story, "Hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."

This brings to our mind a very interesting thing about the nature of preaching. Preaching is not "in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance," as Paul said to the Thessalonians. This is the way Philip was preaching. He didn't only preach to them sound words, but he performed it. He actually produced certain results. And when they saw the miracles which he did, they were impressed and they believed. So far as our witnessing to the world outside is concerned, we have a story to tell to the nations and we need to tell it, but we also have a power to demonstrate and we need to show it.

We ought to notice, in passing, Acts 8:8: "And there was great joy in that city." Yes, there would be when people would hear and believe the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. So in verse 12 we read, "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men, and women." Here we get a little fuller picture of what Philip was preaching. This was about Jesus Christ and concerning the kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God" refers to things being under the control of God. When anybody would preach the kingdom of God he wouldn't claim that everything was included but he would distinctly say that anything that was in the kingdom of God would be subject to God's will. And so, Philip preached that God was a living God, that He could and would control those who would put their trust in Him, and that, if God controls them and lives in their hearts, they would be in the kingdom of God.

Philip also preached "the name of Jesus Christ." "Name" refers to the work that Jesus Christ would do. He preached the way Jesus Christ would bring a man into the Kingdom of God. Anybody wanting to come to the Kingdom of God would need to be born again. You may remember that statement in the third chapter of John when Nicodemus came to the Lord Jesus and asked him, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." The Lord Jesus went on then to tell him, "Ye must be born again." Philip would be telling that this blessed relationship with God, wherein God rules in you, is possible only *if* and *when* you are born again.

He would also preach to them the truth which you find in the tenth chapter of John where the Lord Jesus says, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Or, as the Lord Jesus said in John 14:6; "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the but by me." So we will say, then, that the witness must preach the truth as it is in Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the actual culturing of these people, the establishing of the work of the grace of God in Samaria, proceeded under other leaders. Philip didn't go on and do that. The church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to make sure that these people would receive the Holy Spirit, is that they would grow in grace and knowledge and come into the understanding which would enable them to enter into the fullness of the blessing and receive the Holy Spirit. We should take notice that the witness, like Philip, who goes and tells people about the Lord Jesus Christ and even wins them to Christ, must be willing to see others build on his foundation. After Philip had called these together, the church in Jerusalem sent down Peter and John to guide them into more truth.

So far, we have seen the witness dealing with the group. Now we're going to see him dealing with an individual. In verse 26, "The angel of the Lord spake unto Philip saying, Arise, and go toward the south." This implies that the witness can be led by the Holy Spirit. Notice that at this time Philip did not know what was going to happen. He was led to go and do something apart from knowing what would follow. This is very important. I imagine many Christians may often say to themselves, "I think that I wouldn't mind witnessing, if I just knew I'd accomplish something." I want to tell you that it's not for you to know whether you would accomplish anything or not. It's only for you to obey, if you were told to go. Philip was told to go toward the south and he did.

Look in verse 27: "And he arose and went." That's all that's said. But it's powerful. He arose and went. He was told to go, so he went. That's very simple. You do it that way. You're told to pray, so pray. You're told to read the Bible, so read the Bible. You're told to trust God, so trust God.

Now look in verse 29, "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." Each item in this sentence is important. If he hadn't gone as the Lord told him, he wouldn't have been there when that chariot came by. He didn't know the chariot was going to be there, but God did. When he got there, the Spirit directed him to this chariot. Again there is no intimation of what's going to happen. Philip was led to go, so he went.

Verse 30 brings us to the contact: "And Philip ran thither to meet him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah." "Ran thither" means *promptly*. Being told to go, he went promptly.

Philip listened to what the Ethiopian was doing. He saw that he was reading Isaiah, and this gave Philip his chance. He could then talk to him about the Lord. And he said immediately, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" So the man asked Philip to come up and sit with him. That was a great advantage. It wouldn't have been like that if Philip hadn't done what he was told to do. We are learning something as witnesses. We are learning to do the thing in hand, whatever we are called upon to do.

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached, unto him Jesus" (Verse 35). That's what he had to talk about. The witness is going to tell about Jesus Christ.

Then in verse 39, "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more." The witness has no permanent function with the people he comes in contact with. He shows the things of Christ, and then he goes on. He went on his way rejoicing. The Lord gave him joy.

There is no evidence in this whole story that Philip talked about anything else. If he did it was just incidental. The main thing is that Philip could talk about the Lord Christ and other people could find out about the Lord through him. In this way, then, we see how a person can witness for the Lord daily as he is led, showing the things of Christ. God can so use him and bless him.

## Paul

"For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:15). These words were spoken to the Apostle Paul at the time of his conversion. God had things in mind for him. Of all those who have ever witnessed to the truth of Jesus Christ, perhaps the whole world will agree that the greatest witness of them all was the Apostle Paul.

