

# A Biblical Understanding of Witnessing and It's Practice: A Case of Pauline Model

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## ABSTRACT

Despite attempts by the Adventist church in the city of Bulawayo to train and motivate its church members to be involved in witnessing, many of them remain passive. While some in the church believe and teach that during New Testament times witnessing seems to have been for all believers it appears that in current Adventist churches in Bulawayo it is seen as a practice of a few gifted ones. Furthermore, witnessing seems somewhat taken for granted. The church members seem to put the blame of failing to witness on the church leadership. There is very little written by Seventh-day Adventists on witnessing for Christ and Bible study. There seems to be no clear guidelines informed by the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy on witnessing. The Adventist church has not developed a clear theology of witnessing. There is a consensus that the Bible assumes witnessing is important but Adventists have not explored this topic very much. Others confine it to verbal proclamation and teaching of the word that is divorced from meeting the needs of the people. On the other hand, there are those who think they can witness through living an exemplary and “attractual” life without verbal witnessing. As a result of this lack of clear information there are misguided views concerning the practice of witnessing like the belief that it is for a few gifted people, not everyone. This paper exegetes some Bible passages like Acts 9:1-31, 22:21; 26:12-22 that refer to how the apostle Paul witnessed. The Pauline witnessing model was interpreted in light of other scriptures where others like Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8), the Gerasene demoniac, (Mark 5:1-20), and the woman of Samaria (John 4) modelled biblical witnessing. These Bible texts were examined with the objective of helping in forging out relevant interventions that can fill in the gaps in the misconceptions and the practice of witnessing in ministry. Although these Bible texts were not originally written to inform witnessing practice, there are principles in them that can shape, influence and direct it. The study made use of narratives, Bible commentaries and Ellen White writings as the main source of data for the study. The study recommends that the SDA church should make deliberate actions in teaching and motivating all its members to be active in witnessing based on the Pauline witnessing model.

**Keywords:** evangelism, witnessing, proclamation, social action, prospect

## INTRODUCTION

In the last book of the Bible all, the other books of scripture meet and find their final fulfillment. The Adventist church believes in the nearness of the second advent of Jesus. It believes that the gospel must be preached to the whole world prior to his coming (Mat 24:14; Rev. 14:14). This second advent is preceded by the verbal proclamation of the three angels' message (Revelation 14:6-12). That the message will be verbally proclaimed is attested by the following terms: “the eternal gospel to proclaim (Rev. 14: 6)” the second followed “saying fallen, fallen is Babylon (Rev. 14:8)” and the third “followed them, saying with a loud voice... (Rev. 14:9).”

According to Russell Burrill (1998), Adventists have always identified themselves with this threefold message and have seen it as their responsibility to proclaim it to the world to prepare a people for the coming of Jesus. While witnessing constitutes the life, the deeds and the words of the witness, the threefold message (Revelation 14:6-12) seems to show that verbal witness of the church will be central prior to the

second coming of Christ (Revelation 14:14). It is however disturbing that the Adventists seem to have slackened on this important expectation of theirs, hence it becomes the objective of this paper to demonstrate that through Pauline model all church members can participate in the call of being disciples, leading souls to the feet of Jesus.

The organization of the paper is as follows: a brief introduction to the study, definition of key terms, aspects of witnessing, and models of witnessing, Pauline model, findings and recommendations.

### **The Exegesis of Pauline Passages That Model Witnessing**

This paper exegetes some Bible passages like Acts 9:1-31, 22:1-21; 26:12-22 that refer to how the apostle Paul witnessed. Act 9 is a narrative of Paul's journey to Damascus when he met the resurrected Jesus. Every witness must have an encounter with Jesus. The encounter results not only in a moral transformation but also a change of mission. Francis D Nichol explains that the sudden change in the life of Paul was due to the discovery that Jesus was the Messiah. Furthermore Paul realised that when he persecuted the church he fought against God. This accounts for his sudden change from a persecutor to an apostle. When he gained his sight after Ananias' prayer, Paul immediately (Acts 9:20) began to preach Christ. In Acts 9:20, Luke has used the Greek term "kai euethus" that has been translated, "straightaway (KJV)", "immediately (ESV)" or "at once (NIV)" to emphasise the sudden change of character and mission.

This road to Damascus experience so impacted on the life of Paul, that whenever he testified about Jesus he would refer to it. His emphasis was that although he was never with Jesus in His earthly ministry like the twelve he actually met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul did refer to the Damascus experience in his testimonial sermons in Act 22:21; 26:12-22. These testimonial sermons served to validate his witness. Any witness like Paul would influence their prospects if they have had an encounter with Jesus and are not merely relating cognitive facts about Christ.

There are other witnesses who changed their mission after their encounter with Jesus. The woman of Samaria suddenly began to witness for Christ after her encounter with Him at the well (John 4), the Gerasene's demoniac was told by Jesus to go to tell others what the Lord had done for him (Mark 5:1-20) and the man who had been blind immediately began to witness about Christ after his eyes were opened (John 9).

The woman of Samaria was so keen to share the news about her new, great discovery that she left her jar of water at the well (John 4:28). Francis D. Nichol says: " She had experienced desire, conviction, and decision and the next logical step was action -she went to tell others of her great discovery." This is natural to all witnesses who have had a genuine encounter with Jesus. It was also the case with the blind man whose eyes were opened by Jesus (John 9:1-41). After his healing the man immediately began to witness.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **Witness**

JD Douglas (1975) defines a witness as "one who may be called to testify to an event at which he or she was present." On the other hand, Watch Tower Bible Tract (1993) observes that a witness relates facts from direct personal knowledge, or he proclaims views or truths of which he is convinced. Firstly, if one is a witness of Jesus it should be one who has had a personal encounter with Him. They must have a personal experiential knowledge of Jesus. The apostles acknowledged themselves as witnesses of Jesus (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-41). When replacing Judas Iscariot the apostles sought for one who had been with them from the time Jesus was baptized by John up to the ascension (Acts 1:21-22). What comes up clearly is that one cannot talk people into being a witness. They cannot even teach or train them to be a

witness. A witness actually has to witness something happening in order to be a witness. A witness is a witness by virtue of something they have experienced.

