

Faithful Witnesses, Steady Hearts

A Sermon on Not Growing Discouraged in Witnessing

There are many sincere believers who become heavyhearted because their witness seems to produce little visible fruit. They speak to family members, neighbors, old friends, or even people in churches, and after all their effort they see no change. Some stand almost alone in their town. Some have only one or two others who understand what they believe. Some write letters, hand out literature, share Scripture, invite conversation, and still feel as if the door remains shut. Then discouragement begins to whisper, 'You must be doing something wrong.' This sermon is for those weary servants. The Lord has not called His people to measure faithfulness by the number of people they can persuade. He has called them to speak truth, walk in love, build up the body of Christ, and trust God with the increase.

It is important to begin with a truth that many believers forget: not every servant is given the same work. In 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, Paul writes, 'Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers,' and then he lists miracles, healings, helps, governments, and other gifts. Then he asks, 'Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers?' The answer is plainly no. The body of Christ is not made of one kind of member, one kind of gift, or one kind of ministry. Some preach publicly. Some teach patiently. Some encourage quietly. Some organize. Some help. Some support others so the work can continue. If your service does not look like another person's service, that does not mean it is worthless. It may mean you are doing the particular work Christ gave you.

Paul also reminds us that gifts are never meant to become a cause for pride or despair. At the end of 1 Corinthians 12, he says, 'Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.' Then he leads into the chapter on charity, or love. A gift without love is empty. A ministry without love becomes noise. A witness without love becomes argument. The believer who witnesses must therefore ask more than, 'How many have I convinced?' He must ask, 'Have I spoken the truth in the spirit of Christ? Have I loved the brethren? Have I strengthened the body? Have I obeyed the Lord in the place He gave me?' Those questions bring peace where false measures bring discouragement.

Ephesians 4 makes the matter even clearer. Paul says that Christ 'gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.' Then he tells us why these gifts were given: 'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.' Notice the order. The ministry is not only aimed outward at the unbelieving world. It is also aimed inward, for the strengthening, correcting, and maturing of Christ's own people. Many Christians have been made to feel that the only valuable service is the visible conversion of outsiders. Yet Paul says that the Lord gives ministers and gifts so that the saints may be perfected and the body of Christ edified.

That truth should lift a burden from many hearts. If you spend time helping a believer become steadier in the Word, you have not wasted your time. If you encourage a discouraged saint, you have not failed. If you help organize a fellowship, support sound teaching, pray for workers, distribute truth, or study Scripture with one hungry soul, you are taking part in the work Christ described through His apostle. Ephesians 4:13 says the goal is that 'we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.' If the body of Christ has not yet reached that maturity, then there is still much work to do among believers themselves.

Paul goes on to say that this strengthening keeps us from being 'children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.' That is a serious warning. Believers who spend all their strength trying to persuade people who hate the truth may neglect the very instruction that would protect them from deception. The church must be nourished in sound doctrine. The people of God

must be built up in Scripture. The weak must be strengthened, the confused must be taught, and the faithful must be encouraged. There is nothing selfish about feeding the flock. Christ Himself told Peter, 'Feed my sheep.' A healthy body shines more clearly than a scattered and starving body.

This does not mean we never speak to those outside our fellowship or never bear witness to people who disagree. We should speak when God opens the door. We should give an answer when the opportunity comes. We should not hide the kingdom of God or the lordship and saving work of Jesus Christ. But Scripture also teaches that there is a time to stop arguing with a person who has willfully rejected the truth. Titus 3:10-11 says, 'A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.' That is not harshness. It is obedience. There is a difference between patience with the weak and endless striving with the obstinate.

Many believers suffer because they do not accept that difference. They return again and again to the same resistant person, hoping that one more argument, one more letter, one more discussion, or one more proof will finally force the door open. Months pass. Sometimes years pass. The other person grows harder, and the witness grows bitter, weary, and ashamed. But the Bible does not command us to batter the same shut door forever. It tells us to admonish, to bear witness, and then, when the rejection is plain, to move on. The failure to convince a hardened hearer is not proof that you have failed God. It may be proof that you have reached the point where God's Word tells you to stop striving.