Saul the Pharisee became Paul the Apostle. His testimony is all the more remarkable because of the way he began. In the book of Philippians he described himself, "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Add that up and you have the picture of a very sincere, earnest, zealous religious man. But the Apostle Paul would be the first one to tell you that with all that, he didn't know the Gospel in those early days. He said, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). He was thoroughly sincere, but on the wrong road. Or, if you want to say he was on the right road in that he was dealing with God, let me assure you that he was going in the wrong direction. He could say that he served the God of his fathers with a clear conscience, but that didn't make him right. He wrote to Timothy that he was "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious." Then, he went on to say that he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief. This is the background in which the Apostle Paul grew into young manhood, sincere and honest, but ignorant and prejudiced and an unbeliever.

Then things started with Paul. His life became one long testimony to the living Lord. In the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we find the story recorded of Paul on the Damascus Road. Going toward Damascus for the express purpose of taking any disciples of Christ and throwing them into jail, he saw the Lord. He was completely changed in that one blinding flash when he saw Jesus of Nazareth in glory at the right hand of God. Just as soon as he recovered his sight he immediately went out among the Jews in the city of Damascus and "He preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." There was no long period of thinking and no gradual readjustment in his mind. It was a sudden dramatic, drastic turnover.

Paul then returned to Jerusalem, and in Acts 9:29 we find him speaking with the Greeks. We read that "he spake boldly in the name of the lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians." This word *dispute* means to argue. The Greeks were great philosophers and they explained everything by rational processes. Paul had been trained in the Greek school. He could speak Greek and doubtless was acquainted with Greek philosophy, and he was able to argue with them.

Then Paul went away into Arabia for a space of about three years. Most of us feel that those are three silent years in which Saul apparently entered into the full meaning of the remarkable truth that came to him when he found that Jesus Christ was actually, literally raised from the dead into the very presence of God. Something tremendously important happened to Paul and made a difference in everything he had to say after that.

In Acts 11:25-26 we find that Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him to Antioch so that he might teach the new disciples. When Barnabas saw how earnestly and sincerely these new converts believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, he had in mind that what they needed was to be indoctrinated thoroughly. They needed to understand all that they had heard and all that had happened to them. Saul taught them for a whole year, it says. We can learn something at this point when we read, "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The name *Christian* was given to them as a kind of nickname. They talked about Christ so

much. Everything was about Christ. And so they just called them "Christians."

From Antioch Paul was sent forth by the Holy Spirit to carry the Gospel to others. In Acts 13:14-43 we see him standing among the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. He showed his command of the history of the Jewish people and of the whole course of their dealings with God. He climaxed his testimony with this statement about the Lord Jesus Christ, "But God raised him from the dead." This was the underlying thrust of all that he had to say to those Jewish people. They needed to face the fact that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead and by that very act, God had set Him up to be Lord of all.

Now in Chapter 14 we find Paul in a Gentile city by the name of Lystra. There he spoke to people who were pagans. Because of certain things that happened, the inhabitants of that part of the country wanted to make gods out of Paul and Barnabas. They were going to worship them. Barnabas and Saul ran out among the people, imploring them not to do that. Paul told them that they should turn from these vanities to the living God who made heaven and earth. Paul preached the living God, because to these pagan peoples, religion was, a matter of believing a certain idea. They would adopt certain ideas and then imagine certain things about them. That's the way pagan religions develop. But Paul confronted them with this simple statement that they should turn from these vanities to the living God.

In the next chapter we find that the early church had their first big assembly meeting in Jerusalem to consider whether or not a Gentile needed to be circumcised before he could be a Christian. Barnabas and Paul got up before the church there, "Declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." To my mind this is a striking thing. If anybody could have reasoned with them it would have been Paul. Certainly when we read the letters of Paul, there is no question that he could reason out logically the things he wanted to say. The interesting thing is that Paul does not offer any argument. You know what he does? He gives testimony. He bears witness to the things that God has done, because the way God has done would be enough to convince anyone that Barnabas and Paul were preaching the truth. And so, he reported unto these people the wonders and the miracles that God had done among the Gentiles by them.

In Acts 17 we find this same man, Paul, standing in Athens at Mars Hill, the very center of the intellectual culture of the world of that day. There he stood before those sophisticated Athenians, ready to give a reason for the hope that is within him. They had gathered together for the purpose of listening to him. They were interested in what this "babbler," as they called him, would say. And as he went through with his address, he came to the point where he told them that God "hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance, unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." That ended the address. The Greeks wouldn't listen to him any longer. But I want you to notice that after he was through with all the part of reasoning and arguing, he came to something that God did. God raised up Jesus Christ from the dead, and God was going to judge the world in righteousness by that Man. When these concrete facts of action were brought before the people they didn't want any more of it. They turned away from him. But that was Paul's testimony.

