

How Do I Witness to a Nominal Christian?

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Question: He says this, "How would you recommend witnessing to somebody who believes they are saved, but they show no understanding of the Gospel and have no evidence of being born again? I do not want this person to remain deceived, but I also don't want to be self-righteous about how I do this."

Discussion:

Tim: Well, I would say - you know what I would say about this? Look, you guys, we may have some in this room who think they're Christians and they're really not. And this applies to some of us with regards to you. And then there are some of you who are truly converted in this room and you've come across this. You come across people. Some of them might be your parents. Some of them might be those that are close to you, they might be a brother or sister, might be co-workers, might be some you know right in the church, in the Bible study, wherever. Maybe other churches you came from. There are people in your life that you care about. You want to see them converted. You want to see them in glory. But you have real concerns that something isn't right. You have real concerns that they claim to be a Christian and they're not really.

Okay, what do you do? Well, I mean, the self-righteous thing, certainly, I'm not going to stay away from confronting other people because of a concern of self-righteousness. Look, if you're a Christian, you need to love them. Be done with the self-righteousness. Just put it away. Don't be it. I would say put that away. Don't be judgmental. Don't be hard. And for one thing, we have to understand this, you don't know another man's heart. And so the best you can do is be pretty convinced that things aren't right. Because I'll tell you what, there was a time in David's life, if you looked at him, you'd have said, yeah, it looks pretty doubtful, right? I mean, there are people in the Scriptures there are certain times if you looked, you would have gazed in, you know, right there when Jesus was on trial, you would have looked over there at Peter, you'd have thought that guy's cursing, and that guy's swearing and that guy's denying Christ. Nope, he's off the list. He can't be a true one. You know, we have to be careful, right? Sometimes we get looking at other people, some of the self-righteousness we need to be concerned with may fall in just having an overly harsh judgment. You know, God did not make us the spiritual policemen, the spiritual judges to go around and condemn everybody else and tell them.

Now look, but at the same time, love says if I know my Bible well enough to look at what the characteristic of a true Christian is and I look at yours and I'm not seeing them line up, guess what? I have a responsibility to call you to repentance, whether you turn out to be true or not. And you know, there's definitely certain people's lives you can look at, especially over a longer period of time, and you can become very concerned. I'm a pastor and some of you know. I don't want to be mean to people. There are people I've called into question. There are people I've asked about. There are people I've pressed, people I've taken them to the Scriptures, there's people that I've said, you know, I have concerns here; I have concerns there, and I've seen

some of them fall away and I've seen some of them run extremely well. And I don't always have this figured out. I've told you guys there's some people coming into the church and I'm like that's a tremendous testimony. A month later, they're gone. There's other people that come in and I'm thinking, no way, that doesn't fly. And you know what? Eight years later, they're running just as well as ever. And so I realize I can be wrong. You can be wrong.

But okay, what do we do? Well, if indeed we've got somebody that it appears they're probably lost and they have a false profession, we know this. What did Jesus Christ say sets us free? Truth. You're not going to help anybody, and you're not going to love anybody, you're not going to really care for anybody unless you hit them with truth, right? The truth sets free. If somebody says they're a Christian and they're not, well, they're not free. They're in bondage. And they're in double bondage, right? Because not only are they lost, they're all the more deceived into thinking that they're saved. So they're not really going to be aggressively pursuing that. It's not like you can come to them like you can if you slide up next to a Muslim and he obviously rejects Christ. You're on a whole other thing there. The problem is we have so much of that in this country, don't we? People with false professions. You've got all sorts of folks that think they're saved. Well, the truth sets free.