### **A holistic Witness**

There are some misconceptions of witnessing. While there are those who emphasize verbal proclamation over social action, other people think that they can witness successfully through their lives even without verbal proclamation. The following reference will show that a holistic witness provides a balanced view. The apostles witness comprised “giving their testimony to the resurrection of the ... Jesus (Acts 4:33)” and meeting the material needs of people (Acts 4:34). Despite the preaching of the gospel Paul encouraged the gentile churches to send food relief to the churches in Judea (Galatians 2:10; Acts 11:15) Evangelism by Jesus and the apostles in the early church involved verbal proclamation, teaching, miracles of healing and personal witness and testimony. The miracles of healing served to validate verbal proclamation in witnessing. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen (1975) insist that evangelism goes beyond words and they see social activity or responsibility as a partner to evangelism through words, like the two wings of a bird working together. White E.G. (1912) calls this social action “meeting the needs of people.” She says, “Christ’s method alone will bring about true success for He mingled with people as one who sought their good, ministered to their need, gained their confidence and bade them follow.” She insists that social action must come first in order to increase the interest of people in the gospel then verbal witness would follow when the people’s confidence has been won. Verbal witness must be backed by an exemplary life if it must effectively influence community. However, verbal witness or proclamation of the gospel is heart of evangelism.

George E. Knowles, (1981), says witnessing comprises two halves namely the witness by an exemplary life and one done by word. He compares these to the left and right wing of the plane. If no plane can fly with one wing then for effective witnessing to take place both halves must be functional. Furthermore, Flemming D. (2013) sees Christian witness as a completely multifaceted understanding of mission, which touches the whole range of human needs. He then argues that witnessing comprises “being, doing and telling”. Being points to a state of being and a lifestyle. Witnessing is not an event but a lifestyle. One who is in Christ will inevitably engage in doing what Jesus did. Like Jesus Paul preached, performed mighty deeds, cared for people’s needs and suffered for the benefit of others. The lifestyle of the witness will lead people to ask, to “give the reason for the hope that is in them (1 Peter 3:15)”. Therefore, a holistic witness comprises being, doing and telling. The people that are witnessed to are prospects or prospective members of the church. Prospects are potential members of the church that can be won through witnessing.

Witnesses of Christ will influence the work through the whole of themselves that is by their life, conduct, word and even their death. The Jews in Jerusalem had noticed that there was nothing strong enough to separate the twelve apostles from their witness not even death itself.

### **Witnessing**

Most of the definitions of witnessing seem to see it as a verbal testimony about Jesus that is backed by a life that evidences a living faith relationship. Therefore, this paper defines witnessing as:

“...leading unbelievers to a saving relationship with Jesus (by one with an experiential knowledge of Jesus) through verbally teaching and proclaiming the word, meeting people’s needs and living an evidential life that Christianity gives meaning and purpose.

The following components seem to come up from the definition:

1. The witness has an experiential knowledge of Jesus

2. The witness shares their experience.
3. The spiritually bankrupt cannot share this experience.
4. The witness shares Christ through both living a convincing life and verbal proclamation and teaching the word.

Unbelievers must be convicted through observing the life of a witness that Christianity works, gives purpose and meaning in life. People have been exposed to many philosophies, theories, and teachings. They are looking for something that will positively transform their lives resulting in a purposeful and satisfying life. White E. G. (1898) exhorts, "...the gospel is to be presented, not as a lifeless theory but a living force to change the life. God desires that the receivers of His grace shall be witnesses to its power." Secondly, since the witness has had an encounter with Jesus theirs is an experiential knowledge of Him. In order to witness effectively the witness must have had their lives transformed by Jesus. Calvin C. Ratz, (1972), explains that people to whom one witnesses are not interested in learning about a new religion and philosophy but what works and positively impacts on their lives. It must be noted that people long for power that will transform their lives in a holistic manner to make life more joyful, satisfying and meaningful.

### **What triggers witnessing?**

Witnessing is an overflow of a life that babbles out of excitement exuding from gratefulness for what Christ has done for the believer. The woman of Samaria spontaneously left the jar of water and ran into the city to tell his people what the Lord had done for her (John 4). It must be noted that after his encounter with Jesus and baptism, Paul the apostle immediately began to witness for Christ (Acts 9:20). The two demon possessed men of Gerasene began to witness about Christ immediately after deliverance from demons (Matt. 8:26-37; Mark 5:1-20). Concerning the testimony of the two demoniacs about Jesus, White E.G. (1911) comments

They could not instruct the people as the disciples who had been daily with Christ were able to do. However, they bore in their own persons the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. They could tell what they knew; what they themselves had seen, and heard, and felt of the power of Christ.

These two had not heard a single sermon from Jesus and he had never taught them like the twelve disciples, but they testified through their lives and words. It would seem that witnessing is more than words. On the other hand the apostle Peter points to the demonstration of the gospel in the lives of believers as one that triggers verbal proclamation of the gospel (1 Peter 2:11-12). Therefore, the witness of the word and that of the deeds are two sides of the same coin. The demonstration of the gospel in the lives of believers would lead unbelievers to ask questions about the faith hence Peter exhorts believers to, "always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15)." Although it appears that evangelism is a natural overflow of Christian life, Donald S. Whitney asserts that Christian witnesses must intentionally discipline themselves to get into situations where evangelism can occur. They must not just wait for witnessing opportunities to happen.

### **What Gives Credibility to one is Witness?**

The response of a witness to crisis convinces prospects about the power and truthfulness of the Gospel. People tend to listen to a witness when they have seen that difference in his or her lifestyle. This is especially true when they see the different way Christian witnesses respond to problems with which everyone struggles. Paul and Silas could pray and sing hymns while in prison. Such praises attracted the attention of the prisoners. Luke records that these, "...were listening to them (Acts 16:25)." The response of the apostles to the crisis aroused the prisoner's attention. Siegfried H. Horn (1979) explains, "The inner prison held other occupants, outcasts and criminals who had never before heard such sounds in a place that naturally echoed the wild curses and foul jests." This response to persecution should have prompted the

jailer to ask, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” This question obviously led to verbal witness by the apostle Paul (Acts 16:32) which resulted in the baptism of the jailer and his household (Acts 16:33).

Furthermore, Paul and the other apostles would continue proclaiming the resurrection despite threats from authorities. This courage served to convince people about the truthfulness of the resurrection and that Christianity is worth embracing.