We move on to Chapter 22 to find Paul in Jerusalem, confronted by the Jews. They were going to kill him because he was working with the Gentiles. He was just a renegade so far as they were concerned. But Paul raised his hand, and speaking to them in their own, language he gave them his personal testimony: "Suddenly there shone from heaven, a great light round about me." I am impressed with that. He didn't go into a long argument, not even comparing Old Testament Scripture with Old Testament Scripture. He gave a plain, straightforward, factual testimony of something that actually occurred on, the Damascus road, something you can't explain away. Whether you like it or not, there it is. It was a way of getting the idea across to them that "What I have to tell you about Jesus Christ is actually true."

Later on Paul was called before the Council to give defense for himself. We read about this in Chapter 23, verses 1-10. Here again there was no attempt on his part to escape the implications of his witness and



testimony. He told them, "Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." This was the tremendous great truth that he was witnessing to and testifying: Jesus Christ is alive. He was raised from the dead.

In Chapter 24 we find that Paul was brought before Felix the Roman Governor. He was criticized and accused of being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. The apostle spoke simply to Felix, "After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets." Then he went on and gave his personal testimony. He showed no attempt to escape at all. He was perfectly ready to be identified with the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Chapter 26 we see he stood before King Agrippa, and there his testimony was the same. Listen to him. "At midday, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven." From there, in the next chapter, we find the apostle on a ship in a terrible storm at sea, almost sinking. Standing before the ship's captain and crew he could give his witness. "For there stood by me this night the angel of God." This man had dealings with God, God had dealings with him, and he told the people about it.

In Chapter 28 we see the Apostle Paul on the island of Melita before barbarians. Here's a very interesting thing. As he had been out gathering wood to build a fire, a poisonous snake bit him. Paul walked over to the fire, shook off the beast into the fire and felt no harm. Then the barbarians changed their minds and thought he must be a god. Later on we find that Paul entered into the home of a sick man and prayed and healed him, giving his witness and his testimony there. At the end of the Book of the Acts we find Paul in Rome, standing before the Jews and saying, "For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." Then he went on, expounding and testifying the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus. When they did not particularly follow him, he turned to the Gentiles, "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord, Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

What a wonderful witness and testimony did this man Paul give in his day and time. He had seen the Lord. He knew the Lord. He could tell the whole, wide world he understood about the Lord. And he could say, "God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (Acts 27:23).

May the Lord grant us to have such strength of conviction that we might share with the Apostle Paul in our common witness to the whole world concerning the truth that is in Jesus Christ.

## Facing Opposition

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me." These are the words that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to His, disciples, sending them into all the world that they might preach the gospel to every creature. Such witnessing from time to time runs into opposition. There are people who are just not agreeable to the idea of spreading the news about the Lord Jesus Christ. Usually their interest is self-centered. They don't want anything about themselves to be changed, and they don't want their circumstances changed. When a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ comes into the community and starts witnessing, there is always the threat that things may be changed. Some people resist change in any way they possible can.

Look at Acts 4-29-30. This is the prayer that the Christians offered when the Council had forbidden Peter and John to preach in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter and John had come back to the church and told them, "Those in authority are commanding us not to preach or teach in the name of the Lord." Notice how they prayed: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." (In this passage we have a remarkable sketch of the pattern, of witnessing. So often we are inclined to feel that witnessing is a matter of talking, and that is true. There is a sense in which the word must be spoken, and the Gospel does come unto you in word. But as Paul said to the Thessalonians, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

Here they prayed that with all boldness they might speak God's Word. But they didn't stop there. I am afraid that for many of us in our witnessing we're inclined to stop right at that point. We tell the truth, so to speak. We speak the words, and we let them stand. And I think sometimes we have regret to feel that our words fall to the ground and no one pays any attention to them,. Sometimes we're inclined to blame other people for that, as much as to say they had their chance and they didn't take it. I want to draw to your attention that just speaking the Gospel in so many words is not enough. The prayer was that "with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thy hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." You will see that you have a pattern of witnessing, in that you not only speak, but you also perform. You not only say, but you do. There is a sense in which actions speak louder than words, and this may be felt here.

One could at the moment pause and ask why did they pray for boldness? And where was this boldness to come from? What was it to be? Was it just to be that they were to be strong in spirit? Were they to be bold in the sense that they were courageous, brash people who didn't care what would happen to them? Or were they to be bold because they believed that results would follow? Was it true that they were "with all boldness" to "speak thy word" because there would be healing, and signs and wonders would be done by the name of the Lord Jesus? Would the Lord Jesus grant this boldness by doing wonders through them? Is this what would make them bold? We can certainly say that boldness and actual doing are related. And this is the answer to any threat. I am not sure how long the boldness would have lasted if they hadn't had some performance; the performance backed it up.

Now we could ask ourselves again this question: Why would a witness need boldness? Why not just be sweet, gentle and kind and just tentatively mention things to people in a quite, reserved, shy way? Why be bold? Because of the opposition.! There are people who, if you are gentle and weak in, your testimony, will sweep you out of the way. One needs to be bold to stand and to challenge any kind of reaction to your stand. If in the course of it you get hurt, that's to be expected. But there's to be no question about the

boldness.

