

## Are You Present?

By Lynn Warner

To witness is to be known by personal presence, to testify, to attest. For example, when someone sees a car run a red light and cause an accident, that person is a witness because he was present at the scene and saw what happened. God Himself is a witness of our lives. He is present to know us – both our actions and our inner heart motivations. Even more, He gives those who believe in the Gospel grace to know ourselves as He knows us and to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. God gives us grace to testify to our Brethren of His sovereignty, providence, and goodness, just as He also gives us power through the Spirit to testify to the world that its works are wicked, judgment is coming, and belief in the Gospel is necessary for forgiveness and life in Christ.

In John 4:29, the woman at the well testified, *“Come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”* Jesus had met her at the well, talked to her face-to-face, and revealed her heart to her. *“Many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all I ever did’”* (John 4:39). But many more believed when He stayed with them for two days, saying, *“It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world”* (John 4:42b). Jesus met people face-to-face, enjoyed their companionship, and shared Himself in person.

In Scripture, we see references to an open heart and a closed heart. The closed heart is not interested in sharing presence: *“if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed or truth”* (1 John 3:17-18). We have even more than the world’s goods – we have the treasures of Christ to share with one another. The love we have is directly from the Father: *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God, and so we are”* (1 John 3:1a).

Paul also talks about an open heart and a closed heart: *“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to little children) widen your hearts also”* (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). The Corinthians were not “present” or open to Paul. Pride, a wounded spirit, and other causes may shut down our hearts. Bitterness and unforgiveness grieves the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not able to flow freely when we are bitter; corrupting talk comes from our heart. *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to the hearers”* (Ephesians 4:29).

In conclusion, we become witnesses by seeing or knowing something through personal presence. Our witness is a ministry to others and includes us being present to others. We witness to others by sharing ourselves to encourage and build up our brethren in the Faith. We do this because we have learned by personal example from God. He Himself is personally present with us. He sees us and His heart is open to us. If we are present to Him and if our hearts are open to Him, we learn to know Him as we walk through the tribulations and joys of life. God Himself gives us grace to see ourselves as He sees us and to be conformed to the image of His Son. Through His Spirit, He gives us power to testify of the truth to the world that its deeds are evil, judgment is coming, and belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is necessary for life. God sent His Son to engage with people “face-to-face” to be physically present. Paul followed Jesus’ example and yearned to be present to each church, as seen by his letters. Paul urged the brothers to follow his example. As Bereans, we are well acquainted with searching the

Scriptures “*to see if these things were so*” (Acts 17:11), but it does not end here. We begin asking God to continue teaching us, and follow the example of Jesus, Paul, and other Believers in our lives who help us, by example, to be present to God and to others. Let’s pray for each other in this area. Many of us, as Bereans, find it far easier to search the Scriptures to find what is true but find it more difficult to “be present.” Yet, if we are to follow the witness of Christ and the Apostles, we also must witness in presence with the Body.