**Edward C. Wharton, (1977), writes,**

One convincing evidence that Jesus had indeed been raised was that all twelve of the apostles under threats from the hierarchy, who very well held the power to pass the death sentence, nevertheless, persisted in their preaching that the resurrection was a fact to which they were eyewitnesses. They could not stop preaching it though it would cost their lives.

Such reckless courage that could lead to martyrdom proved that their testimony was not a fabrication but an authentic event. The resurrection of Christ has been propelling Christians throughout history. Many saints have been calm in the face of death because of the belief that there is life after death. Such a hope has made Christianity attractive hence giving witnesses courage to push on against odds.

### **Models of Witnessing**

While this paper describes the witnessing approaches by the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20), the woman of Samaria (John 4:1-35), the blind man whose eyes were opened by Jesus (John 9), it will mostly be informed and underpinned by the Pauline model. This model was selected because it brings out rich and varied means and contexts of witnessing that can easily accommodate all church members. The Pauline model of witnessing shows that witnessing is for all born again Christians and is not confined to time and place.

### **Every Believer A Witness**

If witnessing is telling people what the Lord has done for you then every born-again Christian is a witness. Every born-again believer will naturally sense the obligation to share Christ with non-Christians. This is attested by the apostle Paul when he says, “...For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (Romans 10:16).” It appears that the four who have been cited in this paper as models of witnesses felt the motivation to reach out to their communities as witnesses for Jesus. It also appears that most of those believers whose drastic conversion experiences were sampled and narrated at length in the New Testament are seen to have aggressively reached out to testify to their communities. After his healing the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20) was commissioned by Jesus to go to tell his friends and relatives what the Lord had done for him. White E. G. (1911) says that the four thousand who were later fed by Jesus were gathered due to the influence of the witness of Legion. The witness of the Gerasene demoniac must have also attracted the attention of other gentiles in Decapolis. Ralph P. Martin (1989) says that those who brought the deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:32-37) had an expectation which implied knowledge of Jesus’ reputation to heal. He insists that their coming may have resulted from the preaching of the Gerasene demoniac in the Decapolis (Mark 5:19-20). The woman of Samaria returned to her community to testify about Jesus after her encounter and almost the whole city came to Jesus because of her testimony (John 4).

The apostle John appears to assert that anyone who believes in Jesus is born in them the desire to share Him. Jesus said, “...The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 4:14).” The same words Jesus uttered when he said, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water (John 7:38).” Concerning these texts Siegfried H. Horn (1979) comments that only the one in living communion with Christ becomes himself a centre of spiritual

influence. This influence is exerted in the community through words and deeds.

It appears that in the early church witnessing was for every believer. After the death of Stephen, when a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, Luke records that, "...**all except** the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." Witnessing is the initial stage of making disciples. According to the Great commission (Matthew 28:19-20) the mission of the church is to make disciples. Jesus also said, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." The true disciple is reproductive. Russell Burrill (1998) argues that:

"...the Christian who is not reproducing by creating other disciples is not really a disciple. It is impossible, then to be a follower of Jesus and not share Jesus."

Ellen G. White (1912) seems to concur with this when she says, "Every true disciple is born into the kingdom as a missionary." In every born again believer there is a desire to share Christ with others. There is therefore a call to become a Christian through conversion and another call after conversion to missionary work of sharing Christ. Charles Van Engen (1991), insists that conversion is a three-part process involving:

1. A conversion to God in Jesus Christ
2. Conversion to the church, the body of Christ
3. And conversion to ministry in the world for whom Christ died

It is this process of witnessing that people are brought to Christ and his church and ultimately to the world to testify for Christ. Witnessing is more than an intellectual process of giving information but a transformational process. Many have failed to witness because they seem to operate on the cognitive domain and are devoid of spiritual life.

### **Is Witnessing for Every Believer or a few Gifted Ones?**

Some believers think witnessing is not meant for every believer but a few gifted ones. Possibly, they confuse witnessing with spiritual gifts. Many have left it for the trained professionals like pastors yet Acts 8:1 states that during severe persecution of the church "...all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." The apostles who would then be regarded as the professionals of that day are the ones who remained in Jerusalem. They had been discipled and sat at the feet of Jesus for three years. Ordinary lay members seem to have fled from Jerusalem and "...preached the word wherever they went Acts 8:4". The SDA Bible commentary states that the twelve remained in Jerusalem because they were conservative Jews and their lifestyles were not a threat to the existence of Judaism. Jerusalem was the centre of the Christian faith. It was the place where challenges could be settled. It was in Jerusalem where the dispute about the admission of gentiles into the church was settled (Acts 15). These apostles could remain in Jerusalem because they had no choice as pillars of the Christian faith. They were willing to seal their testimony with their lives. As we note later that almost all of them sealed their witness with their blood.

The fact that the twelve apostles remained in Jerusalem when ordinary Christian were scattered by persecution and witnessed for Christ wherever they went is a proof that witnessing was not dependent on the clergy but all Christians. In the early church witnessing, was not the work of professionals but every disciple. The twelve would remain giving witness in Jerusalem where the battle was hottest.

### **The Witness Must First Encounter Jesus**

It appears that all the four biblical models of witnesses that are cited in this paper first met with Jesus before embarking on their mission. Fernando (1998) states that: "conversion is God's initiative, a personal encounter with Jesus that leads to allegiance to Him, a sense of connection to his community and finally a

sense of commission and belonging to Him”.

### **What Accounts for the Less Intense Conversion?**

Conversion experience differs from one believer to another. Some testify of having experienced sudden and drastic conversions while there are people who cannot remember the time when they were converted. As already noted, there are some whose conversion is gradual especially those who grow up in Christian backgrounds. Ellen White (1913) seems to attest to that when she says, “a person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or to trace all the chain of circumstances in the process of conversion: but this does not prove him to be unconverted”. It appears that the degree of aggressiveness in witnessing is dependent on the nature of conversion the witness experienced at the beginning of their Christian walk. Those who cannot trace the time of their conversion and encounter with Jesus can be helped to realise that they can be empowered to witness through their daily exposure to the word of God which is “...is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword... (Hebrews 4:12)”.