One could ask, why would there ever be opposition to the Gospel? Why would anyone want to oppose the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? Certainly there is never any opposition to humble, meek and helpful service to others. You'd be surprised how all the world would be glad to have us do things for them. They don't mind Christians acting in that way. Is there then anything else in witnessing other than just being humble, meek and helpful? And we see there is. Opposition develops toward anything that asks for a response. I have the feeling myself I am not really witnessing for Jesus Christ unless I convey to the other person the idea that He wants you and He is calling upon you to respond. Men generally are ready to receive the benefits of the Gospel, but they are quick to resist anything which could challenge them to respond either in confession or in commitment. They don't want to do anything about it. They want to think that everything is being done for them with no demand upon themselves. But that's not really the Gospel.

May I say in this connection that there is no real opposition to the fruits of the Spirit. You could have love, joy, peace, long suffering, goodness, gentleness, meekness, self control and faith all you wanted to and people wouldn't opposed to that. The opposition is not to the fruits of the Spirit. The immediate objection is to the evangelistic appeal: accept the Lord Jesus Christ, yield yourself to Christ. This is where the resistance comes, and this is where the witness has to speak out. Christ Jesus came into the world to seek and to save the lost. That is true. And whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. It's true. But the fact that whosoever believeth not is condemned already is also true in the same breath. It's the same thing. Those that are in are saved; those that are out are lost. It needs to be said together. This is what people, generally speaking, resent, because it demands them to come in. It asks them to act.

Many who listen to the Gospel will face opposition in the home and neighborhood where they live, if they're going to respond to it. There may be opposition in the very home itself, among your own loved ones, and in the neighborhood where you live.

The principles of witnessing in the face of opposition are the same everywhere, but I want to draw your attention to several of these that occurred in the Book of the Acts. They are rather typical. I have to use some big words, but I will only use a few and they will just indicate the kind of opposition that there is. The first word I have to use is *ecclesiastical*. The reason I use this word is that I want to cover everything that is included in organized religion. In the days of the disciples it was the rulers of the temple who opposed Peter and John when they preached; and afterwards they were opposed to Paul when he preached. As you read you'll find out why the rulers would be opposed. Was it because of what the disciples preached? It was not so much that Peter and John and Paul, in winning men to Christ, would have turned out people that were kind, merciful, and helpful. The trouble came because they preached about the Lord Jesus Christ in a way that challenged people to follow them.

Another thing that caused the opposition was that the apostles were widely received. Multitudes came to hear them, and the leaders of the temple were jealous of Paul's success. They were envious of his popularity with the people. Because they were jealous and envious of him, they were opposed to his message. That happens right inside the church. You may find that there are leaders who do not want your message. They want to be counted as the real leaders and the real believers. And, if you come in with something that is different, they don't want you to be acceptable. For instance, you may be in a Sunday School class taking part, and you understand the truth. You can see what the lesson is saying. So you offer this, and after awhile it becomes obvious that you really know what the Scripture is saying. Every time you speak you show what the Bible means. Well, I can tell you right now, your comments will not be welcomed by the leader of that class. It's very seldom that you will find that a teacher or a leader of a class will be glad to have someone speak up and show things that the leader doesn't know. If you're in a prayer meeting and you speak up and tell what the Lord has done for you in answer to prayer, you may find

opposition there by the leaders because they don't want you to be that prominent. They don't want you to be that important.

I have lived in the church now for a number of years, and I have to admit that in the church I am in I have heard much more criticism against zealous Christians than against heretics, against the people who are wrong, or even against the people who don't do anything. Do you remember when Mary anointed her Lord with a box of precious ointment? She was criticized by her fellow believers, even by an apostle. They said she spent too much money. And on another occasion you will remember that when Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet she was criticized by her industrious sister, Martha, who claimed that she was neglecting her work. This kind of criticism comes from inside the church. I could be far more specific. I have just spoken in general terms so that you can be aware of it. Now, I want to underscore the fact that your action as a witness in the face of such criticism is to be quiet, humble, meek, and not to defend yourself. Just insist that you mean well in what you are doing.

The next problem of opposition that I think of I would call *congregational*. There was in the congregation itself dissatisfaction with the leadership over the distribution of food. We find this in the sixth Chapter of Acts. In the service of the Lord, when you're actually doing what He wants you to do, there can be opposition from people who do not understand or who think that you're doing inadequately or inefficiently the very thing that you're supposed to be doing. The inefficiency in the distributing of food in the early church may have been real. We do not really know. All we know is that certain persons complained that it was so. You can't believe every complaint you hear. But the impression was real, and the impression, was that the Greek widows were not being taken care of. I want you to notice here again that the witnesses of the early church, the apostles, made no attempt to justify themselves. There was a readiness to concede, a readiness to conciliate. The problem was solved by a course of action that satisfied the critics. And so, when we are facing opposition from inside the congregation, let us humbly seek, if possible, some way to do our job in a manner that will be acceptable to the people.