The Lord Jesus gave this instruction to His own disciples. In Matthew 10, when He sent the twelve out, He told them to preach, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' But He also said, 'Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.' He did not say, 'Stay there until everyone is persuaded.' He did not make the disciples responsible for forcing belief into unwilling hearts. He sent them to proclaim the message faithfully. If the message was received, they remained. If it was rejected, they departed. That instruction should teach us humility. The witness is responsible to speak. God alone is responsible for the result.

The apostle Paul followed the same pattern. In Acts 18, he testified that Jesus was Christ. When some opposed and blasphemed, Paul shook his raiment and said, 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean.' Then he turned his labor elsewhere. Paul did not interpret their rejection as proof that he was unfaithful. He recognized that he had discharged his duty. There are times when the most obedient thing a witness can say is, 'I have told you the truth. I will not quarrel with you. I leave the matter with God.' That is not indifference. It is reverence for God's order.

This is especially important in perilous times. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul describes people who are lovers of their own selves, proud, blasphemers, unthankful, unholy, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, and having a form of godliness while denying the power thereof. Then he gives the command: 'From such turn away.' That command is plain. Some people have religious language but no love for truth. Some have a form without power. Some enjoy argument more than righteousness. The Christian is not called to make fellowship with such people in the hope that constant exposure will soften them. Paul says to turn away.

Ephesians 5 gives the same warning in another way. Paul tells believers to walk in love as Christ loved us, but he also warns against uncleanness, covetousness, foolish talking, and the works of darkness. He writes, 'Let no man deceive you with vain words,' and then says, 'Be not ye therefore partakers with them.' Later he adds, 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.' This is not a call to hatred. It is a call to separation from corrupt influence. The believer may reprove evil, but he must not become a companion of it. When we spend too long in the company of those who despise the Word, their bitterness may affect us more than our witness affects them.

The reason for this is explained in 1 Corinthians 2. Paul writes, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' There is power in the Word of God, but that power is received by faith through the work of the Spirit. To the natural man, spiritual truth sounds foolish. He may mock what you treasure. He may pity you for believing what he cannot understand. He may become angry when confronted by Scripture. Even in the ministry of Christ, some believed when they saw His works, while others hardened themselves and sought to destroy Him. The same sun that softens wax hardens clay.

Therefore, do not accuse yourself every time someone refuses the truth. A faithful witness cannot give spiritual sight. He cannot create love for God in another heart. He cannot make the natural man receive what only the Spirit can make known. That does not excuse laziness, cowardice, or harshness. We should examine whether we have spoken clearly, humbly, and faithfully. But after honest witness has been given, the matter belongs to God. If a person will not hear, do not let his unbelief become your prison.

Second Thessalonians 2 adds another sober warning. Paul speaks of those who 'received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.' Then he says that God sends them strong delusion, 'that they should believe a lie.' These are fearful words. They teach us that rejection of truth is not a small matter. When people take pleasure in unrighteousness and refuse the truth, God may give them over to the lies they prefer. How can a witness overturn what a person has chosen and what God has permitted as judgment? We cannot. That is why our confidence must not be in our power to persuade every hearer. Our confidence must be in God's wisdom, God's timing, and God's sovereignty.

But Paul does not leave the faithful in fear. He immediately turns to thanksgiving: 'But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.' That is where the discouraged witness must learn to rest. When someone rejects the truth, do not sink into despair. Thank God that He has given you ears to hear. Thank God for every brother and sister who loves the Word. Thank God for every small fellowship, every open door, every honest question, every soul that wants to grow in Christ. Gratitude will guard your heart from bitterness.

Revelation 18:4 says, 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.' There is a time to come out. There is a time to separate. There is a time to stop trying to reform what God has called His people to leave. This applies not only to large systems but also to personal entanglements. If a conversation constantly pulls you into anger, pride, compromise, or confusion, you must ask whether you are witnessing or merely being drawn into the very darkness you were sent to reprove. Wisdom is not cowardice. Separation can be obedience.

First Corinthians 3 brings us back to the heart of the matter. Paul says, 'I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.' One servant plants. Another waters. God gives the growth. This single sentence can save a believer from years of unnecessary discouragement. You may be a planter and never see the harvest. You may water what someone else planted. You may speak one sentence that God uses years later, after you have forgotten it. You may strengthen a believer who later strengthens many more. The visible result may not appear in your lifetime. That does not make the labor empty. It simply means the field belongs to God.