### **Encountering Jesus in His Word**

Although some people may not have an experiential and personal encounter like Paul, they must be helped to realise that they can meet Jesus in His word. Paul has said the word of God “...is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword... (Hebrews 4:12)”. The Christian witness must believe in the power of the word. James Howard (2020) has rightfully said the Bible is not like other books, it is not merely informational, but transformational. When the witness teaches and preaches the word, they are sharing Christ and His life with their prospects. There are several texts in the Bible where the word is referred to as life. Jesus said, “the words that I speak to you are Spirit and they are life (John 6:68).” Concerning the phrase, “they are spirit” Horn, S. (1979) has commented that the truths Christ uttered are concerned with spiritual things and to receive them into the heart is to receive spiritual life. The angel who set the disciples free from imprisonment said to them “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life (Acts 5:20.” In his comment on the adjective “this” Horn, S. (1979) further explains that “this Life” is the life in Christ that the apostles advocated. It must also be noted that the apostle Paul referred to the word of God as the “the Word of Life (Philippians 2:16)” The Christian must believe in the efficiency of sharing the word of God to have access to a saving relationship with Jesus (Romans 10:13-17). When one with a living relationship shares the word of God with Jesus, it exerts a transforming power on the hearer as testified by the disciples who asked, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” The prospect encounters Jesus in the word as the witness studies the Bible with them. It is the word of God that creates spiritual life in the prospect.

### **Lessons from the Encounters with Jesus**

The experiences during their encounters with Jesus have a bearing on the future ministry of the prospective witness.

In the presence of Jesus, one is compelled to face themselves hence helped to sense their sinfulness and dependence on the mercy of God. This was Peter’s experience at his first encounter with Jesus. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8) This was the case with Isaiah when overwhelmed by the holiness of Yahweh he said, “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” (Isaiah 6:5) Paul had a similar experience after being struck by light on the road to Damascus. For the first time, he called Jesus, “Lord” and was, willing to be assigned by him (Acts 9:5, 6). The feeling of helplessness and worthlessness probably created a sense of dependence on the grace of God.

A witness must mingle and socialize with their people if they are to win them to Christ for salvation. Jesus set the first example by breaking tribal and religious barriers through associating with the Samaritan woman (John 4: 1-35). She then went back to witness to her community. Legion was sent back to his people as a witness of what Jesus had done for him (Mark 5:20). Effective Christian witnessing is verbally sharing with people what the Lord has done for you and challenging them to verify your discovery.

William Barclay (1975) asserts that:

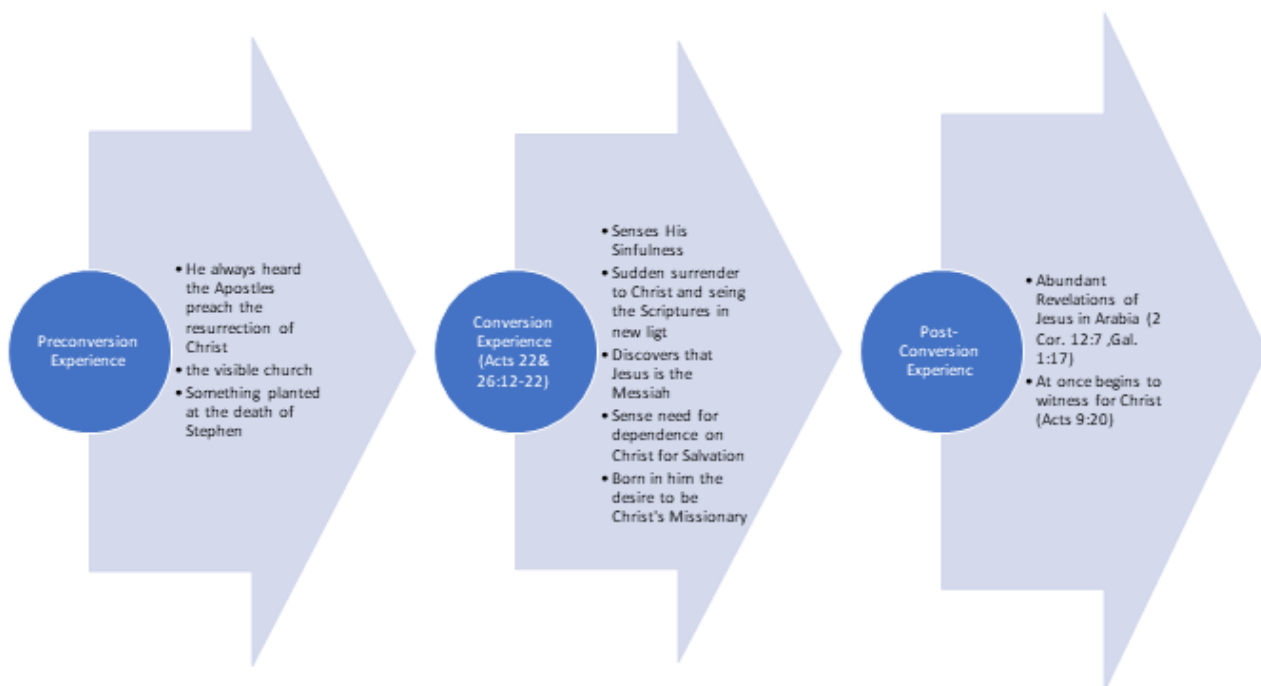
“No one is likely to attempt the experience unless our own lives show its value. There is no use in telling people that Christ will bring them joy, peace, and power, if our lives are gloomy, worried, and defeated”

People are interested in the relevance of our faith to their lives. If our faith has worked for us, then they are likely to be convinced that it will work for them and is something to be desired. This challenges Christian witnesses to live up to their profession. A successful Christian witnessing is a verbal witness that is accompanied by a life that exhibits the value of a sound relationship with Christ (Luke 8:39). Correct doctrine has its place in witnessing, but it is not everything needed for successful witnessing. George R. Knight (1986) has said, “Correct doctrine gives direction to Christian experience in daily living. We have a problem when doctrine overshadows religious experience.” Therefore, verbal witness is only effective when done within the context of Christian experience.