Now there was another kind of opposition. I am going to call it *traditional*. This is when Peter entered into the house of the Gentile Cornelius, in Acts Chapters 10 and 11. This was contrary to Jewish custom. The Jewish tradition was that no Jew would go into the home of a Gentile. When Peter came back to Jerusalem, he ran into opposition. I want you to note Peter's action and response. He had not been indifferent to Jewish customs by going into the house of Cornelius. He took six men with him to be able to report exactly what happened. Peter did not ignore their contention. He didn't walk along in a haughty way and say, "It's none of your business." He didn't deny their right to criticize. He humbly explained to them that God had led him. There was no blanket condemnation of the tradition. He didn't say they were all wrong. He gave a simple testimony that the Lord guided him to go into the house of Cornelius, regardless.

Suppose you were driving a car and you came to an intersection where there was a traffic light. Let us suppose that the light turned red. That means you're supposed to stop. Then a policeman comes along and waves you across because of an emergency. What would you do? Well, you'd drive across because the policeman told you to. Someone could come along and criticize you and say you ran a red light. And you'd say, "I ran the red light, but I did that because the policeman told me to." You're not opposed to all red lights. You don't think a person should cross any old time. But under certain conditions you would. Now that's the way Peter did here. Peter went into the house of Cornelius, which was against Jewish custom. That's like crossing a red light. They raised a question about it; you'd expect anybody to. And Peter's answer was, "The policeman told me to go across." In this he was humble and he was frank and he was considerate and he was meek. This is his witness in the group, facing the opposition that's based on tradition.

Now the opposition also can be *economic*. There can be those opposed to what you have to say for the Lord because they feel, if you have your way, people will become Christian and certain patronage will be

lost, or certain programs will be dropped out. There is an opposition to the Gospel in the interest of maintaining the status quo. We read of this in Chapter 19 when we find that the leaders who were opposing Paul in Ephesus openly charged that Paul was disturbing the public peace. They aroused a great demonstration against Paul. It's a very amusing thing to read in Chapter 19:29 and 32 that these people were in confusion. It says in verse 32, "The more part knew not wherefore they were come together." Many times, in such mob scenes, that can largely be the case. How did Paul act? He wanted to go in and explain his position to them, but the other brethren wouldn't let him. They quietly took him away. In other words, if you're going to run into opposition where people say your program is going to hurt business, the best thing to do is to be quiet and slip away. You don't fight about that.

Finally, there is *cultural opposition*. There is an opposition against your witness because what you're proposing is different from what other people have. In Acts 21 we find that the Jewish people accused Paul of trying to upset the Jews. Now their accusation was not valid. Paul hadn't tried to hurt the Jews. He acted to refute the accusation. Since they said, he was acting against Jewish custom, he proceeded according to Jewish custom. He fitted into whatever cultural pattern prevailed in order that he might be able to go on, with the Gospel ministry. Paul said, "When I was with the Jews I became as a Jew, and when I was with the Greeks I became as a Greek, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:19-23). In our witnessing, when we are facing opposition,, we should avoid contention as much as possible, so that by all means we might seek to save some.

## Barnabas

In any given community every Christian may be a witness, but the preacher, whether he is good or not, is in a particular position. If your preacher bears a strong, consistent witness for Jesus Christ in himself, as well as in the pulpit, your community is indeed fortunate.

This study concerns a man whose life demonstrates much of the Gospel. He had a wonderful witness and testimony in his life. I am speaking of a man who isn't included in the apostolic group. I am referring to Barnabas. In Acts 11: 24 we find these words, "For he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord." Barnabas was a pastor in a congregation of new converts. His whole ministry was such that "much people was added unto the Lord."

As we pick up the story about Barnabas in the Book of the Acts, we find that his witness was primarily in terms of service to other people. We do not know how he became a Christian nor very much concerning his background. We do know that he was a Levite. That is, he was trained to be one of those who led in the public services. As a Levite he was well educated, and he was a man committed to honorable service. This is one man whose witness is best seen, not in the position that he holds, nor in his family, or anything like that. It is seen in his works, in, the things that he did.

Throughout the Book of the Acts we come across Barnabas again and again in short little incidents, which, when added together will show something about this great man. Chapter 4:36-37 says of Barnabas that he, "having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." "Having land" would probably mean that he was rich; "Sold it" means he took action about it. He wasn't just going to think of something he could do. There were poor people in the church and they needed help. He didn't just take the change he had in his pocket. He didn't look at his income to see whether it would upset his budget. But he had some capital stock in the form of land. Part of the land he sold, brought the money and laid at the apostles' feet. This showed humility on his part. Some people, when they give, want to tell you what to do with it. They want to give all right, but they want the control of it also. There is no particular objection, to that. However, Barnabas was not like that. He laid the money at the feet of the apostles for their use. That is how he got his name, Barnabas. He who was called Joseph became Barnabas, which means "a son of consolation." This was a typical act on the part of Barnabas. He did things like this over and over again.

