

## ***Christianity that's Catching***

April 25, 2013

Some insurance companies are claiming that church-goers live 5.7 years longer than those who do not attend. Accounting for the fact that not all church-goers are truly Christians, we can still give credence to their findings that 60% have less chance of a heart attack, and 55% less chance of a one-car accident. Are these reasons to 'go' to church? Proverbs 3:1-2 "*My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.*" and 9:11 "*For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life*" seem to answer "Yes"!

It all started with a **V I S I T**—nothing takes the place of eye-to-eye contact! In 1858, Sunday school teacher Edward Kimball paid a visit to a Boston shoe clerk and led him to saving faith in Jesus Christ. That clerk, as a result of giving his life to Christ, became evangelist Dwight L. Moody. In 1879 in England, Moody was instrumental in awakening evangelistic zeal in the heart of Frederick B. Meyer, who was pastor of a small church. In preaching to an American college campus, Meyer brought to Christ a student named J. Wilbur Chapman. So **Kimball** led **Moody** who awakened **Meyer** who led **Chapman**, and that would have been a great work of contagion, but, wonderfully, the infection of the gospel was passed on through **Sunday** and **Hamm** to **Graham**!

Chapman, engaged in work with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), employed former baseball player, Billy Sunday, to do evangelistic outreach. Billy held a revival in Charlotte, NC, and a few local men became so enthusiastic that they planned another one with evangelist Mordecai Hamm. It was during this revival that young Billy Graham heard the gospel and accepted Christ. Only eternity will reveal how many thousands and thousands have come to Christ through these witnesses, **beginning with one very contagious Christ-following Sunday school teacher**. This is the potency of Christian *contagion* (Webster defines 3 : transmission of an influence on the mind or emotions)!

Someone has said that **we can never speak to the wrong person about Christ**. That statement comforts me that I am not going to go wrong before God by sharing Christ with anyone. The amazing thing is not that a Christian wants to tell everyone about Christ, **the really amazing thing would be if they did not want to!** Zig Zigler said, "If you don't want to share, it's highly likely that you have nothing to share." Certainly that's food for thought! When asked what he knew about God, George Beverly Shea replied, "Not much, but what I do know has changed my life." 2 Corinthians 2:15 "*For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.*"

This passage says **we are the aroma of Christ to God** both among **1) those being saved and 2) those who are perishing**. We'd better take sharing the "good news" seriously, because, as far as witnessing goes, silence is not golden; it is sin! The Lord will help us share: He will give us His word, our personal experience of salvation, and a passion to see lost people come to saving faith. Every calendar year Christmas and Easter shed brilliant light on Christianity. If there were no other witness, these commemorations stand as looming sentinels to influence the world for the Christ of Scripture—His miraculous birth and glorious resurrection. Charles Spurgeon: "Who can be astonished at anything, when he has once been astonished at the manger and the cross?" 2 Corinthians 4:6 *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' **made his light shine in our hearts** to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."*

Luke 2:17-18—*"When they had seen him (Jesus), they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them."* Spurgeon again, "Dear reader, it may be that from the quietness and solitariness of your life, you are scarcely able to imitate the shepherds of Bethlehem, who told what they had seen and heard, but you can at least, fill up the circle of the worshippers before the throne, by wondering at what God has done." Earlier in Luke 2:10 the angel had said to these frightened shepherds, *"Do not be afraid. **I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people**."* All people, then and now, were to be told the good news of great joy!

♥Anna was a New Testament prophetess who lived in the temple fasting and praying every day. Scripture tells us she was the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been widowed after only seven years of marriage and, so, had spent more than 60 years in this devoted-to-God manner. She could pass through the outer Court of the Gentiles into the Women's Court, but no further; and she probably overheard the men praying in the Court of Israel—forbidden to her—and thanking God that they'd not been born a Gentile or a woman.

But Anna focused on her blessed privilege: On a particular day she saw the also elderly and godly Simeon holding and blessing a baby after he had been *"moved by the Holy Spirit to go into the temple courts"*, and she understood the meaning. Messiah was here—in this place—Luke 2:38 said, *"Coming up to them at that very moment, **she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all** who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."* Anna got to proclaim in the hearing of all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem, about the child. All that she'd heard and all God had placed in her devoted heart, He let her speak—proclaim! She didn't do it alone; she didn't wonder what to say, and she wasn't concerned about who overheard her testimony of faith in Jesus the Christ!

♥We do not know her name, but she was from a despised people group, and, unlike Anna, she was a woman of the world—a sinful woman. But Jesus had an appointment with her at Jacob's well and led her to saving faith, and then what? She left her buckets and baggage, with the very Son of God, at that well and ran into her city—where her influence with anyone and everyone had to be abysmally nil—and she called out: *“Come see a man...!”* And then she told them all—from the men who'd shared her bed to the women who scorned her—what God had done in her life; and they could see the change, and they miraculously listened to her words, and Scripture says that many came to saving faith that day because of her witness. John 4:39 *“Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, ‘He told me everything I ever did.’”*

► What caused this woman from Sychar ‘City’ to be such an effective witness?