### Paul’s Encounter with Jesus

The author came up with the following diagram to illustrate that Paul’s encounter with Jesus seems to have been in three phases:

1. His pre-conversion experience
2. The Road to Damascus Conversion experience
3. The post-conversion experience



### Pre-Conversion Experience

It is encouraging to Christian witnesses to learn that God is already at work in the lives of their prospects



before they even get to them to share the gospel. Salvation experience appears not to be an instant, momentary turning to Christ but a gradual working of God in the life of a human being that may culminate in a drastic surrender of one's life to Christ. This seems to be the case with the apostle Paul. Christian witnesses may learn lessons even from Paul's pre-conversion experience that seems to have prepared him for the Damascus sudden conversion. William Barclay (1969) says, "it was not a sudden conversion but a sudden surrender to Christ." There are events prior to the conversion that seem to have prepared for the sudden surrender of his life to Christ. He further argues that there is something about Stephen that lingered in his mind and could not be banished. From the time, he witnessed the death of Stephen he was never at peace. He may have asked how an evil man would die praying for their enemies. Paul must have battled with the question; "Why would a bad man die praying for his enemies?" William Barclays seems to think that the church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen at his death. It is that prayer that convicted Paul and prepared him for the sudden conversion on the road to Damascus. Darrel L. Bock (2007), also seems to concur with William Barclay when he adds that there are many historical factors that would account for the sudden change of a persecutor into an apostle. He has listed three:

First, he must have always heard the apostles preach the resurrection of Christ.

Second, the seed must have been planted by Stephen's death.

Third, the visible church and its message must have made an impression on him.

When God calls a witness, He invites them to join Him in a work that He is already doing. Being a Pharisee Paul was already familiar with the Old Testament scriptures. His encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) was not his first meeting with God. Christopher Wright (2010), has rightly said:

In addition, as part of that divine mission, God has called into existence a people to participate with God in the accomplishment of that mission. All *our* mission flows from the prior mission of God. ...So we have to start by seeing ourselves within the great flow of God's mission, and we must make sure that our own missional goals – long term and immediate are in line with God's. ...And yet if our mission efforts lose touch with that story or set off on all kinds of tangents from it, we have to ask: Whose mission are we on? Whose agenda are we pursuing?

There are many references in the Bible that show that our mission flows from God's mission, Ananias was called by God and sent to minister to Paul after God had already started working on his life on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:10-16). The other instance is that of the wise men from the east. While the chief priests and elders pretended to be indifferent to Jesus God was already leading the heathen wise men from the East to Jesus in Bethlehem. (Matthew 2:1-12). Moreover, Philip was sent to the Ethiopian Eunuch who was already reading the Bible and on his way from worshipping in Jerusalem (Acts 8:26-32). Furthermore, Cornelius was previously a prayerful man who had seen God in vision when Peter was summoned to witness to him (Acts 10:1-26). Therefore, in all witnessing endeavours man is joining God in a work that He has already started. The above references clearly show that all mission begins with God's initiative. David C. Cook (2017), has rightly stated this when he writes:

Our job is to recognize God's presence and discover how He is working. The secret is not to pray for God to "do something" in those situations but to recognize what He is already doing and align our efforts with his initiative.... Any mission we might pursue on earth must therefore be the result of Gods' ongoing purposes to heal all creation."

It must be encouraging to the witness for Christ that God initiates mission and He is already working to transform the lives of people before they get to them with the gospel. Witnesses should find ways of leading unbelievers to Christ and prepare them to surrender their lives to Christ. This can be done through running

community services programs and living lives that will convince unbelievers that Christianity works. Holy lives and community service help witnesses gain the confidence of their prospects so much that they open their ears to the verbal proclamation of the word.

### **The Conversion and Post-Conversion Experience**

After a series of events that appear to have been leading to his conversion, Paul must have surrendered his life to Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul had such a drastic encounter with Jesus such that he surrendered his life to Christ (Acts 9). This encounter with Jesus resulted in moral transformation in his life. He changed from being a persecutor to an apostle. In her description of the impact of the words of Jesus spoken to him on this encounter with Christ Ellen White (1911) says:

The words struck home to his heart with appalling force. A flood of light poured in upon the darkened chambers of his mind, revealing his ignorance and error. He saw that, while imagining himself to be zealously serving God in persecuting the followers of Christ, he had in reality been doing the work of Satan.

Paul as a Pharisee was familiar with scriptures and his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus helped him to see the scriptures in a different light. He realised that they pointed to Christ as Messiah and Saviour. Those who have a cognitive understanding of Jesus are to be helped by witnesses to have an experiential knowledge as they witness a living relationship in the life of a witness. The ministry of the witness must be incarnational by helping prospects encounter Jesus and have a living relationship with Him. This they can do through their being, their words, and deeds.

This road to Damascus experience so impacted on the life of Paul, that whenever he testified about Jesus he would refer to it. His emphasis was that although he was never with Jesus in His earthly ministry like the twelve he actually met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul did refer to the Damascus experience in his testimonial sermons in Act 22:21; 26:12-22. These testimonial sermons served to validate his witness. Any witness like Paul would influence their prospects if they have had an encounter with Jesus and are not merely relating cognitive facts about Christ.

Unlike Paul, there are some especially those who grow up in a Christian context who cannot point to any drastic event in their life when they were converted. Ellen White (1913) seems to attest to that when she says, "...a person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or to trace all the chain of circumstances in the process of conversion: but this does not prove him to be unconverted". Therefore, those who cannot remember the time of their conversion are not justified to doubt that they are converted because Christians have had differing experiences that have led to their conversion.

### **The Encounter with Jesus Changes Paul's Mission**

While Paul approached Damascus on a mission to destroy the Damascus church, he encountered with Jesus. After the painful encounter he was sent to Ananias. After Ananias' prayer for Paul his eyes were opened according to Luke's record in Acts 9:20. Paul immediately preached that Jesus was son of God. This would be natural for anyone who has encountered Jesus. It must be noted that a witness who encounters Jesus will experience not only a moral transformation of character but also a change of mission.

This is not merely realised in the life of Paul alone but also Isaiah (Isaiah 6), the woman of Samaria (John 4) and Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20). They all realised their sinfulness, the need for dependence on the power and leading of God in life and a life of mission. In his encounter, Isaiah was so overwhelmed by the holiness of God that he said, "... Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, (Isaiah 6:5)." He became aware of his own imperfection of character. Such awareness created a hunger and thirst for a better and more satisfying life. This must have led him to humility and dependence on God for

character transformation and his future work as a witness of God. Furthermore, when Yahweh asked whom, He could send, Isaiah responded, "...Here am I; send me (Isaiah 6:8)." After her encounter, the woman of Samaria left the jar of water and rushed to testify about Jesus in the city despite her immoral and former disgraceful life (John 4). After his healing the Gerasene Demoniac was charged by Jesus to tell his people what the Lord had done for him (Mark 5:20). Both Paul and the Gerasene demoniac had not been taught the Gospel in a formal way. Paul asserts that, "the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12)." On the other hand, the Gerasene Demoniac also did not have time to learn the details of the gospel from Jesus. Immediately after healing they were sent to tell others what the Lord had done for them (Mark 5:20).

