

How Not To Witness

By Mark E. Benjamin

The Great Commission Doesn't Mean A Sales Pitch

Certainly as Christians, we have all heard that we are to go into the world and make converts out of any one who we meet. (Matt 28:19(NIV) “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”). This is nothing new, for even the non-Christian knows about our mission. Many sermons have been preached on this subject and even more Sunday school classes devoted to the training on how to go about doing it. This article will therefore not go down the well-trodden path of the great commission. Before I continue, let me make it clear that I am not now, or ever, saying that any of the things previously said on how to witness to a non-believer is without merit and need. If we would put into action only a fraction of what we have all learned since our rebirth, our work here would be done and Christ would have come again. Halleluiah!

Instead of going over how to witness, I want to point out how not to witness. For we stumble and talk in sheepish tones wanting not to offend and when we do finally say something, many times we push away instead of drawing them towards us and the Lord. I am so glad that it's the Holy Spirit's job to truly convict and convert and not ours. Amen? If it were left up to our own skills, no matter how sincere we may be, not many would turn to Christ for salvation. Even though the Holy Spirit can take whatever messes we may make, and use it to make miracles happen, I see no reason why we should test His strength and make His work harder.

Let me demonstrate my point by relaying a story shared by a dear brethren from the church I attend. He shared this during one of those many Sunday class lessons mentioned above. I'm not sure what his point may have been at the time, but it was most likely to say something like, “Just do it. Witness to everyone and if they close you out, at least you planted a seed in them and maybe the next person will be the one to bring them to Christ.” An admirable and valid point. But sometimes the seeds we plant can be that of a thorn bush; when it takes root, grows and blossoms, it does nothing more than irritate the Holy Spirit right out of them (1 Cor 1:23 (KJV) “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;”). Maybe, just maybe, we now made it harder for that next person by what we have said. The next person will need to first cut down and eliminate the fruits of our labor, before being able to plant the correct seed.

“Please Lord, Don't Let Him Sit Next To Me”

I'll leave out some of the details of the story, but I think you will see what I mean. I'll call my friend Jim.

Jim was coming home from a trip. The plane ride was going to be several hours long and once you take off “you have a captive audience”, as he said. He noticed immediately that the couple sitting next to him was Jewish. Jim didn't say how he knew, but I assume that they were of the more Orthodox tradition and the man had a skullcap on or something else that makes it easy to tell when you're sitting next to a Jewish couple – whatever that may be. Jim started to lay out the Gospel to them. He stated, almost out of the gate, about the truth of Jesus and asked them how they could deny Him, their own Messiah? The man, although polite and tactful, asked for the conversation to be over and turned to converse with his wife.

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That's it, we're done. No more chance to spread the good news, or walk through the four steps or some other well-known Christian tracks. The Jewish couple completely and totally shut out poor ol' Jim and whatever he had to say. Maybe something penetrated, maybe the wife was listening and is now a closet Christian working patiently on her husband, maybe the next person that sits next to them on a plane will have better luck because they are now curious... Maybe. The Spirit can, and does, work in strange and surprising ways at times. But, I just can't help to think that what really has happened is that they just added one more layer to their defenses against "those crazy Jesus freaks". The next person they sit next to might not even be able to say hello to them. We will never know for sure until the day of days has come.

If The Spirit Opens The Door, Don't Stand In The Doorway

Let's take a closer look at Jim and his technique. First off, if you can't say anything good about Jim, don't say anything at all. Right? Therefore, we must say a big "good job" to him for even saying anything. How many of us have similar or even better opportunities and we bury our noses in a magazine or plug in the iPod. Jim made an incredible first step; he tried to open the lines of communication. It can be somewhat daunting to try to speak to a perfect stranger, especially if they have the look of being knowledgeable in religious matters. I think you'll find that even if the person you are trying to talk to is more informative than yourself, in most cases they will appreciate that you have at least put forth an effort.

Different situations will dictate different approaches. For instance, when I have the opportunity at my secular job, I will usually just say one or two lines and let it go at that. I will be seeing these people again so I'm not up against a clock. Some time later, I will have fellow workers come to me, under the cloak of darkness wearing a mask and sunglasses to not be recognized. It is usually when they are faced with a situation in life that they don't know what to do or have "religious" type questions. They can't admit it or wish to be seen having this need, but its there and by letting them know that I'm available, something has been initiated that the Lord can use. Amen?

In Jim's situation, time is limited and although haste may be in order, tact is not to be left behind. There was a key opportunity here for Jim. If he would have approached it a little different, possibly the end result may have been different. People in general love to talk about themselves and their own interests. The time of year Jim was on the plane with this Jewish man and his wife just so happened to be between Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot. What a tremendous break, sitting next to a Jew during some of the key Jewish holidays. I would venture to guess that if Jim had talked and asked questions about these important days, they would have talked the entire flight.

True, Jim may never have had the time left in the trip to fully present the Gospel, but I have no doubt he could have at the very least slipped in some facts about how *Y'shua ha-Mashiach* can be found in these Holy days. True, it might have offended the man even more than the more direct approach, or it could have gotten him to debate the subject. Even to go as far as, with the Holy Spirits help, question his beliefs or be interested in finding out more about it. He most likely had heard many people say "Jesus is your Lord too." But the chance of having someone talking about his own holidays and how Jesus is in them may have been a novel approach, and one that would hold his attention.

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Conversion Is A Two Way Street

Talking to a Jew about Jewish Holy Days and traditions may not be an easy task for most Christians. In fact if there ever was the existence of a sure thing, that would be it. It's definitely a change in strategy on how to witness. Especially witnessing to the spur of the moment person that you may meet in the middle of your day-to-day activities. The "beat them into repentance" or even the "love them to Christ" techniques I'm sure work on many non-Christians. But with these plans of attack, it is doubtful that you will get much farther than Jim did with someone that has as large of an investment in traditions as most Jews have.

So what's a well meaning Christian with a passion to help win the Jew over to Christ to do? The answer is simple although accomplishing it may prove to be more difficult. We need to study, learn, and understand the heritage, traditions, and ways of the Jewish people. This will give us an even greater common ground with them. Once we have mutual understanding and dialog, we are therefore allowing a better chance to not be shut down by the one we are witnessing to (1 Cor 9:19-23, especially verse 20 (KJV) "...unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews..."). With the Lord's leading, another member will be added to our ranks. Halleluiah!

Keep praying for and learning about our spiritual cousins. Also keep praying for yourself to be of the mindset that can truly grasp where the Jewish people are coming from so you can be more relatable. Above all, look for any opportunities that the Lord will put before you – I am very sure He will. Most importantly, act on what God gives you as answers to what you pray.

And one more thing, Pray that Jim will have another chance to go on a plane ride. Amen?