Paul continues, 'Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.' This does not mean the laborer is worthless. It means the laborer must not steal the glory. We should never exalt a preacher, teacher, writer, or witness as if the truth came from the man. If any spiritual light reaches us, it comes from God through His Word. The minister is a vessel. The Lord is the source. This truth protects us from pride when people listen and from despair when they do not. We are not the foundation. 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.'

Luke 10 records the Lord sending out seventy others, two by two, into the places where He Himself would come. That detail should encourage those who feel alone. Sometimes the Lord sends only a few witnesses into a place. Sometimes two are enough. Sometimes one faithful household stands where there is no crowd, no large congregation, and no public approval. Christ said, 'The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few.' He did not say the laborers would always be surrounded by applause. He sent them as lambs among wolves. Yet He also gave them instruction and authority for the work before them.

In that same passage, the Lord says that when a city receives the messengers, they should remain and declare, 'The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.' But when a city will not receive them, they are to go out and testify that even the dust of that city is wiped off against it. Then He explains the seriousness of rejection: 'He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me.' When a faithful witness speaks the truth of Christ and someone rejects it, the deepest rejection is not of the messenger but of the Lord who sent the message. That should humble us. It should also relieve us. We are not the final issue. Christ is.

Therefore, do not keep casting holy things before those who only trample them. Do not keep laying the truth down for mockers to grind underfoot. Speak with patience. Speak with love. Give room for honest questions. Bear with the weak and the confused. But when contempt has shown itself, when the witness has been given, and when rejection is settled, leave the matter with God. There are other souls who may be hungry. There are believers who need strengthening. There are children who need teaching. There are lonely saints who need fellowship. There is a body to edify.

The Lord told His disciples privately, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see.' That blessing belongs in the heart of every believer who has been granted light from the Word of God. Instead of grieving endlessly over those who refuse to see, rejoice that God has opened your eyes. Instead of measuring your life by how many people you have convinced, measure it by faithfulness to Christ. Have you borne witness when the door opened? Have you loved the truth? Have you strengthened the brethren? Have you refused fellowship with darkness? Have you thanked God for the grace He has shown you? These are better questions than the discouraging question, 'Why will they not listen to me?'

A faithful witness must learn to be both tender and firm. Tender, because the truth is precious and souls matter. Firm, because the truth is not ours to cheapen through endless quarrels. Tender, because some are weak and need patient instruction. Firm, because some are willfully rebellious and Scripture says to turn away. Tender, because love is the more excellent way. Firm, because love does not require fellowship with darkness. The balance is found not in our feelings but in the Word of God.

So let the discouraged believer take heart. If you have convinced only one or two, do not despise that work. If you have seen no visible fruit, do not assume the seed was wasted. If you stand almost alone, remember that Christ has often sent only a few into a place. If your family will not hear, keep your spirit clean and your witness honest. If old friends mock, do not answer mockery with bitterness. If a door closes after honest witness, walk away in peace. God has not asked you to do His part. He has asked you to do yours.

Let the church also remember its calling. We must build one another up in the faith. We must promote sound teaching, support faithful ministry, pray for laborers, help the weak, and grow together into the stature of Christ. The body of Christ must not remain childish, tossed about by every wind of doctrine. The saints must be strengthened until their lives shine with the truth they confess. Then, when outsiders see a people ordered by the Word, walking in love, separated from darkness, and grounded in Christ, the witness will not be merely words. It will be a living testimony.

In the end, the foundation is Jesus Christ. Not our eloquence. Not our arguments. Not our favorite teacher. Not our private success. Christ is the foundation, the message, the Savior, the King, and the

One who gives gifts to His people. We plant. We water. We speak. We pray. We love. We warn. We withdraw when Scripture tells us to withdraw. And God gives the increase according to His own will. That truth does not make witnessing smaller. It makes it steadier. It frees us from despair and anchors us in obedience.

Our Father and our God, we thank Thee for Thy Word and for the light Thou hast given through Jesus Christ our Lord. Forgive us for our discouragement, our pride, our impatience, and our fear. Teach us to witness faithfully without trusting in our own power. Teach us to build up the body of Christ, to love the brethren, to separate from darkness, and to leave the increase in Thy hands. Strengthen the lonely believer, encourage the weary servant, and keep us grounded on the only foundation, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.