### **Time with God to Learn from Him**

The witness needs time alone with God to discern the divine will and mission for them. Paul says that he was not taught his gospel by man but received it by revelation (Galatians 1:17). Paul had abundant revelations of Jesus in Arabia (2 Cor. 12:7, Gal. 1:17) after his conversion Paul went to Arabia. Ellen White explains:

He went into Arabia; and there, in comparative solitude, he had many opportunities for communion with God and for contemplation. He wished to be alone with God, to search his own heart, to deepen his repentance, and to prepare himself by prayer and study to engage in a work that appeared to him too great and too important for him to undertake.

Witnesses must have time with God as a means of preparation for their ministry. This is time for prayer, meditation, and study. A witness receives training from man but there are additional lessons to be learnt from God in isolation. Such a time with God helps the witness to deeply experience God. When witnessing the Christian shares not only cognitive facts but also their experience with God. The Bible doctrines and fundamental beliefs are shared within the context of Christian experience.

### **The Leading of Holy Spirit to the Prospects**

It must be noted that every witnessing opportunity presents its unique challenges, and this necessitates the need for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. While human reason is important there is also need to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit concerning the choice of places where to witness and how to express what is to be said (Matthew 10:19). All witnessing endeavours of the early church were directed and initiated by the Holy Spirit. They were not merely dependent on human initiative. The Holy Spirit led Paul past Asia, Mysia, Bythinia and finally got them to Europe (Acts 16:6). While the Holy Spirit had a leading role Paul believed in the safety of the counsel of many advisors (Proverbs 11:14). It was Paul alone who had been shown the vision of the man of Macedonia, yet he must have revealed the vision to his team that together with him must have concluded that Gods will was for them to go to Macedonia. While directed to Macedonia in a vision he appears to have consulted with his team which then concluded that the Spirit was directing them to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:9). Whereas Darrell L. Bock (2007) sees the use of "we" in Acts 16:10 as suggesting that Luke had joined the scene, it may also imply that they discerned as a team that the Holy Spirit was directing them to go to Macedonia. Prior to this event, the Spirit had requested that Barnabas and Saul be set apart for Him for the work that He had called them (Acts 13:2). The angel also at one time directed Phillip to witness to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26). While witnesses may use human reasoning, they must learn to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit to guide them to the prospects. Sometimes adverse conditions may present witnessing opportunities. The Spirit led Paul and Silas to Philip where they were flogged, and later imprisoned after they cast out demons from a slave girl (Acts 16:18-21). The healing of the slave girl led to their imprisonment. The imprisonment at the city of Philip also led Paul to his witness to inmates (Acts 16:25). and the jailer (Acts 16:29-34). Paul asserts that even his imprisonment in Rome

worked for the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1:12) William Barclay argues that imprisonment opened the doors to new spheres of the work and activity, into which he would never otherwise penetrate.

### **Informal Witnessing Outside Church Programs**

Paul saw witnessing as a lifestyle. It is not confined to a particular place and time. Paul would reach out to people wherever they were as opposed to some believers today who wait for people to attend meetings arranged by their churches so that they witness to them. He would witness anytime wherever there were prospects. Paul modelled a kind of witness which was done anywhere any time. In Athens while he waited for Silas and Timothy, “he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there (Acts 17:16-17)”. While waiting for his companions he busied himself with witnessing to the Jews and the devout people. Greear (2015) says “there is need to reach people apart from meetings and events.” He further observes that “church has been done in a way that everything revolves around its programs.” Church members must not limit witnessing to church programs. It must not be seen as a program or event. Those that were scattered at the death of Stephen preached the gospel wherever they went (Acts 8:4). They that went to Antioch would first preach to the Jews then later to the Greeks (Acts 11:19-20) the work of a witness is in the community. If church members are seen, witnessing only during evangelistic campaigns arranged by the church the community becomes suspicious of their motives.

Another effective way of witnessing is through informal day-to-day conversation as opposed to formal presentation of canned doctrines in organized meetings. This seems to be what D Scott Hildreth and Steven H. McKinion, (2020), call “life-style evangelism” which according to them means, “developing a life-style that enables gospel conversations to flow naturally through all the relationships we have.” It appears that information delivered through informal relational conversations has greater impact than that given by formal presentations. In order to influence through conversations the witness should have a biblical worldview so that they are able to integrate the teaching of salvation with informal daily conversations.

### **Witnessing Without Disturbing Prospects Daily Businesses**

In contemporary societies, people are busy making money and they do not want to be interfered with. The Christian witness should be able to reach out to people without disturbing their businesses. Paul would approach people where they were to witness to them. He met the Jews in the synagogue and the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers at the Areopagus Hall. He had testified about Christ in synagogues (Acts 13:42), in open public places (Acts 13:44, 14:8-18), in prison (Acts 16:25-34, 24:22-27) in the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-33), and in the ship that sailed to Rome Paul could comfort, counsel, exhort and heal the sick (Acts 28:8). At his final imprisonment in Rome, Paul rented an apartment in which for two years he taught those who visited him (Acts 28:30). There were times when Paul could hold arranged witnessing Bible studies that were conducted from house to house and in public places (Acts 13:44; 20:20). Aquilla and Pricilla arranged Bible studies with Apollos when they noticed that he did present a complete gospel. E Myers Harrison and Walter L. Wilson (1952) comment that it was the supreme concern of every believer, every day in the year, in every place, in the church, on the street, in the marketplace, in people’s homes Christian witnesses reached out to unbelievers by instruction, preaching, letter writing and personal contact.

