

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.

Recently 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 not too long ago, my brother Franklin and I
were invited to appear together on Larry King Live, a 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!"

Anne Graham Lotz is the author of My Heart's Cry (W Publishing Group, 2002), from which this article is adapted. Used by permission.