

Stand Out and Speak Up for Jesus

✖ *Many Christians lack the courage—or the conviction—to testify to their faith. But the power of the Holy Spirit helps us to speak up.*

As I go out into the world, presenting the gospel on television and radio talk shows or exalting Jesus from secular and religious platforms, I am treated with respect—most of the time. But reviews of my engagements are not always as gracious as my live hosts are.

They sometimes describe me as a middle-aged woman parading a worn-out, old-time message that has no relevance in our century—simply because I lift up the cross.

I have been accused of trying to ride my father's coattails and make a name for myself because I have walked through doors of opportunity that have been opened for me to proclaim God's Word. I have been attacked as a Jezebel who is leading women within the church into sin by my own example of ministry leadership. I have been labeled unloving, intolerant, exclusive, narrow-minded, fundamentalist, naive—and more. I have been excluded from social functions, platforms, seminars—and even from some churches.

When I look at John 15:17-27, which records Jesus' words the evening before His crucifixion, I see that Jesus prepared His disciples—and those like you and me who would follow them—for the kind of treatment they could expect from the world around them—a treatment that would require deep convictions and the courage to live by them.

Courage to Stand Out

Jesus began His challenge to stand out for Him in the world with the command “‘Love each other’” (John 15:17, NIV). He showed the disciples how they would find the courage to not only live their lives for Him on a daily basis after Jesus was gone but also give their lives for Him on a final basis in death.

Knowing how difficult it was going to be to live for Him in the midst of the world, Jesus reminded His disciples: “‘Remember the words I spoke to you: “No servant is greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also’” (v. 20).

They didn't just persecute Jesus; they crucified Him! Why do you and I think we will be treated any better?

Jesus gave five reasons for the world's persecution of Christians. These reasons have remained valid in the lives of believers down through the centuries:

The first reason Jesus gave is our identification with Him, whom the world hates: “‘If the world hates you, keep in mind that

it hated Me first'" (v. 18).

Hate Jesus? What evidence do you and I see of hatred toward Him today?

Is there an underlying hatred of Christ when His name is invoked in profanity, rather than the name of Buddha or Allah or

Mohammed? At the very least, profanity reveals that deep within the

human spirit there is no neutrality toward Him.

Several years ago on *The View*, a television talk show that involves a round-table-type conversation among several women, Joy Behar

remarked that she had successfully lost weight on her diet. She then

exclaimed "Praise Jesus!" When the show was aired on the West Coast,

the name Jesus was bleeped out! The same network that peppers its

programs with God's name used in profanity found it offensive when His

Son's name was used in sincerity!

The second reason we may be persecuted as Christians is our mandated separation from the world, which causes the world to

resent us as non-conformists: "'I have chosen you out of the world.

That is why the world hates you'" (v. 19).

When was the last time you refused to join in gossip? Or refused to lie for your friend? Or refused to go along to a movie

filled with profanity and adultery?

Did such refusals cause you to be honored and loved and respected? If not, then you're getting the picture.

Third, we may encounter persecution because of the world's rejection of the truth that Jesus is God's only Son and the exclusive way to God: "'They will treat you this way because of My name, for they do not know the One who sent Me'" (v. 21).

In an article in the December 2001 issue of the Christian newsmagazine *World*, Gene Edward Veith warned, "The enemy, we are told, is not Islam but intolerance. It is that narrow-minded, restrictive view of religion that is to blame for the terrorist attacks and the Taliban oppression. People who think 'theirs is the only true religion' are the real enemy, a charge, of course, that sticks not just to the Taliban but to orthodox Christians."

Fourth, persecution may be directed toward us because of the world's conviction of sin, which the truth reveals: "'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin'" (v. 22).

Recently I found myself in a situation similar to one I've been in many times. The driver of a cab I was riding in was lively and talkative, and his conversation was peppered with bad language. When he was getting my bag out of the trunk, one of the people who had come to greet me told him that I am Billy Graham's daughter and a Christian speaker. His immediate reaction was, "If I had known, I would

have cleaned up my language.”

I had not said a word to him about his language. But sometimes just our presence reveals the darkness of sin in the lives of others, and those who are convicted of their own sin by our separation from it resent us.

The fifth and last reason Jesus gave for persecution of His followers is the demonstration of God’s power in individual lives:

“‘If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both Me and my Father’” (v. 24).

If you and I are not being persecuted, could it be that no one has seen any real change or evidence of God’s power in our lives? Have we so watered down and compromised our witness that the world around us doesn’t see any reason to persecute us?

What miracle that demonstrates God’s power can someone else see in your life? Is it when God set you free from alcoholism?

When He reconciled you with your spouse—or your in-laws? When you experienced peace in the midst of turmoil, or hope in the midst of grief?

Courage to Speak Up

After delivering the chilling discourse that warned them of the persecution to come, Jesus revealed to His disciples the source

of the courage that would be theirs as they sought to speak up in a world of hatred. The source was none other than the Holy Spirit of God—the same Spirit who indwelt Jesus.