The incident of the Ethiopian Eunuch also illustrates how the early Christians could reach out to people without interfering with their daily programs. Philip joined the Ethiopian Eunuch “And he (the Ethiopian eunuch) besought Philip to come up and sit with him (Acts 8:31).” The journey of the Ethiopian Eunuch was never interrupted. “And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?.” These days’ people are living in a busy world especially in cities where life is fast. Witnesses should always find ways of reaching out to people in their communities without interfering with their business. It is possible for one to witness to their work mates

during work hours. As people work, they discuss a wide range of topics that range from politics, dating, financial challenges, and ravages of covid-19. A wise Christian witness will find a way of guiding conversations towards salvation. It is possible for a witness to integrate their faith with any topic under discussion. The witness can transform the worldview of their prospect by conversing on every topic from a biblical worldview. This would help them think “Christianly” about any topic.

### **Transformation of Prospects’ Worldview**

A witness with biblical worldview interprets everything from a Christian perspective. Such a view helps influence the associates of the witness to unconsciously adopt the Christian beliefs. While no conversation of Paul is recorded in the Bible his biblical worldview surfaces in the way, he interpreted the writings of the Greek pagans. The inscription “To the unknown god” which was on one of the altars in Athens, Paul explained that the unknown God is the creator of heaven and earth (Acts 17:23-24, Genesis 1:1). Furthermore, he quoted one of the Greek poets who wrote, “For we are indeed his offspring.” In addition, explained that the God who created humans is not like the gods of the Greeks that are made of metals and stone. In his witness, Paul seems to have interpreted everything from a biblical perspective. The Christian witness will exert a positive influence on their associates if they interpret all knowledge from a biblical worldview. Every conversation of a believer must be tainted with the Christian perspective to transform the worldview of non-believers around them.

### **Use of Technology**

Paul wished to minister to the people face to face but where it was impossible, he used the technology of the day. He would write letters or send messengers to his churches. He wrote, “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift...” the same attitude is exhibited by John when he writes, “I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face (1John1:13). Pen and ink were the technology of the time. Paul seems to have believed that the gift of grace could be most effectively shared when brethren met face to face. (Rom.1:11; Heb. 10:25). It must also be noted that to save man from sin Jesus came to this world, became flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) among us (John1:14). Towards His ascension, Jesus promised not to leave the disciples alone but to send another comforter who is the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). Hence, Jesus would always be with the disciples the end of time in the person of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20).

Reaching to people through online platforms like WhatsApp Bible studies, face book, twitter and Instagram could be another way of witnessing. People could be reached through these methods at the comfort of their homes. In a fast-paced world in which people are ever busy in pursuit of money, the witness of Christ must adapt their evangelistic strategies to changing circumstances. Instead of asking people to adjust their schedules to accommodate the Christian witness they can reach to people where they are at convenient hours without imposing too many demands on them.

### **Use of Formal Meetings for Witnessing**

The early Christians witnessed as a way of life. Soul winning was a daily business (Acts 2:47). The apostle Paul could remind the Ephesian elders that when he was with them, he taught in “public and from house to house (Acts 20:20)”. Paul sometimes could meet his prospect in a house. The meetings in houses could be formal like that of the Bible study held by Priscilla and Aquila who invited Apollos to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:26). There was also Bible studies in the synagogue for the Jews who gathered for worship. (Acts 13:42; 17:2-3; 18:4) Paul would probably first go to the Synagogue to preach because a majority in it were Jews who were obviously familiar with the Old Testament and then he would prove to them that Jesus was the Messiah to whom the scriptures pointed. This would mean that there were times when witnessing meetings could be arranged in houses and in public

places (Acts 13:44). Russell Burrill (1998) observed that occasionally the multiple house churches would all meet in one place especially when the apostles had visited the city. Luke appears to point to a public meeting when he says, “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.” (Acts 13:44).

### **Use of Centres of Influence**

The school must have provided a systematic formal education to the community. Paul also taught daily in the hall of Tyrannus continuously for two years until the residents of Asia heard the word both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:9-10) The element of sustainability and consistency is evident in the sense that there was teaching daily in this school (Acts 19:10) and this went on for two years (Acts 19:10). The school was effective as shown by the fact that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10). Jeffrey McAuliffe and Robert McAuliffe (2017) see this school as playing the role of a Centre of Influence that positively transformed the surrounding community in a way that brought the gospel into the lives of the people and effected change in them.<sup>[1]</sup> Centres of influence serve to connect the church to the community hence making it easy to share the gospel. The witnesses gain the confidence of the community through meeting their needs and later introduce them to Christ. In this way through the centre of influence, the Christian witnesses win the unbelieving community to themselves before they win them to Christ.

### **Avoidance of Manipulative Tendencies**

In his witness Paul seems to have learnt to avoid oratory skills to draw people to Christ. He “determined not to know anything save Christ crucified (1Corinth 2:1)” and never proclaimed to them the testimony of God in “lofty speech or wisdom and plausible words...” but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that the Corinthians’ faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1Cor.2:1, 4, 5). According to the SDA Bible commentary the Greek word translated “determined (1 Corinthians 2:1)” means to make a definite decision as to his new method of labour and not an idea of the moment, but a carefully thought-out plan formed before going to Corinth. After his failure to win many to Christ in Athens when he went to Corinth, he resolved that he would avoid oratory skills as a means of winning souls. White E. G. (1901) seems to concur when she explains that in an attempt to adapt his style to the character of the audience Paul had met logic with logic, science with science and philosophy with philosophy he had little fruit and consequently resolved to lift Christ and the power of the cross. When nothing but Christ crucified is plainly preached, the success must be entirely from Divine power accompanying the word, and thus men are brought to believe. It is clear that the attempt to use the oratory skills of salespersons to manipulate people into decision is futile. In Paul’s testimonies, Christ was central and that gave power to his witness. Furthermore, Paul’s failure in Athens and success in his mission in Corinth can save to teach witnesses that there are lessons that God can teach to witnesses in real practical ministry which cannot be learnt in formal training seminars in the classroom and in church. However, the above assertion does not ignore the usefulness of oratory and logic during presentations in witnessing. Oratory serves to catch and maintain the attention of the prospect as the witness does the presentation.

### **A Self-Sustaining Witness**

Paul reminds his Thessalonian readers that when he was among them, he worked day and night so that he would not be a burden as he proclaimed the gospel (1 Thess. 2:9) While it was his right to receive a salary for preaching the gospel he would forgo it to avoid appearing like he proclaimed the gospel for money (1 Corinthians 9). In his last arrest in Rome Paul abode two full years in his own hired dwelling, and this enabled him to receive all that went in unto him to listen to his preaching and teaching (Acts 28:30-31).

