

# Be My Witnesses

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THE APOSTLE PAUL emphatically reminds the Church that Israel remains “beloved” of God and that “the gifts and the call” upon His elect people are “irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). The core of that call is to be witnesses to the nations that there is one God, the Holy One of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Isa 43:10; 44:8).

In a parallel way, the Church has a call upon it as well: to witness to the nations that there is one Lord and Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead. “You shall be my witnesses!” was Jesus’ final injunction to his faithful disciples (Acts 1:8). So both Jews and Christians carry a mandate to bear witness. The challenge for Christians has always been *how* that witness is rendered and to *whom*.

This is a particularly sensitive issue in Israel. Evangelical Christians for decades have demonstrated unwavering support of the Jewish state—based on biblical principles alone, not on any hidden agenda to convert Jews—and yet they are always under suspicion as covert “missionaries” by the religious community.

THIS SURELY IS a volatile matter, with complex historical antecedents, that defies simplistic solutions. But may I suggest a few thoughts on Christian witness that are not always understood by evangelicals.

[1] When it comes to the Jewish people, Christians are in the unique position of being both witnesses and debtors. To the other nations our responsibility as witnesses is straightforward. But with respect to Israel, we also are scripturally exhorted to recognize that to them belong the promises, the covenants, the patriarchs, the giving of the Torah, and the worship of the true and living God (Rom 9:4-5). From the Jewish people comes the Messiah himself and salvation (John 4:22). In him we have been brought near to Israel’s God, whereas apart from him we would have no share in the spiritual heritage of Abraham’s offspring. We would be “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:11-12).

[2] So when we have the opportunity to interact with Jewish people, let us never be arrogant or exhibit the religious triumphalism that has characterized Christianity for twenty centuries. Rather let us be humble, respectful and deeply appreciative. Jesus came to the Jewish people as a *servant* on behalf of the truthfulness of God’s promises (Romans 15:6). Our attitude should match his; our love, like his, should be unconditional and never self-serving.

[3] Whether to bear witness to Jews or not is a “forced option” (in William James’ terminology). It is unavoidable. Christians *are* bearing witness whether they consciously choose to or not. The real issue is: is it a good and faithful witness or the opposite. All too often in Church history it has been the latter. In its missionary zeal the

Church has dishonored our Lord, the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, and demeaned and even demonized his brothers and sisters after the flesh, the Jewish people – all in the name of Jesus' love!

[4] Authentic love is relational and respectful. It is never "I-It" but always "I-You" in its approach to the other. All deceptive, manipulative or coercive tactics must be rejected. To target Jews for proselytizing and treat them as any other nation is enormously disrespectful and ill-informed. The other nations do not worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They are not the recipients of the oracles of God, nor the preservers of Holy Scripture. They are not in continuing covenantal relationship with the LORD God. Israel is. As a nation (independent of the spiritual status of any particular individual) Israel's election is irrevocable. There yet remain promises to the Jewish people that God will keep.

[5] As appealing emotionally as "Dual-Covenant" theology may appear, it does not accord with New Testament scriptures. On the other hand, evangelicals are not called to judge who is saved and who is not. God will be the Judge. We are called simply to be His witnesses. And the most transparent and enduring witness we can render is to lead a life that speaks of a holy difference, and when asked, to be prepared to give an account of the hope within us—thanks to God's redemptive act through Jesus our Lord.

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