There is a universal action of charity which everyone understands all over the world. I have a story about one particular congregation that will illustrate what I mean.

It seems at one time the whole congregation was having an argument about money – money they were going to offer to missions. The church ran short of funds and there was some money in the bank delegated to missions. The treasurer just borrowed the money from the missionary fund to pay the current expenses of the church. Someone found out about it and requested a report be given to the congregation. There was a great big fuss, with a lot of questions. Should the treasurer be accused of mishandling the funds?

In the course of this congregational meeting, which had stirred the people up to real bitterness and opposition to each other, a man stood up in front of everyone. He was not a rich man. He earned his living by repairing pianos. Being a humble man in many ways, he startled everybody when he stood up in, the congregational meeting and said, "We are having all this argument and contention . . . because of \$900. I am going to make you. a proposition. If the people here will promise that they won't say anything about this affair, if they will just quietly each one mind their own business and seek to serve the Lord, I will give you \$900." As an actual matter of record, that's just what he did! That man went to the bank, drew \$900

out of his savings and brought it to the church to hush the congregation's quarrelling. That man, you can be real sure, had made a profound impression on that congregation for years to come. His witness was strong.

Now I want you to turn to the ninth chapter of the Book of the Acts, the 27th verse. It is the story of Saul the Pharisee's conversion. You will remember that Saul had been opposed to the Christians. He had been arresting them, taking them to court, and in some cases even putting them to death as disturbers of the peace. Then, on his way to Damascus to arrest some of the Christians, Saul met the Lord.

Christ gave Paul a new life and in a very miraculous way Saul the Pharisee, who started out on that journey dead set against the Christian church, was now its most ardent advocate.

When this man Saul finally reached Damascus and said he wanted to give his testimony – he wanted to step out and talk about Christ – the Christians were afraid of him. They didn't want to take him into the company. They remembered him as Saul the persecutor.

Look at verse 27, "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." Do you see what Barnabas did? He shared his prestige with this young convert. Everybody had confidence in Barnabas; they had no confidence in this young man, Saul. But when Barnabas took Saul, as it were, under his wing, put his arm over his shoulder, stood before them and said, "This is my man," he opened the way by wise tactics. I want you to notice what he did. He went to the leaders and testified to the spiritual reality of Saul's experience. He didn't discuss whether it was right or wrong for him to do this or that. Barnabas testified to the fact that the Lord had come and dealt with Saul, and then also testified to other actions on Saul's part. There was no question in Barnabas' mind but that this man should be received. Notice, Paul did not need to talk for himself – Barnabas spoke up for him. This is what a man like Barnabas can do. He witnessed in a very real way to the Lord Jesus Christ.

At one time there was some question concerning accepting me on the faculty of a Seminary. No one on the Seminary Board knew me. Yet, they needed a man in the field of Bible, and my name was being proposed. The man who came forward to mention my name was a very prominent man in our church. Later, he became the Moderator of our General Assembly. This man, with all of his prestige, stepped up before those people and indicated to them, "I have implicit confidence in this person; this man could be your professor." My coming to Columbia Theological Seminary was largely the result of this one minister who shared his personal prestige with me.

Thinking about Barnabas, we find that the believers in Jerusalem sent Barnabas down to Antioch to the young church that he might help deepen their spiritual lives. We read in Acts 11: 22, "Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad." This was the kind of a man who could be glad in the success of other ministers " . . . and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." Now comes our great text about Barnabas: "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the lord." There was a lot of response to his leadership. "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. For a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. It was at Antioch that the disciples were called Christians for the first time."

By bringing Paul to the people and having him teach them, they grew and developed so much they were nicknamed "Christians." Barnabas was charitable, he was kind, and *he was wise*. This kind of thing leaves a very fine taste in the mouths of other people.

The end of Chapter 12 shows how " . . . the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark." This young believer, by the name of John Mark, joined himself to Barnabas and Saul when

they came back from Jerusalem. Barnabas saw him and picked him out. Mark later became one of the strongest workers for the Gospel. Barnabas had seen the potential in him.

Look in Chapter 13. Barnabas was sent out by the Holy Spirit to be a missionary. "The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." All I want to mention at this point is that Barnabas was obedient. He was a very prominent man, one of the leading ministers of the day, and yet, when the Holy Spirit said he should go to the foreign field, he dropped everything and went.

In Chapter 14, verse 20, you read that Paul had been stoned and left for dead. "Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." All I want to bring out is that Barnabas is not the leading man. He is following Paul. But that doesn't mean he quit. He was humble enough to follow right along. In Chapter 15 the church was arguing about whether or not the Gentiles could become Christians. Barnabas was one who stood up and gave his testimony. "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (verse 12).