What comfort the disciples must have felt as Jesus promised, “‘When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about Me’” (John 15:26). The source of power that filled Jesus, enabling Him to face His accusers and His execution with dignified compassion and courageous strength, is the same source of power that enabled the disciples to live and die for Jesus.

And it’s the same source of power available to you and me today! When we have the Spirit of the living God within us, we have no less courage, no less power, than did those 11 men around the table in the upper room!

When have you spoken up for Jesus? When have you told someone about Jesus who doesn’t know Him?

Are you recoiling in fear, protesting, “Anne, I could never do that! I’m afraid my neighbors would never speak to me again. I’m afraid my friends will laugh at me or be derisive about something that’s precious to me. I’m afraid to speak up for Jesus because I may lose my popularity or promotion or position or prestige or possessions.”

Jesus understands your fears. That's why He has sent you and me the Holy Spirit. When we open our mouths, the Holy Spirit not only gives us words, He clothes the words with power to make a difference in the hearer. And it's the Holy Spirit who will fill you with such deep conviction, passion and zeal for the truth that you will be compelled to speak up!

One evening, my brother Franklin and I were invited to appear together on *Larry King Live*, a once-popular talk show on CNN. Mr. King asked Franklin how it was that we were so bold in our faith. Was it hereditary?

I felt I had to say why I was bold—when my personality is basically shy. The reason is that I am convinced what I say is the truth!

And I wonder—maybe you and I don't need more courage; maybe we just need stronger convictions! Because when you feel deeply about something, you are compelled to open your mouth and speak up. Jesus stated this clearly to His disciples when He said, "'You also must testify, for you have been with Me from the beginning'" (v. 27).

Fewer than 60 days after that evening meal in the upper room, two of these same disciples—Peter and John—were arrested by the authorities in Jerusalem for speaking out about Jesus. Facing the same religious court that had condemned Jesus to death, Peter—the

same Peter
who had been so terrified of the opinions of others during the
trials
of Jesus that he had denied His Lord three times—Peter, filled
with the
Holy Spirit, boldly proclaimed Jesus Christ as the One “‘whom
you
crucified but whom God raised from the dead ... Salvation is
found in no
one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men
by which
we must be saved’” (Acts 4:10-12).

The authorities could hardly believe their ears! “When
they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they
were
unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took
note that
these men had been with Jesus” (v. 13).

After a brief consultation among themselves, the
religious rulers forbade John and Peter to speak in Jesus’
name. The
disciples’ reply was a classic defense that rang as true in
their
politically correct, pluralistic, multicultural society as it
does in
ours: “‘We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and
heard’” (v.
20).

They were compelled to speak up—they couldn’t help
it—because they had been with Jesus! They had been with Him
when the
blind received sight, the ears of the deaf were opened, the
lepers were
cleansed, the lame walked, the tormented were set free, the
dead were

raised to life!

How could they ever be silent again?

Our youngest daughter, Rachel-Ruth, recently gave birth to our first grandchild—a little girl named Ruth Bell Wright. She is softly pink with big blue-gray eyes, a halo of golden brown hair, perfect little ears, long fingers and—I could go on and on.

My husband and I are totally enthralled with this little girl. She fills our hearts! We can't help talking about her to anyone who will listen.

I'm not afraid to talk about her. I don't plan in advance how I will talk about her. I don't worry about offending someone with my talk about her. I don't go to classes to learn how to talk about her. I don't read books on how to talk about her.

Little Ruth Bell fills my heart! And what fills my heart comes out on my lips!

Why do we make speaking up for Jesus so complicated? If He fills our hearts, He is going to come out on our lips! Like Peter and John, we will not be able to help "speaking about what we have seen and heard" of Him!

Today, in our God-blessed nation of America, no one is crucified or thrown to the lions or burned at the stake because he or she believes in Jesus as the only way to God. Yet the average church member seems to be so lacking in deep convictions concerning

who Jesus

is that he or she cowers under a raised eyebrow, a whispered innuendo
or a politically incorrect label.

Are you convinced that Jesus is the only Way to God, the only Truth about how to get to heaven, the only Life that is eternal

and abundant? Are you convinced that no one will ever be accepted by

God the Father, except they come to Him through Jesus Christ?

If these statements, which paraphrase Jesus' own claims, are your convictions, then do you have the courage to state them

publicly—today—to your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers? Many

church members in our pluralistic, tolerant society not only lack the

courage to stand up for the truth that faith in Jesus Christ alone is

the only way to God; they actually reproach others who do stand up!

In the light of such spiritual anemia, my heart's cry is, Please, Jesus, give me more of Your courage in my convictions. I want

the courage to stand out and speak up about my convictions in the way

Christians have exhibited in every century since the cross and resurrection.

In response to my heart's cry, Jesus has whispered in my heart, "I will give you more courage, Anne, when you stand out and speak up for Me!"

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