She believed

She received

She was convinced

She was motivated

She'd been radically delivered

She found herself overjoyed

She wanted others to know

She cared for Sychar's unknowing

She desired that Jesus be known...**so**

She announced to all who'd hear!

Maybe we're not an Anna—sadly, few are! Maybe our witness is somewhere between these two wonderful women. But we have something more, today; we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us the moment we receive Christ, and we have God's eternal word: **Learn it; Love it, Live it!** “If you are not living in the will of God, you are uncomfortable in the word of God,” said Zig Zigler. “And if you don't know what God is saying, you will listen to what Satan is saying.”

The devil wants to contaminate our Christian witness with at least seven lies:

1. You don't have to tell people about Christ if you live the gospel in front of them.
2. You don't have to share the ‘good news’ today; tomorrow is soon enough!
3. You mustn't offend—be very careful when and how you share.
4. There are some people you should never share with—if they have said they don't believe in God, then keep your lip zipped.
5. You have to be an ordained minister or an evangelist to properly share the gospel, and you are neither one.
6. Your testimony is not riveting enough—it won't make an impact on anyone.
7. You just don't know enough...!

There is not one shred of truth in any of these seven excuses: they are all lies that the devil hopes we'll buy—hook, line and sinker! In Genesis 4:1 Eve said, *“With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”* Our mother was speaking physically, of course, but the same has spiritual truth. We will bring forth disciples with God's help alone! Chester Johnson warned: *“If your faith is not contagious, it may be contaminated.”* **Satan's lies are prolific and poisonous!**

In Matthew 28, right after the women went to share the good news that Christ had risen with His disciples, Scripture tells how some of the guards hurried to report to the chief priests. Verses 11-15 *“While the women were on their way, **some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.** <sup>12</sup>When the chief priests had met with the elders and **devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money,** <sup>13</sup>telling them, **You are to say,** *“His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.”* <sup>14</sup>*If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.* <sup>15</sup>*So the **soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed.** And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.”* Keep in mind that for a guard to fall asleep while on duty was a crime punishable by death, yet, these guards were sold a lie that could cause them to die—for what? It's one thing to die for the 'truth', for the cause of Christ, for the noble Name of God; but to die for a lie that they heard contrived—to die for the devil—who can understand it?*

Hebrews gives us an indictment to encourage one another—we are our sister's keeper—in 3:12-14 *“See to it, brothers (sisters), that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. <sup>13</sup>But encourage one another daily, **as long as it is called Today,** so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. <sup>14</sup>**We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.**”* And Hebrews 10:23-25 gives this challenge to all believers: *“**Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,** for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

Discernment is the ability to see through the masks, but accountability is inviting others to see through us. Both help us see this faith thing through with integrity. And that would certainly include our witness for Christ: godly accountability is never codependency! Paul's accountability approach was their devotion to Christ in 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 *“**But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning,** your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup>For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive **a different spirit** from the one you received, or **a different gospel** from the one you accepted, **you put up with it easily enough.**”* We must know the true gospel in order to recognize the lie.

When we read the Bible, Old or New Testaments, about the Near Eastern World as it was thousands of years ago and meet the biblical characters, there seems to be no real connection with those to whom the action of the Bible story is played out. We can't see how the two worlds—theirs and ours—'link' up. But the 'link' is there; it is not missing, because the 'link' is God Himself! The times have changed, the culture has changed, the people have changed, the circumstances have changed, **but God has not changed—He is immutable!** "The God with whom they (biblical characters) had to do, is the same God with whom we have to do," said J. I. Packer. God is changeless: He is the same yesterday, today and forever as Scripture proclaims.

1. God's *life* does not change.
2. God's *character* does not change.
3. God's *truth* does not change.
4. God's *ways* do not change.
5. God's *purposes* do not change.
6. God's *Son* does not change.

Packer again, "Where is the sense of distance and difference between believers in Bible times and ourselves? It is excluded—on what grounds? On the grounds that God does not change!" This should give us a renewed impetus to 'dig' into God's word daily and share its truth—the *Truth*—John 14:6!

In order to be the 'influence' for Christ, our walk and our talk must match, because we walk what and how we talk, and we talk how and what we walk. And we won't know how to do either one with kingdom results unless we love the Lord Jesus and obey His teachings on how we are to do both every day of our lives. The women that God places in our path will be influenced by what we say about God to the degree that what we say about Him plays out in our lives—especially the hard, trying and dark times. We need to walk and talk like Jesus!

He turned interruptions into significant appointments—Luke 8

He 'hung out' in people's homes—Luke 10

He took His disciples with Him when He traveled and preached—

Matthew 9:35 "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness." In Luke 18:15-17 Jesus stopped and blessed little children, and Jesus did not tell the children to become like His disciples; rather, **He instructed His disciples to become like a little child!** God wants us to have a message, yes, but **God wants us to be a message**—the message of **Christ in us**, the hope of glory, that speaks unchangeably in our 'walk' and in our 'talk'—as we daily and contagiously infect the world with Christianity!