Okay, now hear this. Because I think this is an important text. Matthew 13:15, and I know we have parallel verses on this probably over in what Luke 8? Mark 4? We were talking about this text just the other night. Matthew 13:15. Listen to this. Jesus Christ gave the parable of the soils. Now just think about that. Parable of the soils. What's true about the parable of the soils? Well, the Gospel's preached. Some people hear it. Bang! They're gone. Birds come down. Demons come in. They pluck the seed up. There's not even a profession made. But you've got other people, the Gospel's preached, they make professions. They're like fireworks. They're all out there. They spring up. There's all sorts of likeness to a plant. You've got lots of leaves and everything. But what happens? Sun comes out. That's a likeness of persecution. They wither away. There was one, professed to be true, wasn't true. Withered away. You've got the other ones. You've got the weeds and stuff. They grow up. They choke it out. And it's no good either because it's not fruitful. And Scripture says you know them by their fruits. Bottom line: fruit's the issue. The ones that are good - you've got 30 fold, 60 fold, 100 fold. And they're good. And why? How can we tell? Fruit. By their fruits you know them. That's always the case in the Scripture. Well, here's the thing. Right in the middle of this whole deal, after He gives the parable, His disciples come to Him and they want to know the interpretation. Between the parable and the interpretation Jesus says this in Matthew 13:15. Listen to this, "This peoples' heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear and their eyes they have closed lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn and I would heal them."

Now here's the thing, truth sets men free. You got somebody that's got a false profession? Let me tell you this. What must happen to somebody based on Matthew 13:15? What has to happen to somebody before they can be spiritually healed? It says they must turn - somebody said repent. Turn. Repent. That's the same thing. They must turn, but what must happen before

they can turn? They must be understanding. You see it there? There must be understanding. To have understanding, they must hear. To hear, someone must be doing what? They must be talking or preaching. Somebody must be telling them something. This one came in by Brad Jones. Brad, the fact is, we need to show people about the new birth. If you're going to have people genuinely healed, the people have got to turn. If they're going to turn, there's got to be understanding. If they're going to be understanding, there's got to be hearing. If they've got to be hearing, there's got to be somebody talking. We've got to take truth to people. Listen, you've got somebody out there. You're concerned about them. You've got to take truth to them. That's the way to do it. Now look, you don't have to charge in like the bull in the china closet, and say "you're going to hell! You know, I've got it figured out. You're lost and you're going to hell and it's all false." You know what kind of hearing you're going to get from people when you do that? About none. You go charging in like that - the best way to do is not to go charging in and just jump all over them and create a big scenario. You can express that you have concerns in some place, or you might even just begin to bring some Scripture up.

Well, what kind of Scriptures? I mean, basically, if you've got somebody with a false profession, and you're wanting to bring truth in order to bring understanding that might lead to the turning that leads to the healing, well, what are we going to do? What kind of truth are we going to bring out? Well, obviously, there are verses that deal with false professors, are there not? Do we not have tests for true Christianity in the Scriptures? Anybody think of where some might be? 1 John, Matthew 7. Yeah, there's a lot. Well, let's kind of go through these in order.

The first one I would say - and what I want to do is, this is not an extensive, full list. This is just some places you can go to in the Scriptures. Just some. I'd start out with this. You know where a good place is I've found? It's in the Old Testament where the New Covenant is talked about. That's a tremendous place. You know why? There in Jeremiah 31 and in chapter 32 of Jeremiah, and in Ezekiel 36 - those are three of the most prominent texts from the Old Testament that give us the character of the New Covenant. And by the way, what's the New Covenant? The New Covenant is the way you are saved if you are saved. It is salvation through Christ. It is the way God saves now. Well, it's the way God has saved always, but it's set over against the Old Covenant which was works, right? Old Covenant - "do this and live." How many people did it? None. All of sinned and come short of the glory of God. That was the defect of the Old Covenant. Nobody could keep it because it didn't give any power.