In Chapter 15, verses 36-40, there is something that many, many people will remember about Barnabas. He was determined in his witness whenever he felt that something was right. When Paul and Barnabas were making their plans for the future, Barnabas thought he wanted to take Mark along with them. However, Paul didn't want to take him because Mark had previously deserted them. Paul was afraid that Mark might not "stick it out." But Barnabas said yes. Consequently, "The contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul, chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God." Barnabas, in his witness, was determined to do what he felt was right, even though it meant differing with a prominent and good man, Barnabas was not a weakling by any manner or means. He may not have been a very prominent preacher, but he was a man who undoubtedly believed the Gospel and stood by it regardless of the circumstances.

The last mention of Barnabas is in Galatians 2:13. There the Apostle Paul tells how some of the disciples were persuaded by Jewish ideas that you had to be circumcised before you became a Christian, or after you became a Christian you'd have to be circumcised before you could enter into the fullness of the Gospel. Paul disagreed and quite an argument followed. In the course of the argument, men came down from Jerusalem and influenced Peter, "insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation." He was actually moved along with the people who were taking a view that was not adequate. Although Barnabas did not understand the Gospel fully, he had been a great witness. Barnabas was ready to share himself with anyone, especially the young and the needy. He felt that the Jewish Christians were perhaps among the most needy, and he was going to go along with them. Barnabas and his wonderful testimony indicate a man, who was not selfish, but rather one who wanted to give witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Barnabas gave his witness by the kind of life he lived as a minister. I'll go back to what was said at the very beginning: "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord." People saw his manner of life and liked him. You felt that he was actually good in the sight of the Lord, full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith. In any situation the Holy Spirit could always show him the things of Christ, Barnabas would believe them and receive them. He was that kind of man!



## Witnessing in Controversy

We have been considering various aspects of the significance of the call of our Lord Jesus Christ to be His witnesses. Christ told His disciples that they had a mission: communicate the Gospel. The truth of Christ must be told. Unless people hear what God has prepared in Christ Jesus they will never know whom to believe or what to believe. "Eye hath, not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit."

From the record in the Book of the Acts we can learn much on how to witness. Notice, witnessing is done by word and by deed. We pointed out that you can't just tell the Gospel story and be satisfied. Something has to be done with it. There are deeds to be performed. The telling should produce certain consequences.

The public considers teaching or preaching the Gospel to be a matter of religious discussion. Religion is not a good New Testament word, although it is popular among human beings. A very ordinary comment heard is, "Well, I never argue religion." The implication is that religious argument is notoriously barren so far as any good results are concerned. Arguments arouse emotions and rush people to the place of downright contrariness. Yet, in spite of the fact that religious argument may not be fruitful, some disagreement is inevitable. There will be some disagreement when the Gospel is communicated.

I realize that it's possible to discuss religion without causing an argument, but there is some question as to how much of value you have said when you talk that way. On the other hand, you may not be able to say anything that's worthwhile without arousing some disagreement. It's true that there may be people who will not argue, but it is likely that they are unaware of what is involved. The chances are they don't have any religion to argue about. Or they may have agreed already that either they are wrong, or you are wrong, and they won't listen to you at all. They might hear you. They would probably have a very low potential as far as receiving the Gospel is concerned. There probably is little chance that they would ever get to know the Gospel. Yet, there might be some people who would not argue with you, but would be like children – children who need to learn everything, including the very language that they're going to use.

Then there are persons whose minds are already set in a different frame than, the Gospel presents. These people sense the difference. When you preach the Gospel to them, or even act the Gospel out to them, they can't help but compare what you're saying with what they say. They have a feeling that their position is threatened by the very position that you take. In such cases controversy is inevitable.

Controversy grounded in different ideas, however, is varied. These arguments are not always the same. Controversy may arise and develop because of a difference in practices, a difference in customs, or a difference in values. By way of suggestion, there are various ways in which two different people might be set in two different frames, two different attitudes, and when they share an idea there will be a difference of opinion. If they come to talk to each other, the controversy is implicit. But no matter what the nature of the controversy, there is always an opportunity to witness. This is what I want to draw to your attention now.

The early church had controversy. They ran into settled situations where people were different from them. The other people didn't want to change. Nonetheless, they invariably found ways to witness during the controversy. By way of illustration, the disciples were preaching in the Temple. The leaders of the Jewish people didn't like to have Peter and John preaching. You will remember they arrested them, brought them into court, and ordered them not to preach in the name of Christ Jesus. Peter and John were preaching because the Lord told them to preach. He had said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the

gospel to every creature." Then the Jewish authorities said, don't preach. Peter stood up before them. He was a Jew, and he knew the range of authority that belonged to the Jewish Council. He challenged the Jewish Council. He would let them be their own, judge as to whether a man ought to obey God or whether he ought to obey man. Peter and John refused to obey the Council and then, of course, there was a real controversy concerning authority. Who is going to be boss in this thing? Peter and, John had given, their testimony in court. People saw them and marvelled that men with no education were able to stand up to these well educated leaders. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men . . . they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." The testimony concerning the resurrection of Christ was actually confirmed in the hearts of the people just by seeing the way Peter and John stood up in court and faced this thing. They were meek and humble. When the Council told them not to preach, they warned the Council right there, "Now you'll have to do what you want to do about that; so far as we're concerned, the only thing we can do is to obey God." Consequently, they went out and preached. The Council arrested them again, but they had strong obedience to do the will of the Lord. In this first instance of controversy, Peter and John were able to give a witness by the very manner in which they conducted themselves.

