

## The Antithesis and Witnessing (2)

I said in my last article that the witnessing of a child of God, whether young or old, has contained in it the same power that the preaching of the gospel has. By that I mean that Christian witnessing is also used by God to gain others to Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, 32/86) and to harden unbelievers in their sin and rejection of Christ.

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It is biblical teaching (Romans 10:13-15) and solid Protestant Reformed doctrine that only preaching by the church through a minister called can save. I do not deny that. The point that needs to be made is this: True Christian witnessing is related organically to the preaching. That word “organically” always causes problems, but here I mean by it that Christian witnessing gets all its life and power from the preaching.

We are walking here on thin ice, and we must be careful—not because the truth itself is thin ice and therefore dangerous; but because this relation between preaching and witnessing can be so easily misunderstood. The preaching of the gospel in church on Sunday in the congregation is not intended to train the members of the church to be witnesses in their lives. It is not a high-powered recruiting of witnesses, sort of like a speech intended to persuade young people to join the army—as many churches today considered it to be with their evening “evangelistic services.” It is not a “pep rally” to get people excited about witnessing. It is not a training camp for witnessing where recruits learn the tactics of witnessing. Let’s at least be clear on that!

The church that gathers on the Lord’s Day is the assembly of believers and their seed. God’s chosen people are summoned on the Lord’s Day as the “beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ.” They are there primarily and even most importantly, to worship. They worship by praising God for their salvation.

So church worship becomes many things. It becomes the means God uses to instruct his people in the truth; to feed them with heavenly bread, to equip them for their responsibilities in their homes and families, in their life in society, in their responsibilities in the church, etc. It is God’s means to give them spiritual strength for their difficult pilgrim’s journey through life: to comfort them in sorrow, to help them bear their afflictions quietly and in godly trust in God’s goodness, and to take up their cross and follow Christ. All kinds of things happen in church on Sunday, but they happen to God’s people, the church, the body of Christ.

When God's people are fed with the word and strengthened in worship, they carry that word in their hearts as they return to the things that occupy their time in the world. They become, therefore, "witnesses."

There is something spontaneous about this. I mean, there is something unconscious about this. They do not, as a general rule, leave church and say to themselves and others: "We must now be witnesses, so let us go forth and witness to what we have just heard." It is not quite like that. They rather say, "We are God's covenant people who are saved by the miracle of sovereign grace and given blessings the value of which cannot be estimated. We are called to be faithful as God's covenant people to him—as if we are his bride who are now committed to faithfulness to him who has made us his wife. Let us then get on with our work in the shop, our calling in our families, our studies in school, our life in the world as those who belong to Christ."

The preaching makes God's people live an antithetical life. When God's people live an antithetical life they are witnessing. They are witnessing in the most powerful way one can witness.

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There is yet another way in which witnessing is connected to the preaching.

If God is pleased to use the witness of his children to "turn others to Christ," we then must include in our witness a strong admonition that they must now attend worship services in the church we attend. We must not do what Billy Graham used to do in his "revival" meetings. When people came forward and said they believed in Jesus, he told them that they should now go to church, although it didn't make any difference to what church they went. This admonition to them to come to our church is necessary and important. For they must come to a place where the gospel is preached, without which gospel they cannot live.

So, you see how God works. Preaching is the "life-blood" of witnessing, and witnessing has as its goal, to bring those who are turned to Christ to the preaching.

The preaching itself must be antithetical if it is to be the source and power of Christian witnessing. The preaching must be antithetical by doing two things: it must sharply condemn all that is the lie, and it must sharply, clearly and emphatically explain the truth. In that kind of antithetical preaching there will be much that points God's people to live an antithetical, that is, a holy life in the world, and there will be much that warns against the deadly sins of the world. So antithetical preaching creates antithetical witnesses who testify in their whole life of the need to live an antithetical life.

Or, to put it in the words of I Peter 3:15 (see the first article I wrote), the preaching will make it possible for us to “sanctify the Lord God” in our hearts. And to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts is the only possible way to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.”

Christian witnessing. It all begins in church on Sunday morning. Don't sleep in church! Don't live in your own private world of pleasure and fun while in church. Don't stifle yawns to cover your boredom. Worship! That's what you are there for. And, we must add that, for the Bible does: “Don't be a hearer of the Word, but not a doer. Then you deceive yourself (into thinking you have faith when all you have is a counterfeit faith worth nothing) (James 1:22).

If you do what Christ tells you to do, you are a witness—whether you think about it or not; whether you are conscious of doing it or not; it all is so natural, so much a part of life, so wholly as it ought to be that when the Lord summons you home and tells you: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for...you were my faithful witness in the world,” you will say, “When did we see you an hungered, and ye gave me meat...?” But Christ will say, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:34-40).