But then the New Covenant, basically God says, I will, I will, I will. What did He say He would do? Let's go through them real fast. Jeremiah 31 - you guys don't have to turn there but just listen to it. Jeremiah 31:33, "This is the covenant I will make with them after those days declares the Lord..." And He's speaking of the house of Israel. And of course, we know a true Jew is one who is a child of Abraham by faith. True Jew. True circumcision. Those are the ones that worship God in the Spirit. He told the Philippians. We see the Galatians are called the true Israel. Basically, you've got to become a Jew to be saved. The way you become that is by faith in Jesus Christ. That's how you become a son of Abraham. What's true of this New Covenant? He says, "I will put My law within them." You know what that means? That means He puts His

law within our heart. You know what John said? His commandments are not grievous. You know what it says in Romans 8:7? It says that the lost - those that are in the flesh - they cannot keep God's law. Right there, if you say you know Him, and you don't keep His commandments, 1 John 2, "you're a liar and the truth isn't in you." Isn't that the same thing Jesus Christ says? Somebody said Matthew 7. You don't do the will of the Father, you're not inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven. Why? Is that because we get there by works? No, it's because where there is true faith in Jesus Christ, where a man is justified by faith, he always has the law written on his heart. He always has a new heart. He always has the Spirit of God put within him. God says He's going to cause him to keep His statutes. That's what He says He's going to do. Regeneration, folks. Men are born again. They're transformed. New creations in Christ. That's what we need to tell people. Look, if you're genuinely saved, you're a new creation in Christ. If you're genuinely saved, guess what? You go from being a person who cannot keep God's laws to one whose practice in life is doing the will of the Father. And if that's not true, those who practice unrighteousness are of the devil. We find that in 1 John 3:9-10. You have that idea come right out at us about these things.

But let me jump back just a second. Jeremiah 31. God says, "I will put My law within them. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God. No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. I will forgive their iniquity. I will remember their sin no more." The very next chapter, Jeremiah 32:38-40. He says, "I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear Me forever, for their own good and the good of the children after them, I will make them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing them good and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts that they may not turn from Me." Guess what? That's another thing that's going to be true. The fear of God is going to be put within their heart that they not turn away. Guaranteed. If you see somebody that has no fear of God in the way they live, guess what? It's an indication that they've never had this New Covenant performed on them.

Ezekiel 36:25-27. "I will sprinkle clean water on you. You shall be clean from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you, and I will give you a new heart, a new spirit will I put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and I will cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules." You see that? God will cause you to be careful to obey His commandments. He will cause that. If you can basically live your life with no regard to the fact that Jesus Christ gave you commandments to live by, you say you know Him and that's true? 1 John 2:4, "you're a liar and the truth isn't in you." You see, we can come to people like this. We can be pretty dogmatic. You're living a life practicing sin, 1 John 3:9 says you don't belong to the Lord, you belong to the devil. 1 John 2:3-4 says you're not keeping those commandments. Matthew 7:21, you're not doing the will of the Father in Heaven. You've got some problems here. We're new creations in Christ. We can remind them of such things that Jesus said. He says, "I tell you, unless you repent, you'll likewise perish." If there's been no turning in the life, you say well, I've just walked along the same way all my life. That's bad. That's bad. Because Jesus Christ says for

somebody to be genuinely converted and healed, there has to be a turning. If there's never been a turning in the life, that's bad. You come across somebody, "Well, I've been a good Catholic my whole life." That's bad. You may be a good Catholic. You may think this certain thing, but that's bad. Because what the Scripture says is when a man comes to Christ, when a woman comes to Christ, they become new creations. They're born again. They walk in newness of life. That's the whole thing. There's radical transformation.

You go over to Luke 14. Jesus Christ, right there towards the end of the chapter gives three distinct statements about who cannot be His disciple. If any of these are true, then you're not His disciple. A disciple is a learner. It's a follower. If you're not a follower of Christ, you don't belong to Him. His sheep follow Him. They hear His voice. They follow Him. If you're not following Him, you've never heard His voice. It's basic. It's simple. He says "if anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, child, brother, sister, yes, even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:27, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:33, "Anyone of you who does not..." This is a big one. "Anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has, he cannot be My disciple." You say wow, I never heard that before. Yes, you did. I just read it to you from the tenets of the New Covenant. One of the things that the New Covenant says is God will cleanse you from all your idols. You know what that means? You'll renounce everything. You're going to renounce every idol. Every one of them.