The next incident I want to draw to your attention is quite different. It's a controversy that arose inside the church itself. There will be arguments among the people inside the church for the very same reason. People inside the church will have their minds already made up about something they think ought to be done a certain way. It is not always the way God would have it done. For instance, in the church there were members who felt that the Gentile believers should be circumcised. Because Barnabas and Paul had, gone out among the Gentiles preaching, many people had believed. The church in Jerusalem had sent preachers out to these new churches to help confirm and consolidate them. They all came back with the same story: the Gentile people were not circumcised. They wanted to be considered as full Christians. As a result, the church had a big argument within the body of believers concerning truth and principles.

Notice, Paul did not undertake to settle that argument by his own interpretation. You will agree that Paul knew the truth. They didn't have to call the church together to discover whether or not they should circumcise people. Paul knew the right answer. Wise as he was, he had understanding too. He knew if the church was ever to reach the truth, they would have to see it themselves. Interestingly enough, both Barnabas and Paul allowed this whole matter to evolve. They went with them up to Jerusalem where a big company of what we would call the General Assembly, or the General Conference, was gathered. Peter stood before them and testified concerning what God had done for the Gentiles and for him at the house of Cornelius. Then Paul and Barnabas gave testimony of God's power on the mission field. Oh, the effect of the concrete evidence of what God had actually done and was doing! Then James pointed out that the Scriptures don't really object to receiving the Gentiles. In fact, the Scriptures indicated that one day the Gentiles would come to the Lord.

The General Assembly of the early church reached its conclusion and wrote a letter out to all the churches saying, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us . . ." That will indicate to you something of the frame of mind with which the early church went into this whole discussion. Believing in the Lord, they all waited before God and let the Holy Spirit have His way among them. The Holy Spirit, using the things that happened, directed them not to lay a greater burden than necessary on these other believers.

This was a big controversy. I suppose someone could say it split the church. That's too strong language! You don't need to use it that way. You can say that the early church certainly was witnessing among themselves a very definite difference of opinion. The two ideas were brought out before everybody for consideration. Barnabas and Paul, especially Paul, knew all the time what the answer should be. This controversy concerning circumcision inside the church was not settled with any power movement. It was not a power performance; it was a case of letting the Holy Spirit guide them.

There were other instances of controversy between Christians and others. For instance, the Gospel preachers often entered into controversy with the Jews. The question would be raised whether the Jew

needed to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ in order to be right with God. It was the custom of the apostles, you will remember, when they went into any city to go to the synagogue first. They went to the synagogue in order that they might declare to the Jewish people that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of the living God. He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the Christ that had been promised in the Scriptures.

When Paul spoke at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13), the appeal he made was to the Scriptures. He didn't argue for any other reason. He didn't tell them what a fine man Jesus of Nazareth was and what a wonderful thing it would be to accept Him. He went to them with the Scriptures and proved, according to the Scriptures, that Jesus is the very Christ.

When the Jews rejected that message, Paul did not prolong the argument or debate. He turned to the Gentiles.

Notice that when a controversy arose and there was a definite collision between two sets of people, it was customary for the early church to allow the matter to die down. As long as people are in a fighting frame of mind they can't think about the Gospel.

Now, take for instance what happened concerning the Temple services. The believing Jews in the early Christian church continued to attend the Temple. This is a striking thing to me. Peter and John went up to the Temple at the hour of prayer, knowing what the Temple stood for. Everybody went to the Temple to pray, and these people would go to pray, too. Part of this is that "it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." The Christians respected the Temple customs; they never repudiated them. When Paul actually went into his ministry he had Timothy circumcised. Under certain conditions he himself shaved his head and entered into a vow. Paul knew that didn't make him any more spiritual before God, but the Jews thought this was the thing to do and he did it. With reference to controversy over custom, practice and tradition, these early Christians offered no outward offense.

Let us consider the Greeks that Paul addressed in Acts 17. There was controversy with them over their philosophy of life. Paul opened his remarks to the Athenians by saying, "I perceive that you are very religious." That was a good start. He went on to say, "Whom therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." Then he appealed to their own literature for acceptance of his basic premise that God is a living God. After he had conceded validity to their culture, as far as it went, he frankly told them that God had appointed a day when men must repent. Eventually, he told them the truth and where he differed from them. But he did this only after he had spoken to them in a way that would show them respect.

In the matter of controversy, the early Christian church avoided an open, overt clash whenever it was possible. They tried to conduct themselves wisely and in a way befitting to their testimony.

May God help each one of us to walk carefully and frankly in the open, yet softly when we differ with people in order not to alienate them or lose time in fruitless quarreling.