He was willing to forgo his rights to preach the gospel. He wanted to avoid being associated with those

itinerant preachers who shared the gospel for money. In his ministry, Paul also disciplined other witnesses (2 Timothy 2:2). A Christian witness can train other witnesses who can reach people who are beyond his reach. In their professional endeavours, church members who are now in formal pastoral ministry have access to people who are beyond the reach of the pastor. A pastor can enhance his ministry through training of lay witnesses who can reach masses at their fields of work where the minister cannot go.

### **Witnessing under Persecution**

Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davis (1997) explain that in the New Testament “witness” (martyrs) is one who testifies to either the events of Jesus’ life or the message of the gospel. They further say that this term later became closely associated with persecution in post canonical literature when it took the meaning of “martyr.” Aggressive witnessing and persecutions seem to have been closely associated throughout the history of the church. It was Peter and John’s witness that led to their imprisonment (Acts 5:25, 28). Stephen was killed while testifying for Christ (Acts 7-8:1-4). Paul and many other apostles suffered persecution for aggressive witness for Christ. Paul said, “However I consider my life worth nothing to me; if I may finish the race...the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24)”. The Greek word for race is “dromos” which may mean “racecourse”, “span of life”, or “term of office”. Siegfried Horn (1979) sees two insights in this text:

1. Paul was making himself a living offering, in order that the course laid out for him might be finished successfully.
2. He wished to end his life in contentment of a clear conscience.

To be a faithful witness of Christ took top priority in the life of Paul. According to the Watch Tower Bible Tract Society of Pennsylvania (1993) many of the early Christians witnessed under persecution and in the face of death (Acts 22:20; Revelation 2:13) that is why the Greek term for witness “martyr” from which was derived “martyr”. Thus, the word martyr acquired the meaning that applied to persons who were willing to seal the seriousness of their witness or confession by death. This would communicate the level of seriousness at which the early Christians regarded the work of witnessing for Christ. They were prepared to seal their testimony with their blood. The verbal witness usually led to persecution of witnesses whereas silence would lead to peaceful living. When the Sanhedrin released the apostles from arrest for proclamation of the gospel, they sternly “charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, (Acts 5:40)” It also appear that the proclamation of the gospel will close with greater aggression of Christian witness which will culminate in the death of witnesses. John confirms that when he says “...also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God,” White Ellen (1911) thinks that it is this last day aggressive Christian witness that will kindle the fires of persecution as was the case in the first century.

### **FINDINGS**

The foregoing submissions led the writer to the following findings about witnessing and its role in the church:

Witnessing is leading unbelievers to a saving relationship with Jesus (by one with an experiential knowledge of Jesus) through verbally teaching and proclaiming the word and living a life that convinces that Christianity works in giving purpose and meaning in life. Flemming, D (2013) argues that holistic witnessing involves being, doing and telling. Many have confined witnessing to inviting people to a public evangelistic campaign while others see it as verbal teaching and proclamation of the word. This activity is for all church members not for the elite as demonstrated by the Pauline model of witnessing.

The whole process of witnessing should be bathed in prayer. The witness must learn to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s witnessing activities seem to have been directed by the Holy Spirit. It was not

merely dependent on human reasoning. While they reasoned that they were to witness in Asia and Bithynia respectively the Holy Spirit would not allow them. While it is not clear how the Holy Spirit directed Paul and his team to the place where they would witness yet it appears that after the vision of a call to Macedonia they appear to have consulted together and concluded that the Lord was leading them to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10).

Salvation experience appears not to be an instant, momentary turning to Christ but a gradual working of God in the life of a human being (from the time before conversion) that may culminate in a drastic surrender of one's life to Christ. An understanding of the pre-conversion experience of their prospect will help the witness as they lead the prospect to Christ. The witness should model a Christ like life if they are to successfully lead their prospect towards the conversion experience. They gain the confidence of the prospect through meeting their needs and finally share Christ through verbal witness. White E. G (1901) summarises this process in the following four stages when he says:

- Jesus mingled with man (socialize)
- Sought the good of man (sympathized)
- Ministered to their needs (served)
- Gained their confidence
- Bade them follow (saved)

Before verbal witness, the Christian witness must be intentional in gaining the confidence of the prospect through meeting their needs. The work of a witness is like that of a farmer who prepares the ground in order to plant the seed.

Witnessing should be part of their commitment to Jesus. It must be so programmed into their lives that it becomes to them a second nature. Believers will naturally witness once they meet unbelievers. It must also be noted that believers should not see witnessing as an additional program added to their already congested programs. It must be a lifestyle ingrained in them.

There are times when a witness may make an appointment to have a time and place to study the Bible with their prospect like the case of Aquila and Pricilla. When they realized that Apollos did not have a full understanding of the Gospel, "they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:26)." Luke further records, "And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus." There are also times when witnessing has to be done in an informal setting to avoid inconveniencing the prospect.

The findings reveal that witnessing is not for a few gifted ones but all believers. Although the Bible shows that there were instances, when the witnesses like Paul would hold formal bible studies and meetings, yet a careful study of the New Testament would indicate that the early Christians regarded witnessing as a lifestyle that was not confined to place and time.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the study carried out on exegeted biblical passages including isolated texts on witnessing, it is therefore recommended that:

The church must be deliberate in encouraging witnesses to carry out a holistic witness if their witnessing is to effectively draw prospects to a saving relationship with Jesus. Witnessing comprises being, doing and telling. Before one witnesses they must be a witness themselves because witnessing is neither a mere activity nor is it an event.



If one is a witness, they will witness as a way of life that is ingrained in them as a second nature.

Witnesses are to witness outside church programs without interfering with the businesses of their prospects. It must not be confined to particular places and times. A wise Christian witness will find a way of guiding conversations towards salvation. They will integrate their faith with any topic under discussion. This helps those who converse with the witness to think “Christianly” about any topic under discussion.

Prayerful lives among witnesses should to be encouraged so that God will direct them to the right prospects. The witness must discern Gods’ leading in the life of their prospect as they seek to lead them to Christ for salvation. Any witnessing opportunity presents new challenges hence the need for the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Pauline model should be taught to all church members so that they are able to apply it in their soul winning activities.

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