Now, I realize there's progress here. I realize that as we live our Christian life, He comes back to us over and over. We have to repeatedly turn. We still have the flesh that we battle against. But let me give you another one. We can talk about what the apostles say. You know this one. I say it often. Romans 8:13, "Unless by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will die." That's what the Apostle Paul says. You will die if by the Spirit you're not putting to death - if you're not at war with sin, you're not saved. 1 John tells us repeatedly. If you don't love the brethren, you're not saved. It says that. You don't have the Holy Spirit? You're none of His. You're not saved.

Why is that so important? Because in Romans 8:16 it says that the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we're children of God. If you have no witness bearing going on in your heart, inside you, from the Spirit of God - and how does that happen? Well, you know Romans 5:5 talks about the love being shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit which has been given to us. God sheds His love abroad. If you're not knowing tangible, experiential communications of God to your soul that you're truly His, that's reason to be concerned. Because the Bible says that the Spirit of God, if you're truly His, you have the Spirit of God within you. We saw that again in the tenets of the New Covenant. If you're one of His, He's given His Spirit to you. Like it says in Romans 8, if you don't have the Spirit, you're none of His. If you've got the Spirit, the Spirit bears witness. If you've got the Spirit, the Spirit puts to death sin. If you've got the Spirit, the Spirit helps you pray. If you've got the Spirit, it's the Spirit of adoption, and you find yourself crying out, "Abba, Father." There's suddenly an intimacy. Again, tenets of the New Covenant. You're not going to have to teach everyone. There's basically, when a person comes, they

suddenly are made to know God in a way that you don't have to be taught. There's an intimacy. Something is worked out there.

Now yes, it's important to sit under teachers. It's important to study your Bible. But what it's saying is something happens. God intervenes. Christianity isn't just about sitting under a teacher. You suddenly come into some kind of relationship and some kind of communication with God that goes above teachers. If these things are all foreign to you guys or to any of you, it's time to be concerned. One of the things the Apostle Paul says, "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed." I'll tell you this, if you don't have any love? "All things work together for good to them who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. You're not loving God? You're giving the indication you're not called. You haven't been called according to His purpose. Basically, the apostle says let these people be cursed. If you're not knowing what it is to love Christ, if there's no special affection that you have for Him, you're in trouble. That's not a good place to be. God has saved men and women to be lovers of His Son. This is basically how it is.

Well, I don't need to keep going on. These are the verses, and you guys could think of many others. I mean, you know what James says. "Don't be deceived," by being what? A hearer and not a doer. And he talks about dead faith. What's dead faith? Dead faith has no works. And he says can that faith save you? Demons believe. It can't save. You can believe all the facts about Jesus Christ. You can believe much. You can go to church a long time. But I'll tell you, the bottom line is if this isn't working out, true salvation loves, true faith loves, true faith works, true faith keeps the commandments, true faith battles sin, true faith loves the brethren, true faith loves Christ, true faith is being communicated to by the Spirit of God which is indwelling. True faith - we have that Spirit that helps us to pray, gives us an intimacy with God. And these things are a reality. We can begin to press people. We can take them - 1 John is a tremendous place. Take people there. Somebody said Matthew 7. Tremendous place. Take people to these. You guys, I really want you to remember, Jeremiah 31, Jeremiah 32, Ezekiel 36. You guys need to have that pinned down. You need to know those texts because when you come across somebody and those are not realities, you know, you don't have to clobber people with it, but you can just take them there and show them. If the Spirit of God is involved in it, then you know what? That Word of God is going to be effectual. You don't have to beat people. It's the Word of God. It's the incorruptible seed of the Word by which men are regenerated. It's truth. We don't have to be mean with it. We don't have to be harsh with it. It's that truth that sets men free.